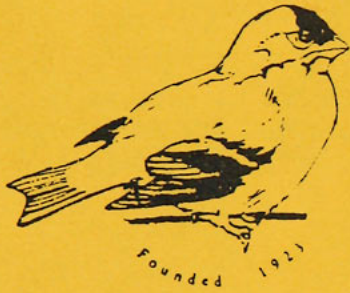


# Iowa Ornithologists' Union



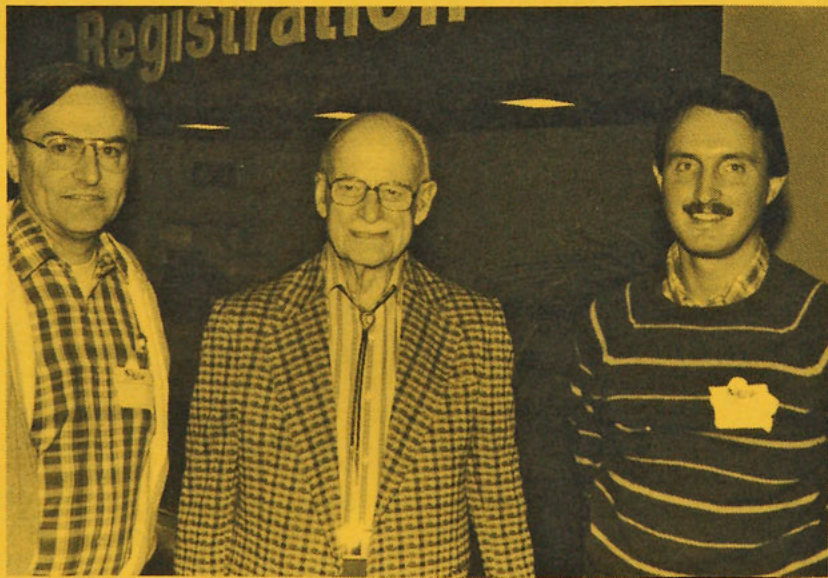
STATE BIRD OF IOWA: THE GOLDFINCH

# I.O.U. NEWS

Fall 1986

Newsletter of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Volume 2 Number 3



L. to R. IBL Editor Tom Kent, Philip DuMont, and President Carl Bendorf.

## AN INTERVIEW WITH PHILIP DUMONT

Philip DuMont was born in Minnesota and raised in Des Moines. In 1933 he wrote A Revised List of the Birds of Iowa; the standard until Iowa Birds was published in 1984. He was the banquet speaker at the recent fall IOU meeting in Waterloo. Jim Dinsmore and Hank Zaletel videotaped an oral interview. The following are excerpts from this interview. (A viewing copy of this interview and the banquet speech is available by sending \$1 to Hank Zaletel, 715 West St., Colo, IA 50056 to cover postage and handling. Requests will be filled in the order that they are received.

IOU: Can you remember when you first became interested in birds?

PD: It was in scout work in 1916. The scout master was an Episcopalian minister, and he was very much interested in birds. I was 13 years old, and we were inspired by him. It was very close to WWI, and he'd go out looking for birds with his

Philip DuMont (cont'd)

opera glasses. The military police in the area would pick him up because he was a suspicious looking character with binoculars or field glasses and pen and paper. He got two of us, Kenny Nelson and I, interested. Kenny Nelson later was a secretary of the IOU for several years.

IOU: Was there a formal bird club present at that time?

PD: No. Most of my birding at that time was just in a few counties around Des Moines. The real hey day for birding was when Kenny Nelson and I went up to Ledges State Park and got acquainted with Carl Fritz Henning, who would now be called a superintendent. He was the caretaker at that time. Carl Fritz Henning was a small man, wiry, with a German accent, full beard, and just a born naturalist. He introduced us to so many other things other than birds--flowers, animals, insects, animal tracks, and things of that sort. He got us acquainted with the Cerulean Warbler which was nesting at the Ledges. On one of those trips, Walter Rosene came over and we were showing off our abilities by calling attention to the song of the Cerulean, and Walter couldn't hear it. He was 50 years old. We know now why he couldn't hear it.

IOU: What kind of equipment did you use? You mentioned opera glasses. Did you have field guides?

PD: Reed's field guide. I had a copy of Chapman's handbook, but it was very difficult for us to find things.

IOU: So old Chester A. Reed field guide was pretty much the standard?

PD: On some of the warblers they were all one color. No distinctions of any sort. It was before the Peterson's field guides came out.

IOU: How did you get around? You mention getting up to the Ledges. Did you have vehicles? Did you hitch rides? Bike?

PD: When we went to the Ledges, we would take the train to the first town south of there (Luther) and walk in several miles. We finally reached the stage where we could borrow the family automobile. That was coming up considerably.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL 1986 MEETING - Ann Barker, Secretary

The fall meeting of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union was held September 5-7 at the Holiday Inn, Cedar Falls, hosted by Francis Moore.

At Friday evening's informal social gathering, members were treated to punch, coffee, cookies, and two beautiful cakes decorated with Pileated Woodpecker icing, the artwork of Peggy Moore. It was a pleasant and relaxing way for everyone to catch up on tales of summer and early fall birding.

Saturday morning dawned cool with intermittent rain showers. Field trips departed the Advanced Systems, Inc. parking lot at 5:45 AM for Sweet Marsh, and 6:30 AM for George Wyth State Park. Although mosquitoes were ravenous, no one seemed to mind much, since the warblers were out in force attempting to control them.

## Fall Meeting (cont'd)

The group returned at noon for soup and sandwiches at the Holiday Inn. Following lunch, three excellent workshops were presented, from which those attending could select two: These were: 1) Shorebirds, with Tom Kent, Iowa City; 2) Winter Bird Feeding, with Weir Nelson, Cedar Rapids; and 3) Fall Warblers, with Pete Petersen, Davenport.

The fall business meeting was held at 3:15 PM after the workshops. Minutes for the meeting will be published in the next issue of Iowa Bird Life.

Members and guests re-convened at 6:30 PM, again at the Holiday Inn, for a banquet. Our featured speaker was long-time IOU member Philip A. DuMont, a former U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist in Des Moines, now of North Carolina, who spoke on "Ornithology in Iowa in the 1930's". His talk provided insight and an historical perspective of the early IOU years, as well as a review of those active in birding and conservation issues and the political developments of the era. Members showed their appreciation with a standing ovation. We were privileged to have in attendance another honored guest, Frederick Pierce, a charter member of the IOU and former editor of Iowa Bird Life for 30 years.

Sunday morning was crisp, in the 40's, but the previous day's rain had long since disappeared. Field trips departed again for the same locations as they had on Saturday. There was an unconfirmed report that evidence of frost was seen on the Sweet Marsh trip; those interested may check with Barb Wilson for details.

The morning's adventures over, members returned to the Holiday Inn for lunch, followed by compilation of the official (Sunday) and weekend lists of species found. The weekend proved productive with a grand total of 140 species, 128 of which were seen on Sunday. This included 23 warbler species and 8 shorebirds. A higher than average number of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds was seen, with 20 or more counted on the Sweet Marsh trip alone. There was general agreement that migration seems to be a week or more ahead of schedule so far. Highlights were: 1) Several Least Bitterns - Sweet Marsh; 2) Swainson's Hawk; 3) Merlin - George Wyth State Park; 4) Golden winged, Mourning Warblers - George Wyth State Park; 5) Worm eating Warbler - both locations; 6) a very early Fox Sparrow.

Members were reminded that the spring meeting will be held in Sioux City May 29-31, 1987. Anyone wishing a copy of the official checklist for the fall meeting may contact the secretary.





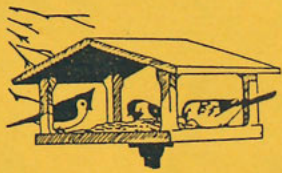
## COMING EVENTS IN IOWA



Please send us your Christmas bird count dates as soon as possible. This year's count will be from December 18 - January 4.

- Sat., Oct. 18 - The Nature Conservancy field trip to Behrens Pond near Cedar Rapids. Meet at the entrance of Behrens Ponds Preserve at 9:30 AM. For information, call Gene or Ruth Goellner, (319) 363-9361.
- Sat., Oct. 18 - Iowa City Bird Club field trip - canoe down the Maquoketa River from Monticello to Eby's Mill. Canoes can be rented near the put-in place, and a shuttle can be arranged for your own canoe. Meet at Brownie's Canoe Service at 9:00 AM. Leader: Barb Beaumont, (319) 626-6227.
- Sun., Oct. 26 - Quad City Audubon Society field trip to Lock 13 and Spring Lake for waterfowl. Meet at 7:00 AM at Luciani's, Rapids City, Illinois. Bring a lunch. Leader: Kelly McKay, (309) 755-6731.
- Sun., Oct. 26 - Iowa City Bird Club field trip to Matsell Bridge. Meet at the north parking lot of the Iowa Memorial Union, Iowa City, at 8:00 AM. Leaders: Cal and Bernie Knight, (319) 337-9140.
- Sat., Nov. 8 - Mississippi Bend Bird and Nature Club field trip to the Louisa Unit, Mark Twain National Wildlife Refuge. Meet at 7:00 AM at the ranger station. Bring a lunch. Leader: Sharon Kaufman, (319) 246-2290.
- Sat., Nov. 8 - Iowa City Bird Club field trip to Coralville Reservoir. Meet at north parking lot of the Iowa Memorial Union, Iowa City, at 7:30 AM. Leader: Bud Gode, (319) 351-5245.
- Sun., Nov. 9 - Quad City Audubon Society field trip to Green Valley Park for banding of sparrows and late fall migrants. 7:00 to 11:00 AM; meet at the Green Valley Prairie, west end of 55th Ave. (west of 48th St.) in Moline, IL. Leader: Pete Petersen, (319) 355-7051.
- Sun., Dec. 21 - Quad City Christmas Bird Count, followed by get-together for compilation and chili supper from 6:00-9:00 PM at 1923 14th St., Moline. For information, call Pete Petersen, (319) 355-7051.
- Sun., Jan. 11 - Feeder Workshop and Seminar, 2:00-4:00 PM, Deere-Wiman House, Moline, Illinois. See different types of feeders and how they work. Presented by Pete Petersen, Deere-Wiman Ornithologist.
- Sat., Jan. 24 - Mississippi Bend Bird and Nature Club field trip to Cordova Nuclear Power Plant. Presentation on the plant's impact on nature. Meet at 10:15 AM at the Clinton Co. Court House. Leader: Carol Rogers (319) 324-8897.
- February 13-15 - Quad City Bald Eagle Weekend. Co-sponsored by the Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources and the Illinois Dept. of Conservation, with help from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Details in future issue.





## HINTS FOR WINTER BIRD FEEDING

It's time once again to begin thinking about repairing, refurbishing, and reorganizing the equipment in our yards for the busy winter feeding season. Most IOU members have been feeding birds for years and find that there are at least two facts about this activity that keep it interesting and challenging: 1) No two years at a feeder are ever the same, and 2) It can be extremely difficult to arrange a feeder array to attract desired birds while keeping unwanted species (avian and otherwise) from taking over. Here are some tips from two of IOU's well known experts on the subject to help engineer your feeders and yard to your own satisfaction.

Peanuts, according to Pete Petersen of Pete Petersen's Wild Bird Shop in Davenport, are an often ignored but well worthwhile source of food to round out a feeding program. They are the favorite food of such species as the Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, Downy Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, both Nuthatches, and Tufted Titmice. Woodpeckers and Chickadees will often bring their fledglings to the peanut feeder. Pete notes that when a Carolina Wren or Red-breasted Nuthatch is in the neighborhood, a good way to ensure its continued presence is to keep the peanut feeder well stocked.

The dominance of the ubiquitous House Sparrow at feeders is still an annoyance to many. Weir Nelson, owner of Wildlife Habitat Wild Bird Specialties in Cedar Rapids, suggests fixing a tray feeder with white millet or a mixture of millet and cracked corn at a distant location in hopes that the House Sparrows will gather here rather than at other feeders nearer to the house. Elaborating on the same idea, Pete advocates a systematic scheme for those who wish to be more thorough. First, before the heavy feeding season begins, remove all feeders from the area for a period of one to two weeks. Then, put up the millet-corn tray at a distance, as mentioned above, without replacing the others. When House Sparrows become accustomed to using the tray, replace the other feeders and remember to keep the millet-corn tray filled at all times.

Occasionally, reports Weir, House Sparrows will drive other species away from niger feeders. Because of the larger size of this bird, shortening the perches of the feeder to 3/4" or less will discourage them. The tray should also be removed.

Displacement of smaller birds at the feeder by larger more aggressive ones such as Blue Jays and Common Grackles is frequently a problem. Pete describes several types of feeders now available which are designed to discourage the larger species:

- 1) A cylindrical tube for sunflower or safflower with a surrounding heavy inch-square coated hardware cloth. Larger birds cannot get through the cloth. This same principle works on niger feeders to keep squirrels away.
- 2) A chickadee feeder with a very narrow rim for small birds to use for perching.
- 3) A satellite feeder with no perch, requiring birds to cling to the edge of the feeder hole.



When migrating Common Grackles take over a feeder in October or November, Pete and Weir both suggest switching from sunflower to safflower, which is not attractive to Grackles but still liked by most other species. Squirrels at the feeder will also be discouraged by safflower. Weir feels this is probably the easiest way to keep squirrels away, and advocates using no sunflower seed at all. Ear or shelled corn may be provided for squirrels at a different location.

Publications of interest:

Dennis, John V. A Complete Guide to Bird Feeding, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1983.  
McElroy, Thomas P., Jr. The New Handbook of Attracting Birds, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1985.

## IOWA'S KESTREL PROGRAM

Mary Jane Timp  
Information Specialist  
Iowa Department of Transportation



If it's true imitation is the highest form of flattery, then Iowa is receiving high praise for its kestrel nesting program, an effort other states seem to be duplicating as quickly as they hear about it.

What other states are lining up to imitate is Iowa's approach to providing nesting places along highways for the kestrel hawk, a small falcon. In fact, Iowa's kestrel nesting boxes are an unqualified success.

Kestrels feed on rodents, so roadsides are an ideal place for these birds of prey to hunt. However, due to the scarcity of the hollowed-out trees which are kestrels' ideal nesting places, the number of these raptors was declining in Iowa several years ago.

But help was on the way. Beginning in 1983, the Iowa Conservation Commission (now part of the Department of Natural Resources) teamed up with the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) in mounting kestrel nesting boxes on the steel supporting posts of large signs along Iowa's primary highways. Thanks in large part to this effort, the birds are making a healthy comeback in Iowa.

Ron Andrews, a DNR biologist, thought of the nesting box idea. He then discussed the possibility with DOT officials. And, in what is fast becoming a piece of birding lore in Iowa, Eagle Scout Trent Bales of Clear Lake made the first 20 nesting boxes. Since then, interest in the program has been high, and DNR and DOT staff have been informing birders throughout the state about the program.

The first boxes were mounted on signposts along Interstate 35 in Cerro Gordo County. The birds took to the nests right away, with many kestrels making nests in the boxes. Many of those nests soon were filled with young kestrels, and the success inspired expansion of the program.

As of this summer, kestrel boxes are on signs on I-35 in Cerro Gordo, Story, Hamilton and Decatur counties; on I-29 in Mills and Fremont counties; and on U.S. 20 in Black Hawk County. One good feature of the boxes being on signs is that the nests are safe from predators like raccoons. A recent check by DNR staff showed kestrels established nests in half of the highway boxes. (Experience shows that the number of nests occupied increases in successive years.) Douglas Reeves, a DNR biologist, estimated some 220 kestrels were produced in boxes along Iowa's highways this year.

Individuals are getting involved too. For example, a lay ornithologist proposed and made the 10 boxes installed last spring on U.S. 20 east of Waterloo, and 11 junior high school students in Ankeny built boxes this year. Reeves said he banded 18 birds from the U.S. 20 boxes.

Reeves and other biologists are not sure exactly why the kestrel program is such a success. "We've got a lot to learn," Reeves said. He has banded 400 kestrels since the nesting program began, but believes only three birds have returned to nest in a highway box a second year, and he knows of only one female that nested in the same box two consecutive years. (Most kestrels lay five eggs and usually all hatch.)

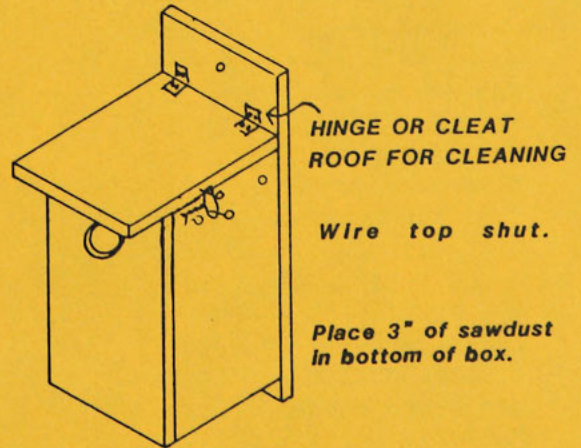
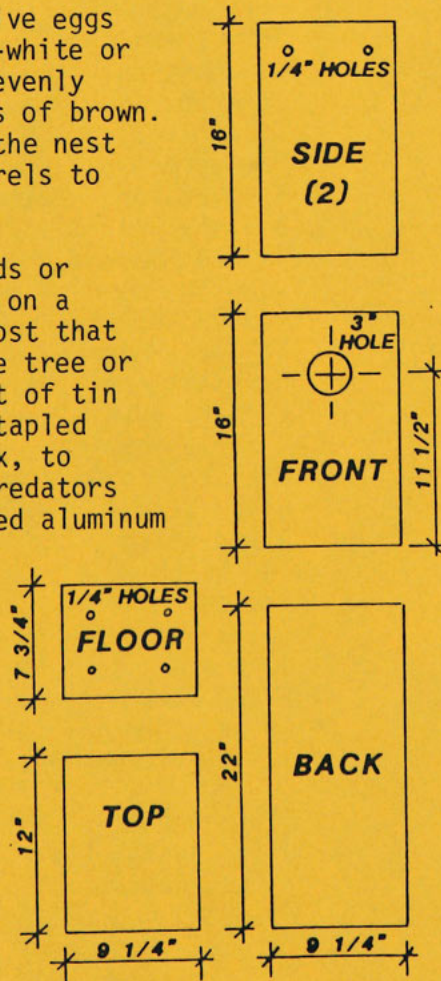
## AMERICAN KESTREL

The American Kestrel is our smallest falcon and is abundant in agricultural areas which are characterized by scattered woodlots, scattered trees, shelterbelts, meadows, highway rights-of-way, pastures and hay fields. This species is valuable because of the large numbers of rodents and insects eaten. Kestrels are frequently seen sitting on powerlines along highways or hovering above the grassy roadside ditches in search of their prey. An adult kestrel is about the size of a grackle.

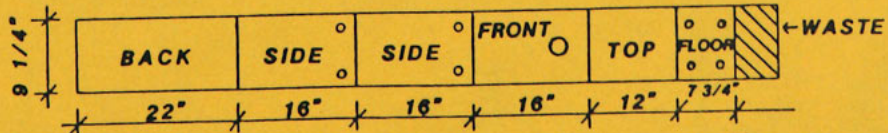
Starlings may be a persistent problem in a kestrel box. The boxes will need to be checked regularly--every week or 10 days--to remove starling eggs and nests. Starlings are an unprotected species.

Kestrels normally lay five eggs that are white, pinkish-white or cinnamon, and they are evenly covered with small spots of brown. Occasional checking of the nest will not cause the kestrels to abandon the nest.

Place the box in orchards or relatively open country on a tree or free-standing post that is 10-30 feet high. The tree or post should have a sheet of tin or aluminum nailed or stapled around it, under the box, to prevent squirrels and predators from using the box. Used aluminum offset printing plates can be purchased very cheaply from newspaper offices and used for this purpose. The nest hole should be 3 inches in diameter and preferably face south or west. About 2-3 inches of wood chips should be placed in the bottom of the box. Grassy habitat should be in the vicinity to provide hunting habitat for the kestrels.



**LUMBER:**  
ONE 1" x 10" x 8' 0"



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## IOWA'S KESTREL PROGRAM (cont'd)

Other states that have heard about Iowa's kestrel nesting program and have started their own are Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, Ohio, Idaho, and Michigan. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers put up 22 kestrel boxes at Lake Rathbun on telephone poles and trees. Reeves said the kestrels established six nests, but the number of fledglings is unknown. The Kossuth County Conservation Board put up 25 boxes along county roads and on farms this year which yielded 26 birds.

DNR officials are so excited by the project, they hope that someday a "kestrel trail" will exist from north to south along I-35 in Iowa. "I don't expect anything but good news from here on out," said Reeves.

## NEW IOU MEMBERS

Please welcome the following new members:

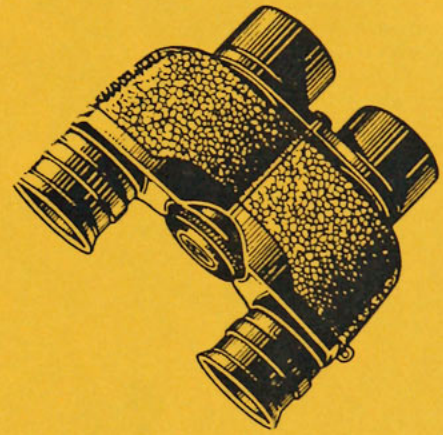
Everett Alton - Iowa City  
Barbara Beaumont - North Liberty  
Lois Beaver - Oskaloosa  
Linda Brown - Ames  
Alvina J. Clayton - Corydon  
William Cummings - Centerville  
Mark Dietzenbach - Ft. Atkinson  
John Ely - Lake City  
Andrew S. Fix - Ames  
Charles Fuller - Burlington  
Jeanne Gee - Shenandoah  
Marcella George - Nevada  
James Gillaspey - West Des Moines  
Ken Gregory - Dysart  
Mary Ann Gregory - Dysart  
Barbara Holmes - Des Moines  
Romona Holmes - Red Oak  
Bill Houser - Waverly  
Margaret Houser - Waverly  
James Huber - Cherokee  
Stu Huntington - Ames  
Laura Jackson - Madrid  
Elaine Johnson - Ottumwa  
Margaret Johnson - Clarinda  
Marjorey Kline - Ames  
R.M. Knox - Bettendorf  
Hank Krause - Akron  
Vernon Lloyd - Union

Mary Matherly - Omaha, NE  
John McNeilly - Shenandoah  
Jim Messina - Cedar Rapids  
John Morrison - Austin, MN  
Joe Morrissey - Muscatine  
Florence Olyphant - Ames  
A.K. Prasad - Paton  
Blanche Prasad - Paton  
Colleen Radebaugh - Des Moines  
Douglas Reeves - Boone  
Melinda M. Rhoads - Cedar Rapids  
William Rhoads - Cedar Rapids  
Douglas Rose - Davenport  
Richard Ryan - Des Moines  
Cynthia Samples - New Sharon  
Pat Schlarbaum - Ames  
Hilda Sickels - Des Moines  
Alice Smith - Marshalltown  
Ed Thelen - Spirit Lake  
Steve Van Note - Cedar Rapids  
Gayle Wallace - Mt. Vernon  
Janice Walter - Mason City  
Terry Ward - Cedar Falls  
Peter Wickham - Cedar Rapids  
Walter Wickman - Baldwin

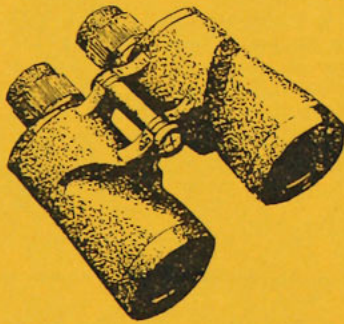
Clinton Public Library  
Univ. Saskatchewan Library - Saskatoon,  
SAS CANADA  
Field Museum of Natural History - Chicago, IL  
Carnegie Museum of Natural History Library -  
Pittsburgh, PA  
Academy of Natural Science Library -  
Philadelphia, PA



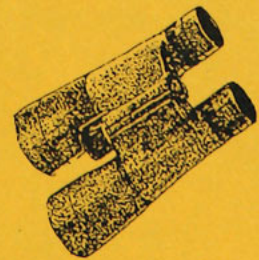




Iowa Bird Life's three editors: L. to R. Fred Pierce, Pete Petersen and Tom Kent.



The authors of Iowa Birds: L. to R. Dean Roosa, Jim Dinsmore, Pete Petersen, Darwin Koenig and Tom Kent.



1985-86 Executive Council: Front row L. to R. Bob Myers, Francis Moore, Ann Barker, Phylis Harris. Back row L. to R. Jim Dinsmore, Ray Cummins, Carl Bendorf, Gene Armstrong, Carol Thompson.

To reserve your suet for woodpeckers and prevent it from being gobbled up by starlings, suspend your suet feeder from a rope or chain so that the mesh side faces down. Woodpeckers, but not starlings, are able to cling upside down and feed in this fashion.

Mesh bag

Pine cone

Log feeder

Coconut shell

Tin can

Some commercially available suet feeders

Hopper and tube feeders are the most efficient ways of offering birdseed.

To coax birds to a window feeder, start by attaching a feeding tray to a ground-floor windowsill. Keep the shades down until the birds become accustomed to the feeder. Keep the windowsill feeder well stocked with fresh food, even though it may be little used at first.

# Iowa Ornithologists' Union



STATE BIRD OF IOWA: THE GOLDFINCH

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