



Great-crested
Flycatcher
by Doug Harr



Northern Rough-winged Swallow
by Doug Harr

2025-2026 Big Bluestem Audubon Society Programs

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

2025 Programs

Dec. 18th: BBAS Christmas Party, Ames Public Library Auditorium

2026 Programs

- Jan. 15th: Carl Kurtz
Topic: Bird Habitat
- Feb. 19th: Adam Janke, Iowa State University professor
Topic: Forest Management for Birds
- Mar. 19th: Teresa Testroet
Topic: The Big Year: Hummingbird Nests at McFarland Park
- Apr. 16th: Doug Harr, BBAS Vice President
Topic: The Wildlife of Sax Zim Bog
- May 21st: Joan Van Gorp
Topic: The Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge
- June 18th: Big Bluestem Audubon Society
Picnic and birdwatching event. Location TBA

My Birding Journey

Tyler Morrison (Board member & Social media specialist)

Although I didn't know it at the time, my birding journey started when I was very young. My parents were always outdoorsy people, and would take my siblings and I camping all across the state of Iowa. The various lakes, trails, and forests that we would visit were always thoroughly explored by our group, and there was no doubt we would see a fascinating piece of nature in the process. This set the foundation for my appreciation of the natural world and the importance of conservation that I have rediscovered in recent years.



I credit my wife with getting me into birding. Having a background in wildlife ecology, she would identify the birds around us while we were outdoors. When she did, I would jokingly tease "They're all just brown and grey birds!" How wrong I was. This was the catalyst that set off the unstoppable chain reaction of making me a bird lover. I began to actually notice the differences in species when she would point them out. Later, I started hearing and seeing the differences on my own. I developed a genuine curiosity for finding out just what species of bird I was observing, and the rest is history.

Since that time, I have made birding a big part of my life. What I enjoy most about birding is that I discover something new each time I am in the field. It could be about how a bird looks or acts, a new place to see birds, or even something about myself. No matter what, I'm proud to be a birder. I joined Big Bluestem Audubon in the spring of 2025, and am excited to now be a member of the board. I look forward to doing my best to protect birds and their habitat in the years to come.

Let's hear from you

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

• • • • •

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

•

• How many birds are given as •

• gifts in the Christmas carol •

• "The Twelve Days of Christmas"? Answer on pg 2 •

• • • • •

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- Website designer** | Ann Johnson

- • • • •
- Answer to trivia question
- 23 birds (1 partridge,
- 2 turtle doves, 3 french hens,
- 4 calling birds (formerly called
- colly birds), 6 geese-a-laying,
- 7 swans-a-swimming)
- • • • •

President's Column by Tim Garner

Vultures get a bad rap. These birds are vilified in popular culture as omens of death, and to use the word as an adjective-think vulture capitalism for instance-is to imply someone who has a ravenous appetite to take advantage of someone or something in distress.

But birders know that this is unfair. Vultures provide an essential function as birds who, because they eat carrion, serve as nature's clean up crew. And, according to an article published in the January 10, 2025 edition of the Wall Street Journal, we can add poacher fighter to that list.

In Murchison Falls National Park in Uganda, the African white-backed vulture circles the savannahs and are equipped with a tracking device, which can alert park rangers to poaching incidents. The tracking device uses artificial intelligence to determine whether the vultures are feeding on an animal that is frequented by lions (and thus more likely to have been killed by that apex predator) or if the animal on which these vultures are feeding was likely the victim of poaching.

Armed with that information, park rangers can then go to the kill site, and, it is hoped can trace the poachers and thus disrupt the illicit hunting of animals including water buffalo, giraffe, elephants, hippopotamus, as well as predators such as leopards and lions. Murchison Falls National Park was the scene of industrial scale killing of these animals from the 1970s until around 2005. Since that time, the British charity Uganda Conservation Foundation has financed 20 ranger stations and boats which the Uganda Wildlife Authority has used to police the massive park, which covers about 1,500 square miles. The results have been encouraging, with the Ugandan kob, an antelope, rebounding from about 9,300 in 2005 to 142,000 in 2023. The Richardson's giraffe has likewise seen a resurgence, from around 245 in the mid-2000s to nearly 2,000 in that same year.

The African white backed vulture has a well-deserved reputation for ferocity, and there are instances where the bird (which does not like to be handled) has even severed a finger or poked out an eye of a would-be handler who was trying to outfit the vulture with that artificial intelligence tracking device. Despite the unfriendly disposition, these vultures are, simply by doing what vulture do, helping to fight the scourge of poaching in the process. It may be said that vultures have a face only a mother could love. But birders can also say this avian undertaker deserves our admiration and respect as a partner is helping to conserve some of the world's most iconic wildlife.

Membership Application

- ☐ New member of the National Audubon Society. \$20.00
Included in the introductory membership fee:
- subscription to the Audubon magazine, published by the National Audubon Society
 - subscription to the Big Bluestem Flyer
 - participation in Big Bluestem Audubon field trips
 - attendance at monthly meetings and presentations

Please make your check payable to:
National Audubon Society, (include "Chapter Code H-57" on your check)

Mail membership check to:
Big Bluestem Audubon Society, PO Box 543, Ames, IA 50010

Name_____

Address_____

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State_____ Zip_____

Phone_____

e-Mail_____

How did you hear about Big Bluestem Audubon Society?_____

From the Desk of...

Bluebird Nest Monitor

By Steve Lekwa, retired director from Story County Conservation

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

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

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

Finding eggs in a box does not ensure that babies will eventually fledge. I found four dead, nearly-grown baby bluebirds starved in Box 11 in June, just west of the dam, after their parents disappeared.

Meanwhile, whole clutches disappeared elsewhere. Raccoons and cats often learn that nest boxes can also be lunch boxes. Coons are amazing climbers and cats can jump to surprising heights. Wrens sometimes pierce bluebird eggs, throw them out and fill the box with twigs for their own nests. Cone-shaped predator guards have been installed on some of the bird box posts to reduce predator losses.

In 2025 at Hickory Grove Park, 101 bluebird eggs were laid, 90 hatched and 76 fledged. Countywide, about 70 boxes produced 240 fledged bluebirds from 361 eggs.

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

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



Eastern Bluebirds
submitted by Doug Harr

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Photos from **Coast to Coast** submitted by Greg Courtney



A September trip to California included a few days in Yosemite National Park. One of the highlights was Taft Point Trail, where we saw several Sooty Grouse, a species I had heard previously but never photographed. This individual didn't seem to care that we were just a few feet away (Greg Courtney, 4 September 2025).



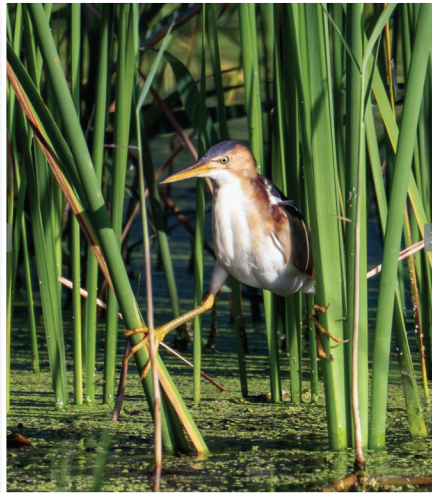
This summer, many local birders ventured to Sheridan Park in Des Moines to see a pair of Mississippi Kite. I was fortunate to photograph them in August, when the pair was foraging for cicadas to feed its young (Greg Courtney, 30 August 2025).



While visiting the southern Appalachian Mountains in October, I saw Blue-headed Vireo at several locations. This individual was photographed along Palmer Creek, a tributary of Cataloochee Creek in Great Smoky Mountains National Park (Greg Courtney, 21 October 2025).



One of my goals in 2025 was to photograph a Black-billed Cuckoo, especially after learning this was a good year for the species in central Iowa. My search paid off in late summer, when I saw both Black- and Yellow-billed Cuckoo on several occasions along the Des Moines River near Lake Red Rock (Greg Courtney, 3 August 2025).



One of my favorite north-central Iowa sites for wetland birds is Morse Lake Wildlife Management Area. During summer, 2025, this was a dependable location for observing (or at least hearing!) Least Bittern. I was fortunate to see and photograph these rather secretive birds on several occasions (Greg Courtney, 20 August 2025).



The California visit also included one of my favorite areas, the east side of the Sierras. While there, we stopped at Mono Lake, a great place for shorebirds like these American Avocets (Greg Courtney, 11 September 2025).



Crowley Lake is another good waterfowl site on the east side of the Sierras. Sanderling were among several species of shorebird at Sandy Point (Greg Courtney, 11 September 2025).



Crowley Lake was also a good site for piscivorous raptors. This Osprey spent several minutes feeding on a small fish it captured off Sandy Point (Greg Courtney, 11 September 2025).

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.

McCoy Wildlife Area has large impact on conservation

Submitted by Hank Zaletel

Sandwiched between Ledges State Park and the Saylorville Wildlife Area in Boone County, the 562-acre McCoy Wildlife Area is often either overlooked or mistaken for being part of the popular state park.

Drawing many of its visitors from Ledges who experience McCoy by walking its nearly mile-long maintenance lane past hayfields, hidden wetlands, food plots and timber, ending at a large bowl-like opening that is currently a large hayfield.

McCoy has been managed by the DNR for a long time. It was home to the state game farm where the Iowa Conservation Commission raised pheasants to expand the population across Iowa (discontinued in 1981 because it was not a biologically sound practice), and is the original site of the DNR's prairie seed collection effort.

"This is also one of the original MSIM sites" said Josh Gansen, wildlife biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Saylorville Unit, referring to the Multiple Species Inventory and Monitoring (MSIM) program, an ongoing research project started in 2006 and is a joint effort between the Iowa DNR and Iowa State University (ISU). The goals of the project are to gather information on the population trends and distribution of mammals, birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles, dragonflies, and butterflies.

"It's been used as a training site for many of the MSIM team members, as well as for animal ecology classes and ornithology classes" he said.

It is also a seed source for chinquapin oak acorns collected and used to grow stock at the State Forest Nursery, in nearby Ames. These acorns are smaller than their red, white and bur oak cousins.

Beyond providing acorns to the nursery and serving as a hands-on field classroom, McCoy is a public hunting area with a mix of prairie, timber, a pond and small wetlands adjacent to the Des Moines River on its southwest side.

Much of the habitat work is handled through a lease with a nearby producer who is part of the beginning farmer program.

The lease includes cropping areas in preparation for prairie conversion or for direct nut seeding of a new oak stand. "We don't want any grass as competition. We want 100 percent sunlight on the oaks" Gansen said.

McCoy added 40 acres on its northeast side recently, and on this early September morning, a contractor is working to implement the forest wildlife stewardship plan by girdling and cutting locusts, honeysuckle and autumn olive from a grove, in favor of the oaks and hickories. The Saylorville team has been working on reclaiming the brome field portion of the addition by pulling the locusts ahead of restoring it to diverse prairie.

Part of this new addition includes a two plus acre pond ringed with trees visible from the road.

Walking up to the water's edge on southwest corner of the pond, a handful of wood ducks nervously fly away. Expanding rings mark where fish were hitting the water surface. "We will be working with our fisheries staff to manage the pond," Gansen said.

McCoy is a popular place to pick mushrooms, from morels to golden oysters, and is part of the Des Moines River birding corridor and water trail.

Media Contact: Josh Gansen, Wildlife Biologist, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 712-330-6685.

Forty Years Ago in BBAS

by Hank Zaletel

Officers for the 1984/1985 year were: Jim Murdock, President; Tom Davis, Vice-President; Sherry Dragula, Secretary; Judy Shearer, Treasurer; and Judy van der Linden, newsletter editor.

The 1984 Christmas party was held at the State Forest Nursery. It was noted that at the November board meeting that Jim Murdock mentioned that he had applied for tax exempt status for BBAS. Also, that \$100 had been authorized for Audubon Adventures for five 4th to 6th grade classes. Audubon Adventures was a classroom tool for teachers to use in teaching about birds and the environment.

Programs for the next three months included "Amphibians and Reptiles of Iowa" by Dr. James Christiansen of Drake in January; "The Politics and Science of Acid Rain" by Dr. Thomas Squires of ISU, Ames Lab in February; and "Bird Eggs: They are Not Just for Breakfast" by Tom Davis, ISU Zoology

Twenty six people participated on the Christmas Bird Count on December 15th which one birder described as "a pretty miserable day." It was cold, foggy, with drizzle and/or hard rain. New species for the count included a Lesser Scaup and a Common Golden-eye both seen at Hallets Quarry (Ada Hayden). At the tally later in the day, Mark Widrlechner proposed doing a Boone Count in 1986.

The February field trip led by Jim Murdock found a Saw Whet Owl at Big Creek. Pine Siskins and a Red-breasted Nuthatch were at Glendale Cemetery in Des Moines. In March, Bill Horine led a trip to Nebraska's Platte River for SandhillCranes with an overnight stay in North Platte.

Local Birding

Photos courtesy of Larry Dau

Larry Dau did some cold-weather birding near his house and by the Arboretum on December 4. He found the following on that day and some of the photos are below:

1 Rusty Blackbird, 15 Red-winged Blackbird, 2 Common Grackle,
2 Brown-headed Cowbird, 4 Harris's Sparrow,
10 White-throated Sparrow, 3 Purple Finch



White-throated Sparrow



Brown-headed Cowbird



Red-winged Blackbird



Common Grackle



Harris's Sparrow



Rusty Blackbird

My Birding Journey

Olivia DeWitt (Board member & Social media specialist)

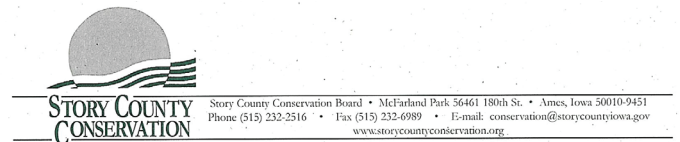
Hello! My name is Olivia DeWitt. I am currently a freshman at Iowa State University, double majoring in Biology and Wildlife and Fisheries Conservation and Ecology. I am originally from Council Bluffs, Iowa, about 2.5 hours away from Ames. I got into birding around 2020, right when COVID hit. My mom had set up a bird feeder right outside my kitchen window, and I would watch them when I ate breakfast. I was gifted a Sibley bird guide for Christmas that year, and the rest is history! Back home, I had the opportunity to have an internship at Hitchcock Nature Center, where I got to help with a prescribed burn, shown in the picture.

My favorite bird is the Whippoorwill, and my favorite place in Ames to bird watch is at Ada Hayden Park. I love the purple martin houses there! I am excited to serve on the BBAS board and can't wait to see what we accomplish in the coming year!



Donations Made

Big Bluestem Audubon Society recently donated \$3,000 to the Story County Conservation Commission. The donation will help to fund the purchase of property near Cambridge, Iowa, and is considered to be excellent bird habitat, as well as habitat for other wildlife. Your membership in this organization enables these donations. A thank you letter from Mike Cox, Director of the Story County Conservation Commission was sent to us.



November 24, 2025

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

Dear Big Bluestem Audubon Society members,

Thank you for your generous donation of \$3000.00 to Story County Conservation for land acquisition along the South Skunk River Greenbelt. Protecting land will improve water quality, create essential habitat, and provide more opportunities for outdoor recreation. We truly appreciate your support in helping us achieve these goals.

Thank you again for your kindness,

Sincerely,

Michael Cox
 Director

Thank you all!

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

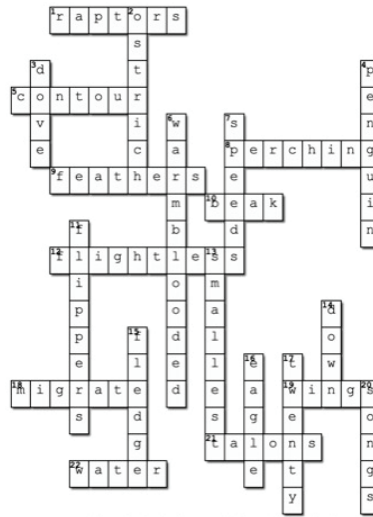
Eurasian Tree Sparrows

These are a new species spreading across central Iowa. They were originally brought from Europe and released near St. Louis, Missouri in the 1880's. They mostly stayed there until the last couple of decades, then moved first into Southeast Iowa and now our area."



Photos courtesy of
Doug Harr

ANSWERS FROM SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER



Across

1. Birds of prey are also called _____.
5. Wing feathers that sometimes are bright and beautiful are also called _____ feathers.
8. Birds that live in a tree are called _____ birds.
9. Plumage on a bird that could be brightly colored.
10. There are many shapes and sizes based on a bird's diet.
12. Some birds are _____ like the ostrich and penguin.
18. Many birds _____ to warmer climates in cold and snowy seasons.
19. All birds have _____ Created using _____ no matter if they can fly or not.
21. Long, sharp hooked claws that are found in raptors for tearing prey.
22. Birds that live near _____ can sometimes fly long distances.

Down

2. The largest bird on Earth is the _____.
3. The _____ is a symbol for peace.
4. This kind of bird is well-known for living in Antarctica.
6. Birds are _____ because they keep a constant body temperature.
7. Birds have been known to reach _____ of 100 miles per hour.
11. The penguin uses its wings as _____.
13. The _____ bird is the Bee Hummingbird.
14. Soft, fine feathers _____ feathers that keep a bird warm.
15. When a bird has left parents to fly out on its own.
16. The _____ is the symbol for strength and the national bird of the United States.
17. There are almost _____ thousand kinds of birds.
20. Some birds have very pretty _____ as they reply back to another one.

Feathered Facts

Submitted by Heather Sanders,
information taken from "Bird Brain Teasers"
by Patrick Merrill

A serinette, also known as a bird organ, was a hand-cranked musical device that was used by French ladies of the 17th and 18th centuries in order to teach songs to their pet canaries. The tunes were played in the same register as the birdsong. In the 19th century the serinette was used as a popular instrument for music, entertainment, and dancing in middle-class families. To operate it, the user turns a crank which operates a bellows and a barrel. The bellows then pumps air into the pipes. A bellows blew air into a set of pipes, regulated by rotating barrel lines with pins.



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

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

**Big Bluestem
Audubon Society**



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

Expires 12-31-2026

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

Expires 12-31-2026

NEW MEMBERS
OF NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY



Who's New?

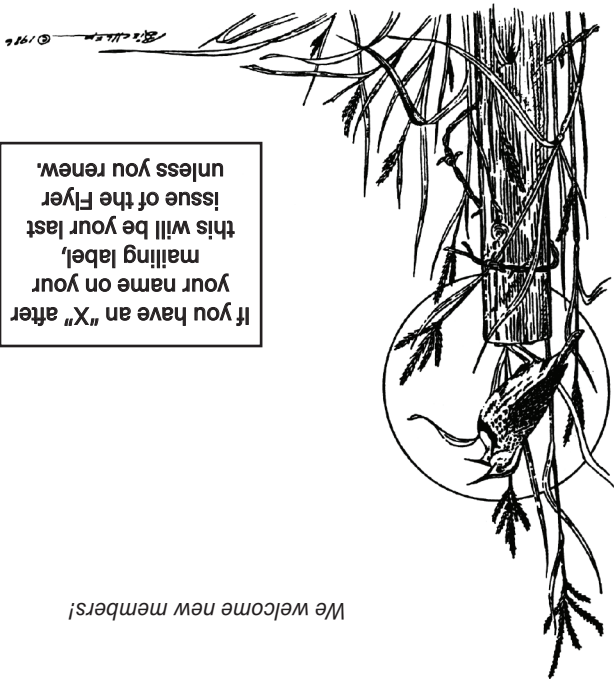
Big Bluestem Audubon Society would like to welcome these new members:
Tyler Harms - Joined Aug 8, **Julie Bovenmyer** - Joined Aug 26
Dale Dunlap - Joined Sept 22, **Steve Espeland** - Joined Sept 23
John Jordan - Joined Sept 26, **Valerie Stallbaumer** - Joined Nov 7
Jay Berkey - Joined Nov 17

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

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

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

NEWSLETTER Volume 61 | Number 2 | Jan/Feb/Mar 2026



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

We welcome new members!

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

Birding Trip, Spring, 2025

Submitted by Doug Miller

Hit South Padre Island 20 April because everybody told me to get there by this date. On Googlemaps "Valley Land Fund Birding" & "South Padre Island Migratory Sanctuary" (small plots across the street from one another off W. Sheeps-Head Street) are two miles south of the Nature Center (fee) & the Convention Center. Besides the short deciduous trees favored by migrants these last two also have extensive marsh boardwalks that abut each other but do not meet so you can't walk continuously from one to the other even though it looks connected on Googlemaps. Spring Breakers long gone so motels cheap. Black-Throated Greens, Cape Mays, Baltimore & Orchard Orioles, Summer and Scarlet Tanagers (one female Western), Indigo & Painted Buntings, Scissor-Tailed Flycatcher. Most memorable sighting: At Valley Land Fund saw male Painted Bunting on ground log next to water drizzle setup. Green Anole lizard sticks out throat pouch and lunges at bird. Bunting flaps up and back 6 inches in surprise and regards lizard for a bit then leaps forward in attack and lizard backs up! Then second male Bunting. Then second Anole!? Can't follow action. Didn't seem like first Anole was leaping at second Anole but maybe?

Rio Grande oxbow parks yielded Altamira Oriole, Green Jay, Clay-colored Thrush, Great Kiskadee, Cachalaca, Black-Throated & Olive Sparrow. Black-Tufted Titmouse eluded me forever then finally saw it diving down main park hollow gate post to nest as I was leaving. Ignored family of crows forever across valley until binocs revealed they were Groove-Billed Ani.

Coming in to Corpus Christi TX my iPhone lost ability to use cellular data so I was forced to rely on paper maps for a couple of weeks argh. Need to get Highway 4 then 48 to get back to South Padre Island. Ok here's 48 I'll take it now and now here's 4 and sign to South Padre Island. Ok fine I'm on the right road. You get used to enormous gas and oil structures close to the coast but after dusk I find myself coming up on big structures that look somehow different than regular oil and gas stuff. Dunno. Pass enormous building with huge windows inside of which are liquid natural gas tanks or something but they look like gigantic, rounded, rocket ships I kid you not. Place just seems odd. Shortly I reach end of the road barricades?! Why am I not in South

Padre Island? Security truck is nearby and I ask where am I. "You're at Starbase". I had no idea Starbase was in Texas.

Corpus Christi's Blucher Nature Park is once again a great site. Flowering Mulberry at east entrance always a hot spot. Towards dusk at SW corner of park with shorter trees along creek get greatest Warbler action I've ever had - Bay-Breasted, Chestnut-Sided, Magnolia, Black-Throated Green, Golden-Winged, Yellow. etc. Very out-of-range Cattle Tyrant who has made it their business to hawk flies off the Prohibition restaurant dumpster downtown for several years of course was not there. Great-Tailed Grackles and Franklin's Gulls fought for scraps amongst the gas pumps at convenience stores.

High Island & Sabine have Prothonotary, Yellow-Green Vireo, Chat, etc but its the worst year in the last 10 or 15 years everybody opines. This was a repeated theme during my entire trip. Strong south winds meant birds did not land at first available opportunity. So no Fall-outs. Nesting Roseate Spoonbills at Smith Oaks look like alien race of High Priests from the Valleys of Neptune. Lifer Blue-Winged Warbler. Even though its a low insect year I try out anti-insect suit from Tongcamo and it works but does add a degree or two to my temperature. On the other hand its a great anti-sunburn prophylactic.

Peveto is smaller but the three benches each have sight lines to both water features. Just like last year the birds start coming in at 2PM after their 18 hour, 700 mile trip across the gulf. Very cooperative Thrasher ate mulberries 8 feet away, Tanager regarded us from 3 feet above our heads. Grosbeaks, Orioles, Buntings.

At Cape May Prairie Warblers fight tumbling through the air for a hundred feet. Lifer Black-Throated Blue Warbler in the Cape May Bird Observatory back yard.

Email I sent while at Cape May NJ.

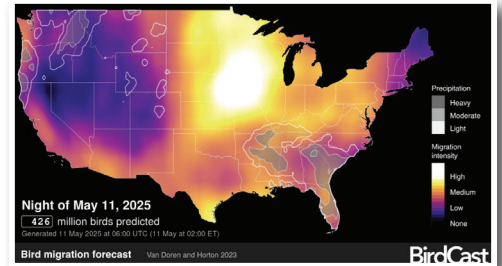
Bird: "Hey you know what would really piss Doug Miller off besides us not showing up at Cape May in New Jersey?"

Bird's Buddies "No what?"

Bird: "Flooding his home state Iowa with

birds while he is halfway across the country looking in vain for us".

Bird's Buddies "Classic! Let's do it to that Loser! Ha ha ha!"



Niagra Falls Canada Geese acting like that one Far Side cartoon about a guy being cornered in an alleyway by a gang of City Ducks. Dad goose thought he could intimidate me with Horrific Hiss while his delinquent kids kept sleeping in middle of path. I countered with arm straight and low to the ground imitating aggressively charging goose while hissing and drove him from the field of battle. Or so I thought. As soon as I had taken a few steps past and turned my head around he flew up and wing-boxed me on both shoulders. Ow! Clever girl, I mean boy.

Magee Marsh on Lake Erie. About one thousand cars! Two Highway Patrol vehicles! Four to eight Ohio Wildlife Officers wearing body armor and packing heat!? For birders. BIRDERS. Tripods banned on miles of boardwalk because of so many people. I check out the man making duck decoys upstairs demonstrating it for the visitors so they can see... holy crap the guy making the decoys is a decoy. Mannequin is so lifelike and they even have a radio blaring on his desk to complete the illusion. Every day a different mix of birds shows up. Chestnut-sided one day, Bay-breasted the next. Prothonotaries nest here and seem to be contractually obligated to come down every so often and perform a song and dance on the boardwalk arm rails for a minute like buskers. Magee Marsh was clearly the highlight of my trip for ease of viewing, numbers, and species of Wood Warblers especially.

Keeping birds safe in the winter

Submitted by Heather Sanders

- Feed birds high-fat foods such as sunflower seeds & suet. This helps them maintain warmth in the winter.
- Place feeders away from predators such as cats. A good measurement is about 10-12 feet from dense bushes. This gives them a good escape route, but also near cover for quick hiding.
- Protect birds from window collisions by placing feeders within 3 feet of windows or greater than 30 feet. Also window decals warn them of glass.
- Provide roosting spots such as piles of brush, evergreen trees, dense shrubs, or roosting boxes to protect them against wind & cold.
- If you have a cat, do not let them roam. Hungry cats will grab a delicious meal such as that bird that you like to view out of your window.
- Keep feeders clean to prevent the spread of disease.
- Provide fresh water or a heated bath. After all, who wants to take a freezing shower?
- Avoid heavy pruning or cleaning up natural debris (such as leaf litter & dead stalks) until spring as they provide shelter & food.
- Leave seed heads on perennials such as sunflowers & coneflowers, & plant native berry-producing shrubs for natural food
- Once you start feeding, continue throughout the winter. Birds do remember where they were fed & will rely on you for survival.

For more information on protecting birds in the winter, go to the American Conservancy website:
<https://abcbirds.org/news/winter-backyard-birds/>

My Birding Journey

Libby Zaletel (Social media specialist)

My family history has a love of birds, and at a recent Audubon meeting I learned you were seeking social media support. I work in operations for a large financial institution in the strategic sourcing area within supply chain management. I've also helped a few different organizations manage their social media. I travel often and enjoy watching wildlife and birds. I look forward to helping connect people through a shared love of birds.



Close-up Look *with Doug Harr*



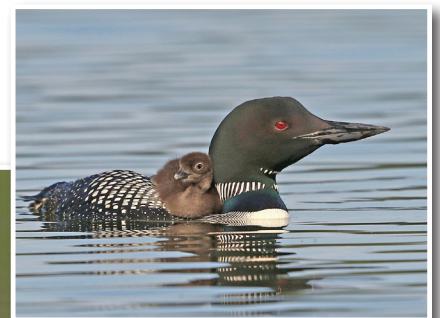
For years there have been a pair of Cooper's Hawks nesting in trees a few blocks from us. Both the adult male and female, plus new juveniles, really like our yard because of the many birds and squirrels in our trees, at

our feeders, and House Sparrows winter-hiding in a brush pile beneath our spruce trees. The very large adult female returned again about 3:15 on November 23, perched on the brush pile for 10 minutes and allowed me to get several photos of her from our back deck, about 35 ft. away.

Did you Know...?

Submitted by Heather Sanders

- Hummingbirds fly backwards & hover in place
- Crows hold funerals. They gather around a fallen crow & call to each other to pay attention. Why? It's not so much to mourn the dead crow, but its to evaluate whether there's a threat nearby.
- Flamingoes eat upside down
- Albatrosses sleep while flying
- Owls can't move their eyes despite swiveling their head 270 degrees
- Pigeons can recognize humans



*These loons were seen by Larry Dau's cabin in July
Photos courtesy of Larry Dau*