

BIG BLUESTEM AUDUBON SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER Volume 53 | Number 2 | November/December 2017

<http://bigbluestemaudubon.org/>



PROGRAMS

November 16, 2017 | Carl Kurtz | Discovering Where We Live

This is a look at plants and animals through the seasons. Carl Kurtz of St. Anthony, IA, is a naturalist and farmer, encompassing free-lance writing, photography, teaching, lecturing, photographic workshops, tallgrass prairie reconstruction and seed sales. Since 1971 his photos and articles have appeared in 50 different publications nationwide. Carl taught Natural History Photography at Iowa State University for 11 years and has given hundreds of lectures to students and civic groups of all kinds over the past 40 years.

December 14, 2017 (**2nd Thurs**) | BBAS Holiday Party McFarland Park (56461 180th St)

Bring your photos of nature on a thumb drive, a food item to share, and some bird seed to donate to Story County Conservation to thank them for donating the venue. We will enjoy each other's photos, food, and company and have a festive holiday time! Please limit photos to 20 and video length.

January 18, 2018 | Marlene Ehresman | The Bats of Iowa

February 15, 2018 | Mike Shannon | Ducks Unlimited Living Lakes Initiative

March 15, 2018 | Paul Roison | Madagascar

April 19, 2018 | Craig Meyers | Information Coming Soon

May 17, 2018 | Dick and Sharon Stilwell | Florida's Corkscrew Swamp

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.

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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

December 2, 2017

January 13, 2018 (***2nd Sat.***)

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. Unless stated otherwise, all field trips will meet at 7:30 AM on the first Saturday of each month (Sept-May). We will meet at the public parking lot bordered by Wild Birds, Unlimited (213 Duff Ave), Harold Pike Construction, and the Union Pacific Railroad tracks (GPS coordinates: 42.024014, -93.611582). 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. Expect to be back at the parking lot generally between noon and 1:00 PM. For more information, contact Eric Ollie at (515) 238-3610 or uphawkeye@gmail.com. Carpooling is highly encouraged.

COMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

Ames CBC | December 16, 2017

Saylorville CBC | December 17, 2017

Carroll CBC | December 19, 2017

Boone CBC | December 30, 2017

BBAS Board Meeting | January 8, 2018 at 6:30 PM | Home of BBAS President Eric Ollie (1513 Ridgewood Avenue, Ames, IA)

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
1644 Maple View Pl.
Boone, IA 50036
lgdau@netins.net



BIG BLUESTEM AUDUBON SOCIETY OF CENTRAL IOWA

OFFICERS

President | Eric Ollie

515-238-3610; uphawkyeye@gmail.com

Vice-President | Doug Harr

515-275-4818; dnharr@gmail.com

Secretary | Hank Zaletel

515-382-5427; madowl@mid Iowa.net

Treasurer | Brian Schilling

schilling.brian516@gmail.com

BOARD MEMBERS

Matt Wetrich

712-210-4614; go_tweeting@hotmail.com

Wolf Oesterreich

wolf@iastate.edu

Marlene Ehresman

515-233-1379; 515-249-8138 (cell)

marlene@iowawildlifecenter.org

SPECIAL ASSIGNMENTS

Archivist | Hank Zaletel

515-382-5427; madowl@mid Iowa.net

Bird-A-Thon | Barb Krumhardt

barbara.krumhardt@gmail.com

Conservation | Bruce Ehresman

515-296-2995;

bruce.ehresman@dnr.iowa.gov

Field Trips | Eric Ollie

515-238-3610; uphawkyeye@gmail.com

Name Badge Coordinators | Jon and Joyce

Bahrenfus

515-275-3263; jbahren@netins.net

Newsletter Coordinator and Audubon

Membership | Larry Dau

515-230-3492; lgdau9@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor | Stefany Hulsebus

515-720-9322; stefany_h@yahoo.com

Publicity & Outreach | Eric Ollie

515-238-3610; uphawkyeye@gmail.com

Refreshment Coordinator | Hank Zaletel

515-382-5427; madowl@mid Iowa.net

Schools Liaison | Jerry Keys

515-232-2516; jkeys@storycounty.com

Webmaster | Karl Jungbluth

weatherbird58@gmail.com

PRESIDENT'S CORNER WITH ERIC OLLIE

Greetings! As I write this, in the first days of November, the trees have goldened, crimsoned, and browned; and the number of bare branches has begun to catch up with the number of those still with leaves. Grasslands of green and flower have long been replaced by a variably-textured patchwork prairie of browns, tans, yellows, ochres, and rusts. Autumn's magnificent splendor abounds around us, with winter soon encroaching!

The birds of summer, along with those who only briefly pass through as they journey toward warmer climes, are gradually but continually being replaced by birds of winter. Sparrows, Finches, Longspurs, Shrikes, Ducks, Geese, Swans, and Owls, Owls, Owls!

Personally, I look forward to late fall and winter birding almost as much as the birding of spring migration. Is it more exciting to find a Northern Parula or a Northern Shrike? A Summer Tanager or a Winter Wren? A Blackpoll Warbler or a Common Redpoll? A Rose-breasted Grosbeak or a Red-breasted Nuthatch? A Purple Martin or a Purple Finch? Or how about a Snowy Egret or a Snowy Owl? They are all equally exciting to me, despite what the reading on the thermometer might be. Excitement abounds, no matter the season. And hey - no bugs in winter!

Four prime opportunities to grab some of the winter birding gusto await you this December. BBAS sponsors four Christmas bird counts (CBCs): Ames, Saylerville, Carroll, and Boone. You (yes, you) are invited to join in on the fun. CBC citizen science is a more than 100-year-old Audubon tradition that depends on birders like you for its success. Birders of every stripe and level of experience head out into the field to survey all of the avifauna that can be found within a 15-mile radius during a set 24-hour period. The data is then compiled and sent to National Audubon. Finding and enjoying birds is the main draw for most, but great social experiences also bring together like-minded bird enthusiasts from all around.

| 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

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.

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

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CONTINUED PRESIDENT'S CORNER

The **Ames CBC** will be held on **Saturday, December 16** and will be coordinated by Shane Patterson. Ames is the home field to many of us, so let's take that advantage and boost our backyard by finding as many birds as we can. To volunteer or to get more information, contact Shane Patterson at shanepatterson@alumni.iastate.edu. Volunteers should contact Shane to register by December 8. There will be a post-count compilation potluck afterward, which is always a great time with an amazing array of food.

The **Saylorville CBC** will be held the next day on **Sunday, December 17**. This count routinely sets the mark for the top number of species counted in a CBC in the state of Iowa, usually climbing up in the 90-100 species range. To volunteer for the Saylorville count, or to get more information, contact Dr. Steve Dinsmore at cootjr@iastate.edu.

The **Carroll CBC** will be held on **Tuesday, December 19** and will be coordinated by Matt Wetrich. This count includes Swan Lake State Park, where many great birds have been found in recent years, including Prairie Falcon, Long-eared Owl, and Snowy Owl. Carroll County is always a great place to find Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs. Being a weekday count, this CBC really depends on people stepping up to help out. If you can be there, Matt would appreciate your help greatly! To volunteer for the Carroll count, or to get more information, contact Matt Wetrich at go_tweeting@hotmail.com.

The **Boone CBC** will be held on **Saturday, December 30**. After a wildly successful 30-year run by Mark Widrlechner, who we deeply thank for his decades of service, this will be the first year that Alex Kretzinger will run the Boone CBC on his own. Let's all help Alex make this year's count the best its ever been! There is a lot of great habitat in Boone County and great birds to be found. To volunteer, or to get more information, contact Alex Kretzinger at alexkretzinger1@gmail.com or (515) 298-3553,

30 YEARS AGO IN BIG BLUESTEM AUDUBON (BBAS) BY HANK ZALETEL

Programs for the 1987/88 BBAS year were held in room 181 of the College of Design. They included the following presenters and topics: Iowa DNR's non-game biologist Doug Reeves who spoke on Common Migrating Raptors Found in Iowa; Iowa DNR's Clear Lake biologist Ted LaGrange on Prairie Wetlands: Birdlife & Waterfowl; and Cornell College's Paul Christenson on Iowa State Preserves.

Field trip participants visited the Ledges in September for fall bird migrants and wildflowers and in October, DeSoto Bend Wildlife Refuge for fall waterfowl. In November, BBAS assisted with the Iowa Ornithologists' Meeting at the 4-H Camp in Boone County.

The Big Bluestem Flyer's editor, Judy vander Linden, resigned because her family relocated. No mention was made of her replacement. A new logo was provided for the Flyer and BBAS merchandise. It was designed by local artist Dean Biechler. Karen Van Drie and staff at the Ames Advertiser volunteered to prepare the Flyer for publication.

Audubon Adventures were provided for 13 classrooms, including all eight elementary schools in Ames plus one each in Gilbert, Boone, Nevada, Colo, and Story City.

BBAS's only physical property was a Bushmaster Spacemaster spotting scope with 22x and 40 power lenses, plus a tripod. The scope was kept by the president for loan to BBAS members.

Officers for the year were President Dave Edwards; Vice President Mike Meetz; Secretary Barb Bettis; Treasurer Mark Widrlechner; board members: Sherry Dragula, Andy Fix, Kay Niyo, and Barb Heikens.



Pine Siskin at Neal Smith Refuge
Photo by Eric Ollie



Savannah Sparrow at Neal Smith Refuge
Photo by Eric Ollie



Merlin at Jester Park in Polk County
Photo by Larry Dau

BARN OWL NESTING BONANZA 2017 BY BRUCE EHRESMAN



Barn Owl family in Iowa
Photo by Bruce Ehresman

While the documentation of 17 Barn Owl nests and 33 total records in 2016 was an all-time record high for Iowa, that record was more than doubled this year. Currently, 38 Barn Owl nests are documented in 26 counties, and 71 young Barn Owls have fledged from 26 nests. Of the 38 nests, 29 are in the bottom three tiers of Iowa counties. Northernmost nest counties are Sioux, Clay (first documented nest

in the better part of a century), Franklin, Butler, and Chickasaw. For a grand total, there have been 66 Barn Owl records (nests and sightings) from 35 different counties. Much effort and time has been invested in tracking Barn Owl reports, and that effort and related publicity has produced significant results. People, in general, seem to love Barn Owls, and Facebook and other social media reports and photos of Barn Owls helped provide avenues of pursuit toward documenting more nests. Since the last nest reported (in a Clarke County deer stand) will not fledge young before December, I suspect that more nests may be forthcoming. In 2016, Pat Schlarbaum documented that egg-laying for Barn Owls began

around March 12, and this year we are documenting the other end of the nesting season that will extend into December. No other Iowa nesting bird species has been documented to have such an extended nesting season.

This is the fourth year in a row that Barn Owl nesting has continued to increase. In two years' time, Iowa Barn Owls more than met the five-year objectives set in Iowa's Barn Owl Recovery Plan. It will be interesting to observe if this increasing trend continues. If it does and is documented, the Barn Owl may be upgraded from endangered to threatened status or perhaps even delisted altogether.

Many of this year's nests were in or atop grain bins and silos, especially inside round metal storage bins. Four nests were located in towns. At least four nests were in hollow trees, and for the first time in my career, Barn Owls nested successfully under a bridge. Remaining nests were found in barns or other out-buildings.

Many thanks to the people who have reported their Barn Owls to us this year and a special thank you to those who encourage this owl's presence on your property. If you wish to report a Barn Owl sighting or would like information on how to build and place your own Barn Owl nest box, please call (515-432-2823, ext. 106) or email bruce.ehresman@dnr.iowa.gov.


PAT SCHLARBAUM RETIRES FROM IOWA DNR BY IOWA DNR & HANK ZALETEL


In June, the Wildlife Diversity Program said farewell to Pat Schlarbaum when he retired after 33 years of championing wildlife with the Iowa DNR. Pat's role in the program was multifaceted, but two of his major focuses were on outreach and species restoration and most recently, of Peregrine Falcons and Ospreys. He worked with partners to secure the birds for release into the wild in Iowa, to host the birds at the release locations, and to monitor the birds' nesting success. Pat was always fearless in the pursuit of conserving these birds. In one of my favorite photos of him, he is on top of a tall building being dive-bombed by an equally fearless falcon who actually lifted Pat's hoodie off his head. Take that, pesky human!

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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Offer good until June 30, 2018

CURRENT STATUS OF PEREGRINES AND OSPREYS IN IOWA BY IOWA DNR & HANK ZALATEL



Osprey at Jester Park in Polk County | Photo by Larry Dau

In 2017, 28 Osprey nest attempts were reported across the state, 23 of which were successful in producing a total of 47 young. Ospreys have a few concentrated areas where several pairs nest within a few miles radius - around Des Moines, Spirit Lake, and Iowa City/Cedar Rapids. However, there are always a few in scattered locations. They are especially fond of cell phone towers!

Peregrine Falcons had 18 nest sites confirmed, 11 of which were successful at producing approximately 24 young. Peregrines nest in a variety of man-made locations, like the Iowa State Capitol in Des Moines and the I-80 bridge over the Mississippi River, but they also have several nest sites in natural cavities along the Mississippi River bluffs.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS BY ERIC OLLIE

September 9, 2017 | Anna McCarthy Lee Park/Carr Woods

Five birders participated in the "Fall Migrapalooza," where we attempted to find as many migrants as possible. The main takeaway from this trip was that it was an absolutely spectacular day to be out in nature, and we all enjoyed the day immensely. The birding was enjoyable, too, but it was a touch on the slow side. We found only four warbler species and a couple of vireos among the 28 total species found, but we enjoyed what we did find.

October 14, 2017 | Boone County Sparrow Hunt

Six birders braved a very rainy Saturday morning, where we car-birded the gravel roads of Boone County in search of sparrows and whatever else we could find. Despite the miserable conditions, we built a fairly respectable bird list. Among the 44 species found, we tallied 11 sparrow species: Dark-eyed Junco, Chipping, Fox, Harris's, Lincoln's, Savannah, Song, Swamp, Vesper, and White-crowned and White-throated Sparrow.

November 4, 2017 | Story County

Four birders ventured out on an overcast morning, where at our first stop we found a very birdy Nevada cemetery. Four actively feeding Red Crossbills gave us good extended views. We also found multiple Red-breasted Nuthatches, Golden-crowned Kinglets and a couple Brown Creepers. We then took gravel roads to Hickory Grove Park, finding a Rough-legged Hawk perched in a close-by tree and had good looks at a male Northern Harrier. In our half-day of birding, we found 34 species, including six species of sparrows.



Fall Chestnut-sided Warbler in rural Boone County | Photo by Larry Dau



LeConte's Sparrow at Neal Smith Refuge | Photo by Eric Ollie

WHAT DO WE DO AT AN AUDUBON MEETING? BY HANK ZALATEL

Of course, a major feature of an Audubon meeting is the speaker, as you know from the program announcements and the schedule enclosed in the newsletter. The meeting begins at 6:30 PM with an introduction of new members and guests followed by a short period of announcements and reports from different activities of the society. These often include discussion of proposed projects, conservation concerns, and a small amount of necessary organization business. This is followed by a period in which members are encouraged to report their bird sightings or other nature events. The major time is given to our speaker. The program usually finishes by 8 PM, leaving time for socialization over refreshments.

PHOTOS AND CONTENT FOR NEWSLETTER BY LARRY DAU

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.

NEW MEMBERS OF NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Ames
Catherine Bazylnski, Robert Haug,
Judith Levings, Miriam Fitz, Patricia Kuhnle,
Virginia Underwood, Donna Wobig

Boone
Marvin Saathoff

Dawson
Robert Muir

Madrid
Carla Seller

Melborne
Lynette Smith

Woodward
Merrilee Frantum

Webster City
Kathleen Hemmen



Sandhill Cranes in flight fall 2017 at Crex Meadows in NW Wisconsin
Photo by Larry Dau

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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