



# I.O.U. News

Iowa Ornithologists' Union Newsletter

Fall 1994 • Volume 10 Number 3

## A Frequent Flyer - To Follow Our Feathered Friends, You Have to Be One Tough Bird

by Mark Olson

Reprinted with the permission of Iowa City Magazine

James Huntington has spotted 778 species of birds from Texas to Alaska. His thoroughness has landed him in 13th place on the American Birding Association list for the number of North American birds seen in an individual's lifetime.

The last new bird he spotted was in Arizona. Since avid birders consider the idea of seeing a new bird to be like a religious experience, Huntington grew more frenzied throughout that week. He kept picturing it in his mind at work. The bird had been spotted on Sunday. It *had* to still be there. Thursday night came, and *bam!* - Huntington hopped on a plane south.

He hiked five rugged miles down Coronado National Forest's Sycamore Canyon in the southeast corner of Arizona, telescope in tow. He heard it - a loud trilly call - similar to the call on his "Birds of Mexico" tape. Adrenaline started pumping and his pulse went through the roof. He looked up. Perched on a tree like a Christmas ornament—yellow breast, green back, white underbelly—was the rufous capped warbler, bird number 778. "The biggest thrill is seeing a bird for the first

time," he says. "There's tremendous excitement and exhilaration. It's almost like a high."

At the age of 40, Huntington is a single, 20-year birding veteran. When not pursuing his hobby, he is a letter carrier for the Iowa City Post Office. He wears contact lenses because it takes too much time to remove his eyeglasses before looking through binoculars.

He carries no binoculars on the job, but takes a quick look at birds in order to identify them as robins or cedar waxwings. To Huntington, fairly similar birds differ as clearly as ostriches and wrens do to a lay person. A blurred white mark on a waterfowl's neck will stand out like an albatross in his 12-pound Kowa TSN-2 telescope. He easily uses any mark on a bird to differentiate it from a dozen other birds, quickly grabbing a bird guide (he has about 30) out of his hip pack and verifying his find to an amazed, unknowing bystander.

After reaching 700 on a North American life list—a list of different bird species seen in one's lifetime—new birds become difficult to find. Huntington may add only three to five new birds a year to his life list. He saw his last lifer in Iowa years ago. "It doesn't take the thrill out of (local birding), but you do long to see different things," he says.



Now he drives or flies to other states to see new birds. He has become what is called a chaser. A few unlucky birds fly hundreds of miles off their charted migration routes and up to 100 chasers flock to see them. Competition is tight at the top, but the top birders say camaraderie reigns in the world of birding. "I'm concerned that I get carried away, but when you hear about something, you really want to see it." Huntington has been a chaser for half of his birding career. He works as front desk clerk at the Highlander Inn in order to supplement his birding expenses.

Huntington has spent 24 hours on the highway en route to Texas to spot a bird. "It takes a day to recover. You get out of the car and you vibrate," he says, so he usually flies. Since January, Huntington has been to Texas and Arizona twice. "I travel a fair amount—as much as time and money permit," he says. "I think I'm a little compulsive. I get kidded at work a little bit. I think they think it's eccentric, certainly not harmful.

"The birds I like the most are birds that you have to go through some effort to see." A few years ago Huntington took a few days off work and traveled to Big Bend National Park in west Texas in search of the eared trogon, a bright green bird with a bluish tail, a Mexican native rarely seen in North America. He caught a glimpse of the bird before it took flight. Huntington flew back to Iowa, still unsatisfied with his look.

He signed up for a week's vacation from his job, bought a water pump, jammed his heaving backpack with food and topographical maps of Big Bend National Park and headed south again. He descended into Ramsey Canyon just before sundown. No one else was around. It

a "a little disconcerting," Huntington says. After a restless night, he awoke and walked east into the canyon. He suddenly heard a call, "ee ee ee." Once again, he was face-to-beak with the eared trogon.

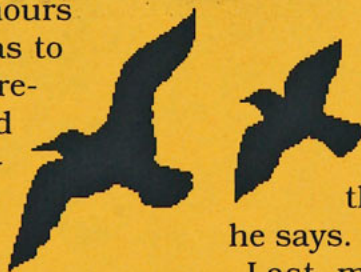
Huntington hiked the canyon, searching for and watching the bird. He found it six of the seven days he spent there. After a successful chase, he feels wonderful and "the feeling lasts a long time."

He isn't always successful. A gray silky flycatcher was spotted in Texas, and Huntington arrived at the last sighting location at noon; it had last been seen at 7 a.m. He spent a week searching for the bird and never found it. "Even to this day I'm disappointed," he says.

Last month (May), Huntington donned his LaCrosse rubber boots and headed to Alaska. He used three weeks of vacation time and spent it with up to 50 other birders on Attu Island, 1,775 miles west (as the crow flies) of Anchorage. He's been to the island several times and refers to the experience as "birding camp." Since transportation there is limited to foot and bike paths, he tries to log 1,000 miles on his bike in the 10 weeks preceding his trips to Attu Island. Once there, birders have a good chance of spotting birds straying over the Bering Sea from Asia.

Huntington once told skeptical friends he would retire from birding when he hit 700 birds on his life list, but he kept going. "It's like a hunter bagging a big game," he says. "The only big difference is you don't have to kill it, you just have to see it."

Mark Olson is a student in the graduate professional program at the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication. He is a native of Minnesota.



# Laurens Dentist a Friend of Wildlife

by Jane Heckert

Reprinted with the permission of the Ft. Dodge Messenger

Laurens—Dr. Ronald Harms, a Laurens dentist, was recently awarded the National Conservation Medal from the Daughters of the American Revolution. The medal is awarded to volunteers.

"It's great that an organization recognizes conservation efforts, and that Helen Ducommun recommended me," Harms said. Harms' interest in nature dates back to his childhood.

He said his grandfather was instrumental in introducing the ringneck pheasant to northwest Iowa. He imported eggs and incubated them under chicken hens. When able to survive, the young pheasants were released into the wild. Harms said he always wondered why his family kept calling them "our" birds and not everyone's.

His mother taught him a lot about birds, using the local names they were known by. Since then, Harms has studied and learned a lot about birds and their habitat.

In 1982, Harms earned his bird banding permit. "I was one of the lucky ones," he said. He explained that Paul and Mary Felsing, licensed banders, sponsored him. It took 18 months to get a permit in 1982. According to Harms, it is much harder now.

Harms also is a rehabilitator of

birds and occasional mammals in cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Sometimes his freezer contains unusual items such as rabbits and squirrels to feed the recuperating birds, and sometimes frozen bird carcasses until the DNR can get them stuffed and mounted for educational purposes.

Harms started teaching local students about birds 30 years ago. He wanted to make sure kids knew there are a variety of birds, and tried to encourage the students' natural curiosity in learning about them. Harms is now a frequent visitor in elementary classrooms, showing different birds he has banded or is rehabilitating.

It was his interest in banding that indirectly led to his interest in butterflies. Ten years ago the visiting brother of a neighbor noticed the nets Harms uses to catch birds and came over to see them. The man was Tim Orwig, an English professor and lepidopterist (butterfly collector). "He is probably the expert in western Iowa on butterflies," Harms said. Orwig invited Harms to Kalsow Prairie to collect butterflies.

Since then, Harms has compiled more than 160 different county records (register of individual butterfly species). Most are common to the area but had never been registered; about a dozen are significant finds. Harms has been a facilitator at the annual Loess Hills Prairie seminar for the past 10 years.

His daughter, Shelley, has been somewhat put out about her dad's butterfly collection. As a child, she had a collection for a 4-H project which earned her a blue ribbon. It was ruined by a



common house moth.

Her dad learned from this and now has a special cabinet with cherry wood containers to preserve his collection. As an extra precaution, he puts pest strips in each container. He also has an understanding that each of his records is "apparently" a duplicate of what she had in her collection.

Shelley's interest in nature has not diminished, even though she is now practicing law in New York. Her family has a home in Connecticut from where she keeps her father informed of the variety of birds she has found there.

Another hobby of Harms' is skull collecting. This has also caused some problems at home because to clean the skulls, Harms boils them. His wife Pat has now designated certain pots for that purpose. But on the whole she feels his interests have been great for the kids. They learned a lot from him.

Their son Craig helps his father out with skulls. Craig has studied in East Africa, the Bahamas and Alaska, as well as in many states, and brought his father some unusual skulls to add to his collection. The latest is a small caiman (alligator) from North Carolina.

Craig, a graduate of Harvard and Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine, is working on his Ph.D. in immunology in North Carolina and recently completed his residency in zoo and aquatic medicine. He said childhood influences had a direct influence on his studies and work.

Yet another activity Harms has be-

come involved in is surveying portions of Pocahontas and Palo Alto counties for the DNR to determine the density and number of frog and toad species. Harms said that during his last visit to Little Clear Lake he noted there were no night songs from any toads or frogs. This is an area he has survey for the past three years, and this the first time there was not a good variety of songs. He said that the apparent negative change could be caused by pesticides or predators.

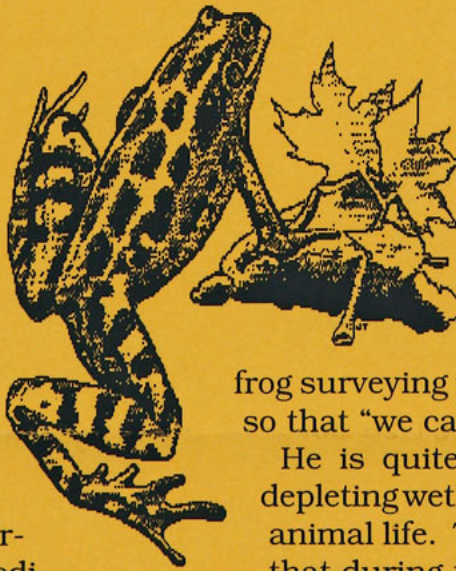
The natural progression for Harms' "quality recreation"—as he calls his hobbies—was to prairies and wetlands; and this led to the preservation of abandoned railroads for bike paths. He isn't interested in the paths as much as the remnant prairies along railroad lines.

Cultivated sections of abandoned railroads have severed the connections,

leaving isolated biological habitats for fragments of habitats. Harms stressed he is a preservationist. The ultimate purpose of all his bird banding, butterfly collecting, and toad and

frog surveying is to learn what is there so that "we can preserve it," he says.

He is quite concerned about the depleting wetlands, prairies and their animal life. The fossil record shows that during the die off of dinosaurs about 15 species became extinct about every 1,000 years. During the last one hundred years, mainly due to humans, one species of birds has become extinct every year. That is an unacceptable increase.



Part of the reason for the decrease in bird population can be attributed to the loss of tropical rain forests and pesticide use. But these wouldn't be as devastating now if not for the loss of the North American natural prairie and wetlands, Harms said.

He points out the the National Academy of Science has stated that "we are at or beyond the fifty-fifty point in the draining of prairie pot holes. We not only should preserve what we have but we had better do a fair amount of restoring of the wetlands," Harms said. "We are all environmentalists," he said. "Some of us affect the environment less negatively than others."



## Recent Literature

Brush, T. 1994 Effects of competition and predation on Prothonotary Warblers and House Wrens nesting in eastern Iowa. *J. Iowa Acad. Sci.* 101:28-30.

Camp, M., and L.B. Best. 1994 Nest density and nesting success of birds in roadsides adjacent to rowcrop fields. *Amer. Midl. Nat.* 131: 347-358.

Rodenhouse, N.L. and L.B. Best. 1994. Foraging patterns of Vesper Sparrows (*Pooecetes gramineus*) breeding in cropland. *Amer. Midl. Nat.* 131:196-206.

## State and County Lists 1993

by Pete Petersen, Davenport

For 1993 only 18 people reported lifetime Iowa totals, down from 24 last year. We received at least one listing for 37 counties down from 48 last year. All you need to submit is a number, no list of species is needed.

Please send your totals through December 31, 1994 any time before June 30, 1995 to the author at 235 McClellan Blvd., Davenport, IA 52803.

Iowa Totals - 200 Minimum

Pete Petersen	362
Brian Blevins	349
Mark Proescholdt	334
Beth Proescholdt	332
Ann Johnson	325
Pam Allen	324
Reid Allen	323
Mary Lou Petersen	314
Doug Rose	311
Curt Nelson	293
Corey Blevins	285
Jan Walter	283
Mary Montgomery	276
Dick Bierman	274
Marion Brewer	268
Lee Schoenewe	263
Rita Goranson	253
Carolyn Fischer	252

County Totals - 125 Minimum

**Allamakee:** Mark Proescholdt 156,  
Dennis Carter 155

**Black Hawk:** Pete Petersen 235,  
Mary Lou Petersen 228

**Boone:** Mark Proescholdt 202,  
Beth Proescholdt 188,





Ann Johnson 166  
**Buena Vista:** Dick Bierman 182  
**Butler:** Mark Proescholdt 152  
**Cerro Gordo:** Jan Walter 264, Curt Nelson 261, Carolyn Fischer 240, Rita Goranson 229, Dick Bierman 176  
**Cherokee:** Dick Bierman 251, Marion Brewer 241  
**Clay:** Lee Schoenewe 248, Dick Bierman 180, Alice Kehoe 171, Judy Knight 171  
**Clinton:** Pete Petersen 248, Mary Lou Petersen 183  
**Des Moines:** Pete Petersen 219  
**Dickinson:** Lee Schoenewe 222, Dick Bierman 195  
**Franklin:** Mark Proescholdt 153  
**Fremont:** Doug Rose 234, Mark Proescholdt 189  
**Grundy:** Mark Proescholdt 172  
**Guthrie:** Mark Proescholdt 184  
**Hamilton:** Mark Proescholdt 175  
**Hardin:** Mark Proescholdt 232, Beth Proescholdt 215  
**Harrison:** Dick Bierman 182  
**Jackson:** Pete Petersen 232  
**Jasper:** Mark Proescholdt 174, Beth Proescholdt 175  
**Johnson:** Pete Petersen 248  
**Lee:** Pete Petersen 153  
**Linn:** Pete Petersen 204  
**Louisa:** Pete Petersen 254  
**Marion:** Ann Johnson 252, Mark Proescholdt 199  
**Marshall:** Mark Proescholdt 256  
**Mills:** Doug Rose 221  
**Muscatine:** Pete Petersen 254, Mary Lou Petersen 219  
**O'Brien:** Dick Bierman 175  
**Pocahontas:** Dick Bierman 151

**Polk:** Pam Allen 274, Reid Allen 270, Ann Johnson 258, Mark Proescholdt 247, Pete Petersen 243, Beth Proescholdt 229  
**Scott:** Pete Petersen 303, Brian Blevins 284, Mary Lou Petersen 273, Corey Blevins 271  
**Story:** Mark Proescholdt 233, Beth Proescholdt 175  
**Tama:** Mark Proescholdt 219, Beth Proescholdt 175  
**Warren:** Ann Johnson 247  
**Winneshiek:** Dennis Carter 205  
**Woodbury:** Bill Huser 243



## Night Birding by Bob Cecil, Des Moines

Each of us has followed an endless, meandering string of blackbirds through the Spring sky, or marveled at the symmetry of migrating cormorants, but few of us have had the opportunity to experience one of the most fascinating of all migrations - the nocturnal passage of millions of birds.

Although I recalled hearing of an account where Judge Charles Ayres of Ottumwa once participated in a project where observers focused their scopes on the moon to watch for migrants, it was one of those projects that I was slow to try myself. Success seemed a little unlikely.

One evening in May, 1993, while looking up at the full moon, the conversa-



tion about Judge Ayres came back to me, and I set up my scope in my Des Moines backyard. I found that my 40x eyepiece produced an almost full frame image of the moon. Within one minute, I saw my first nocturnal migrant, a single, small passerine silhouetted against the brilliant background. A little incredulous, I continued watching, and observed an average of about one sighting per minute for the next half hour or so (watching migrants at night gives a whole new meaning to the term "warbler neck"). Virtually all the birds were singles, seemingly flying alone, and seemed to cross the moon's face in one of two directions, both north-erly. All appeared to be passerines, but were not otherwise identifiable. My son John also watched and saw a number of birds.

A month later, on the night of June 4, we again set up the scope. While I would have guessed that the migration would have significantly slowed by this time, we were surprised to find an even higher rate of crossings, well exceeding one per minute.

This night I saw a small, tight flock of what appeared to be shorebirds. The following October, on the first, we again saw nocturnal migrants, but in lower numbers. More recently, on March 27th, I watched for about 10 minutes and saw only one bird, a large, long-billed shorebird, possibly a yellowlegs. On May 24th, crossings again averaged about one per minute.

This ability to witness nocturnal migration was the subject of a nationwide observation during five days in early October, 1952. This study involved 1391 observers in 45 of the 48 states and was presumably the study in which Judge

Ayres participated.

Although the observers considered only two factors, the number of birds and the direction of their flight, final analysis of the data took more than a decade due to the factoring in of local weather patterns and other complications.

Overall, the one time study produced as many questions as answers, but suggested that midwest migrations extended over vast areas, and may not necessarily follow river systems as once thought.

In Iowa, nocturnal migration by one species or another probably occurs almost year round, and the diligent observer might be rewarded with sightings on any moonlit night. While watching migrants from one's backyard at night may not have the exotic appeal of, say, a trip to Cave Creek Canyon in southeast Arizona, it does impart a sense of the mystery and magnitude of nocturnal migration, and should be an experience of every birder.






---

**THE IOWA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION**  
**FALL MEETING**  
**LAKE RED ROCK AND PELLA**  
**OCTOBER 28 -30, 1994**

---

**C**elebrate the first anniversary of Iowa's first Ross' Gull at Lake Red Rock. The lake area is becoming renowned for its rare fall migrants and will hopefully have many surprises in store. While no one can guarantee a Ross', Ivory, or Sabine's Gull, the numbers of water-related species should be great and who can guess what the next unusual find will be.

The weekend will kick off with registration and an informal gathering at the **Red Rock Visitor Center** at the south end of the dam. Most other events will take place at the **Pella Community Building**, 712 Union, two blocks south of the southwest corner of the town square (corner of Union and Broadway). The Saturday evening banquet will be held just down the street in the Fireside Room of **Graham Hall** on the Central College campus.

**SCHEDULE OF EVENTS**

<b>Friday, October 28</b>	7:00 - 9:00 P.M.	Registration and Social Time at the <b>Red Rock Visitor Center</b> .
	8:15 P.M.	Effects of the Flood of '93 on the Red Rock Area - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
<b>Saturday, October 29</b>	6:30 A.M.	Full breakfast at the <b>Pella Community Building</b>
	7:15 A.M.	Field trips leave for the dam
	7:30 - 8:30 A.M.	Gull Identification Workshop below Red Rock Dam - Tom Kent
	12:15 P.M.	Lunch at <b>Pella Community Building</b>
	1:00 P.M.	What's New at Walnut Creek NWR - Pauline Drobney, USF&W
	1:45 P.M.	Vagrancy Patterns in Iowa - Tom Kent
	2:30 P.M.	Update on Neotropical Migrant Research - Dr. John Faaborg, Univ. of Missouri - Columbia
	3:30 P.M.	Business Meeting
<b>Sunday, October 30</b>	6:30 A.M.	Banquet at <b>Graham Hall, Central College</b> (corner of University & Broadway) Flying the Coop for Fun & Profit - Dr. John Faaborg
	7:00 A.M.	Full breakfast at the <b>Pella Community Building</b> Field trips leave
	12:30 P.M. (Note time to avoid interference with church services next door)	Lunch and compilation at <b>Pella Community Building</b>

**CAMPING** at **Howell Station** below Red Rock Dam. Hook-ups and shower facilities are available for a fee of \$10.00 per night. For those unfamiliar with the Red Rock area, this campground is the best vantage point for observing gulls below the dam.

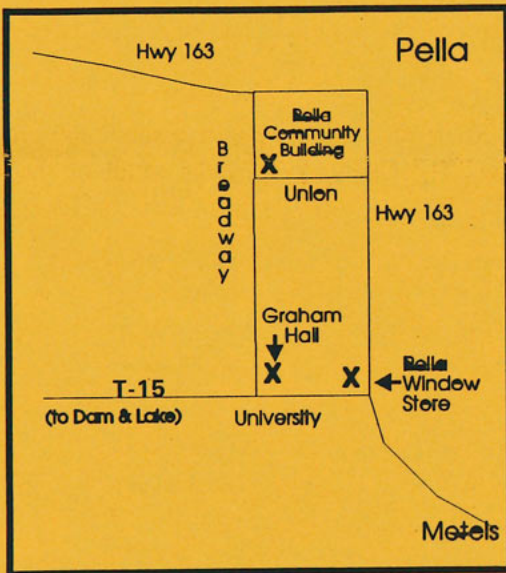


**PELLA ACCOMODATIONS --**

Strawtown Inn, 1111 Washington St. 515-628-2681 -- call for rates and availability  
 Rooms range from \$65-\$95 for one up to \$125-\$145 for four people; a bit pricy but historic

All of the following motels are located on Highway 163 East, southeast of downtown Pella. (Super 8 will give you their special VIP rate, quoted below, if you identify yourself as an IOU meeting attendee.)

Super 8	515-628-8181	1P1B \$34.85	2P2B \$42.41
Dutch Mill Motel	515-628-1060	2P1B \$34-\$44	2P2B \$36-\$38
Pella Motor Inn	515-628-9500	1P1B \$29.90	2P2B \$36.20



**DIRECTIONS TO THE RED ROCK VISITOR CENTER AND HOWELL STATION CAMPGROUND--**

Go south of downtown Pella on Highway 163. Turn right on University (Co. Road T-15) at the Pella Window Store and go approximately four miles until you come to a T intersection. Turn left and drive across the dam. The Visitor Center will be on your right at the south end of the dam. For those who are camping at Howell Station, the turn-off for the North Tailwater area is about 0.5 mile before the T intersection. Follow the road to the south for about 1.5 miles. The campground will be on your right.

**REGISTRATIONS** (checks payable to Ann Johnson) are due **no later than October 21, 1994**. Send to Ann Johnson, 532 120th Avenue, Norwalk, IA 50211. Meals may not be available for late registrants.

**REGISTRATION**

Name(s)

---

Address

---

Phone

---



---

Registration	\$5.00	
Saturday breakfast	\$3.00	
Saturday lunch	\$4.50	
Saturday banquet	\$8.50	
Sunday breakfast	\$3.00	
Sunday lunch	\$4.50	
<b>Entire package</b>	<b>\$28.50</b>	
Total Enclosed		

## I.O.U. People

**Mike Meetz** of Nevada recently received the 1994 Governor's Volunteer Service Award from Governor Terry Branstad for his work with the Department of Natural Resources Non-game Program. Meetz is currently working on part of the American Kestrel Nestbox project along Interstate 35. The nestboxes can be seen on the backsides of some of the Department of Transportation information signs.

**Jane Clark**, a longtime champion of Clive's greenbelt programs and a Des Moines Audubon Society leader, won the just announced Environmental Excellence Award for Individuals from the Metro Waste Authority and the Polk County Conservation Board. Clark's work has benefited everything from the popular Greenbelt Park to Clive's designation as a Tree City USA.



Iowa Ornithologists' Union  
4024 Arkansas Drive  
Ames, IA 50014



Thomas H Kent  
211 Richards St  
Iowa City IA 52246-3519

## Burk Scholarship

Myrle Burk, a long-time life I.O.U. member and former secretary-treasurer who died in 1992, established a scholarship fund with the Iowa Academy of Science to help students with an interest in ornithology.

It is anticipated that about four \$750 scholarships will be awarded in 1995. Students attending any Iowa college or university or Iowa residents attending a university outside of Iowa and with a demonstrated interest in ornithology are eligible to apply.

Applicants must have at least a 3.0 grade average in their college work. The deadline for application is 1 February. Application materials are available from Jim Dinsmore, Dept. of Animal Ecology, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011.

If you know of students who meet the above criteria, you are encouraged to notify them of this opportunity or to tell Jim of their potential interest. As part of this award, they will also be given a one-year membership in the Iowa Ornithologists' Union.

Bulk Rate  
U.S. Postage  
Paid  
Permit No. 200  
Ames, Iowa

