

# IOU News

Fall 2004      Volume 20 – Number 3



Two Canada Geese fly low over the Union Hills Wildlife Management Area of Cerro Gordo County. Photo by P Hertzell.

## Fall Birding : Four Months of Drifting Birds

Even though the autumnal equinox will not occur until late September, the fall birding season is here again, with its unique weather patterns, habitats, population dynamics, and even bird species. The fall birding season is only roughly in alignment with the dates for autumn, because it's supposed to correspond with the post-breeding dispersal and subsequent migration period of most birds' annual cycle. Many migrants actually start southbound movements in July.

Fall birding offers several special birding conditions not present at other times of the year. One feature is the slow fall migration—a less hectic, more drawn out affair than the spring migration. It seems to lack the urgency of the spring migration, and is more easily extended by favorable weather. Many

birds will linger until driven out by cold, or ice and snow.

Another feature is the challenge present in separating the mix of adult and juvenile birds. This year, in particular, it would be interesting to make an effort to count heads when possible. Researchers across Canada have remarked on what a poor nesting season it was for many shorebirds, a fact that should be detectable in the Iowa migration. For unclear reasons, American White Pelicans abandoned entirely their nesting efforts this year at Chase Lake National Wildlife Refuge in North Dakota. Most of these adults could be passing through Iowa in September. An article on this event and an-

*Continued on page 7*





## IOU News

is a quarterly publication of the Publications Committee of the **Iowa Ornithologists' Union**

Editor: Paul Hertzell  
1432 East State Street  
Mason City, IA 50401  
[phertzell@rconnect.com](mailto:phertzell@rconnect.com)

IOU Publications Committee:  
Kay Niyo  
Ann Johnson, Chair  
Paul Hertzell  
James J Dinsmore  
*vacant*

IOU News deadlines for submission of materials:

Issue	Coverage	Deadline
Spring	March 1 - May 31	February 15
Summer	June 1 - July 31	May 15
Fall	August 1 - Nov 30	July 31
Winter	Dec 1 - Feb 28	November 15

IOU Membership / Subscriptions:  
David Edwards  
2308 State Avenue  
Ames, IA 50014  
[dcejce@dandje.org](mailto:dcejce@dandje.org)

IOU Journal: **Iowa Bird Life**  
Kayleen Niyo, Editor

Documenting / Reporting Birds:  
Records Committee-  
Ann Johnson  
532 120th Avenue  
Norwalk IA 50211  
[aj@hologrambirds.com](mailto:aj@hologrambirds.com)  
Website: <http://www.iowabirds.org/>

Winter Field Reports-  
Robert Cecil  
[wewarb@aol.com](mailto:wewarb@aol.com)  
Spring Field Reports-  
Matthew Kenne  
[mkenne@netamumail.com](mailto:mkenne@netamumail.com)  
Summer Field Reports-  
James J. Dinsmore  
[oldcoot@iastate.edu](mailto:oldcoot@iastate.edu)  
Fall Field Reports-  
Paul Hertzell  
[phertzell@rconnect.com](mailto:phertzell@rconnect.com)



Wickiup Hills Wildlife Area in Linn County will be the site of the 2004 IOU Fall Meeting, on September 24-26. Details are on pages 4-6. The Wickiup Hill-Cedar River Complex has been designated an *Important Bird Area* in Iowa. The photo, by Jim Durbin, shows a prairie/savannah area adjacent to woodlands along the Cedar River .





---

---

## IOU Kirtland's Warbler Trip

*In June, 2004, the first out-of-state IOU-sponsored field trip targeted the rare Kirtland's Warbler, whose nests are found only in jack pine barren ecosystems of northern Michigan. Here is IOU member Kent Nickell's account of the trip.*

Nothing like a pretty and rare bird to get your attention. The Kirtland's Warbler is a federally endangered species that nests primarily in the northern Lower Peninsula of Michigan and spends its winters in the Bahamas. These birds have very particular habitat requirements including jack pine forest of the right age, a special type of sandy soil, and dense ground vegetation such as blueberry bushes.

One of the interesting things about birding is that you discover the variety of birds you find are not all suited to urbanized backyard feeders. This awareness of birds' requiring special types of ecosystems to flourish leads to a desire to protect these areas. The Kirtland's Warbler may seem to have an overly demanding fussiness for where to live, but that is just part of the richness of a flourishing, diversified habitat.

This first IOU-sponsored birding field trip was led by Ric Zarwell and designed to go and see this warbler. As well as adding a bird to one's lifelist, this was an opportunity to gain an "ownership" of the bird by seeing it, in person, in its breeding environment, and hopefully to gain an appreciation of its struggle to coexist.

Our trip began at 7am Saturday morning, June 12, in Grayling, Michigan, with a slide presentation from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Along with the US Forest Service, the Michigan DNR, and the Michigan Audubon Society among others, the USFWS is putting a lot of effort into saving this bird, primarily through habitat protection and the limiting of cowbird parasitism.

Shortly after the presentation, we were led into the habitat areas, and even though it was a cloudy and rainy morning, we were rewarded with a few singing Kirtland's. It was good to see them. The warblers not only like jack pine forest, they want them 5 to 16 feet tall. Formerly, this was accomplished with the succession caused by regular forest fires, but it takes some intense forest management to make it happen today. The warblers begin to nest in these areas when the trees are about 8 years old and stop using the area when the trees reach about 20. The birds are doing well, and there appear to be some nest sites in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, across Lake Michigan, and perhaps even into Wisconsin and southern Minnesota.

-Kent Nickell, Waterloo, Iowa

## Caster Succeeds Brees as CBC Editor

Unfortunately for IOU and the birding community in Iowa, but wonderful for him, Aaron Brees will be attending Drake Law School this fall and feels he must step down as Christmas Bird Count (CBC) editor for *Iowa Bird Life*. We thank Aaron for a superb job as CBC editor following in the able footsteps of Stephen J. Dinsmore, who also served so well during my tenure as editor of the journal. I am pleased to

announce that Chris Caster has agreed to take over as CBC editor beginning this coming season. Chris is a general dentist in North Liberty and lives in Coralville with his wife and two young children. Chris has had an interest in birds since grade school and joined IOU in 1987. He has been president of the Iowa City Bird Club for the past two years and the organizer/compiler of the Johnson County Spring Count since 1997. Chris also has volunteered for the Macbride Raptor Project since 1995. He will be contacting the CBC compilers this fall, or they may reach Chris at [cjcaster@earthlink.net](mailto:cjcaster@earthlink.net).

Chris offered the following comments: "I think the IOU is a great organization and I'm very happy to help out as CBC Editor. And I am equally happy to relieve Aaron Brees so that he can enjoy an opportunity to someday do bigger and better things for our birds. Aaron and Steve Dinsmore as CBC editor before him, have set the bar quite high. I am not a student of Iowa ornithology in the way that they are, and so I hope for the membership's patience. Thanks to Kay Niyo for this opportunity and I will do my best to maintain the quality of the CBC article."

-Kayleen A. Niyo, Editor, *Iowa Bird Life*

## Tom Kent Steps Down

In July, Tom Kent stepped down from his key role on the IOU Publications Committee. Kent served as the chairman of the committee immediately after a reorganization occurred in January 2003. At that time, the committee composition was restructured and its bylaws were revised. Under Kent's supervision, the committee helped redesign the two IOU publications, recommended a decreased budget for managing them, and proposed methods for generating increased donations. The IOU membership responded favorably to all three actions, with many members stepping forward with generous financial help.

The Publications Committee bylaws direct the committee to recommend prospective members to the IOU Board. In response to Kent's resignation, the committee has recommended Neil Bernstein, professor of biology at Mount Mercy College in Cedar Rapids, and former editor of the *Journal of the Iowa Academy of Science*.

## In Memory of Ann Kent

It is with sadness that we learned of the death of IOU member Ann Kent, wife of Thomas H. Kent. Following a lengthy battle with breast cancer, Ann died June 14, 2004 at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. It was for the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics Volunteer Services that Ann donated 7000 hours of her time over the past 31 years.

For dozens of IOU members who visited the Kent home for meetings of the Records Committee or other IOU activities, Ann was always a gracious hostess with a special ability to make everyone feel welcome in her home. Although not an active birder, Ann was entirely supportive of the IOU. The many IOU members who were fortunate enough to meet her will remember her with fondness.



# 2004 IOU Fall Meeting

## *Enjoy Fall Birding in Eastern Iowa*

The IOU Fall Meeting will be held at Wickiup Hill Natural Area near Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Sept. 24–26. Registration, programs and most meals will be at Wickiup Hill Outdoor Learning Center. The weekend is hosted by the Iowa City Bird Club in cooperation with the Linn County Conservation Department and the Johnson County Conservation Department. Wickiup Hill has prairie, savannah, woodlands and wetlands with miles of trails. A boardwalk over the wetland area adjacent to the Learning Center is a lovely area to walk and observe all manner of flora and fauna. Wickiup Hill was recently named an IBA. The members of the Iowa City Bird Club are excited to host the IOU Fall Meeting and hope everyone can come and see this diverse, beautiful part of Iowa.

Locations for field trips will depend on weather and birding success throughout the weekend, but will be chosen from a great list of potential sites, including, Dudgeon Lake, Hawkeye Wildlife Area, Otter Creek Marsh, Pleasant Creek State Park, Squaw Creek, Palisades State Park, Pemmican Ridge, McBride Raptor Center, Lake McBride, Amana Woods, Swan Lake, Kent Park, Williams Prairie, Hickory Hill Park, Sandy Beach.

### Friday September 24

6:00-9:00pm: Registration, field trip sign-up and social time. Scopes will be set up on the deck of the Learning Center to observe night migrations on both Friday and Saturday evenings if the sky is clear.

### Saturday Sept. 25

6:15am: Breakfast

6:45am: Field trips depart from the Learning Center and return by 12:00 noon.

12:00-1:00pm: Lunch

1:00 -1:15pm: Setup rooms for speakers

1:15-2:00pm: Early Programs.

Room A *Prairie Strand*:

***Grasslands, Grassland Birds, and Henslow's Sparrows***  
Scott Swengel, Baraboo, Wisconsin

Room B *Raptor Strand*:

***Osprey Reintroduction Program***

Jodeane Cancilla, Dir., MacBride Raptor Center

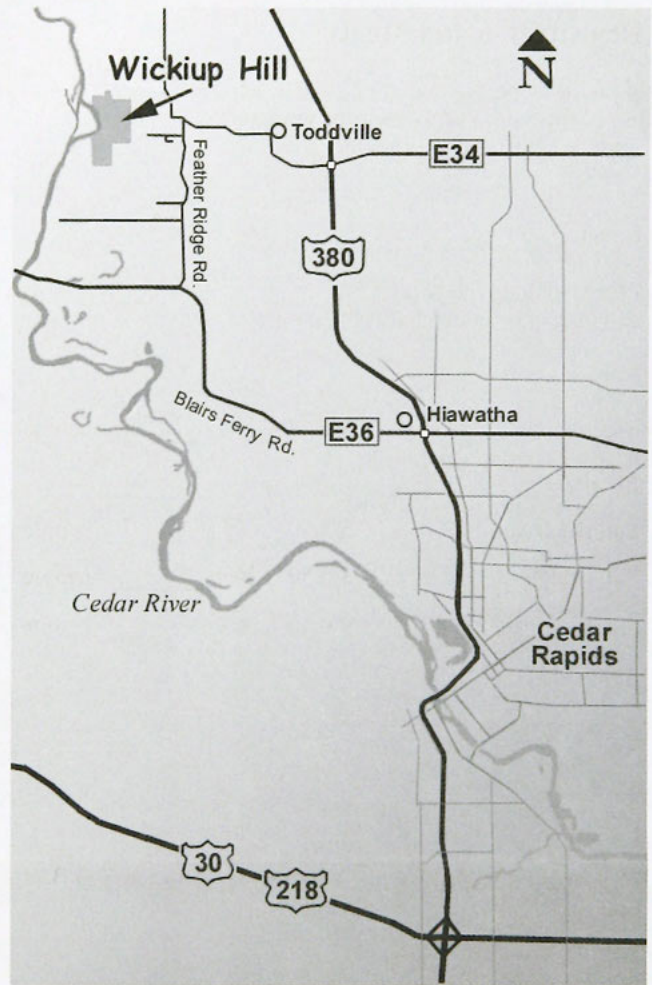
2:00-2:10pm: Break

2:10-2:55pm: Programs.

Room A *Prairie Strand*:

***Wings Over the Prairie***

Carl Kurtz, 2004 Prairie Preview Presenter



Room B *Raptor Strand*:

***Hawk Trapping and Banding Along the Upper Mississippi***  
Ty Smedes, Iowa Nature Photographer

3:05-4:00pm: Programs

Room A *Prairie Strand*:

***IOU Membership Business Meeting***

Dick Tetrault, IOU President

6:30-7:30pm: Banquet

7:30pm: Evening Program

***Birds as Dinosaurs***

Christopher A. Brochu, Asst. Prof., Dept of Geoscience,  
University of Iowa

### Sunday Sept. 26

6:15am: Breakfast

7:00am: Field Trips depart and return by 12:00 pm

12:00noon: Lunch and Compilation



## Registration and Meals:

If possible, please register online at [www.iowabirds.org/iou/currentmeeting.asp](http://www.iowabirds.org/iou/currentmeeting.asp) even if you plan to pay by check. This simplifies bookkeeping for the conference.

Name/s: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Please include telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ or email \_\_\_\_\_  
so you can be contacted if there questions about your registration or conference updates.

### Registration

Meeting Fee \$12.00 X \_\_\_\_\_ people = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### Meals

Sat. Breakfast \$ 5.50 X \_\_\_\_\_ people = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Sat. Lunch \$ 6.50 X \_\_\_\_\_ people = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Sat. Banquet \$ 9.50 X \_\_\_\_\_ people = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Sun. Breakfast \$ 5.50 X \_\_\_\_\_ people = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Sunday Lunch\* \$ 6.50 X \_\_\_\_\_ people = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### Are meatless meals needed?

Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ meatless meals are needed

Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ meatless meals are needed

Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ meatless meals are needed

Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ meatless meals are needed

Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ meatless meals are needed

**Total Registration & Meals :** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate preference: Chicken \_\_\_\_\_ Burger \_\_\_\_\_ Brat \_\_\_\_\_ Soy Burger \_\_\_\_\_

\*Sunday Lunch will be at the Johnson County Conservation Education Center, Kent Park, Oxford, IA. Directions to Kent Park: Kent Park is on route 6 west of Tiffin and east of Oxford, less than a half hour from Iowa City. The I-80 exit just west of the I-380/I-80 intersection is the Tiffin exit. From the Tiffin exit of Route 80 go north into Tiffin to Route 6, then left (west) to Kent Park. From the entrance to Kent Park stay to the right at the first two forks and follow the road back to the Conservation Education Center.

Please register by Sept. 10, 2004. For availability of meals after that date, please check with Karen Disbrow. Make checks payable to **Iowa City Bird Club** and mail to:

Karen Disbrow  
621 1/2 Brown Street  
Iowa City, IA 52245  
Phone 319-339-1017

Accommodations: Blocks of rooms have been reserved at the following motels all within a few miles of Wickiup Hill Natural Area. Please ask for the Iowa Ornithologist's Union Block. **All prices are for 1 to 4 people per room.** Room Tax is 12%. If you cannot reserve a room before the Block is released, ask for the Iowa Ornithologist's Union price when you call and if a room is available you can get the same price. Map locating motels is at [www.cedar-rapids.com/iow/cvb](http://www.cedar-rapids.com/iow/cvb). All of the motels are located near I-380.

### COMFORT INN

5055 Rockwell Drive NE  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402  
1-800-4CHOICE or 319-393-8247  
BLOCK Reserved till 9/03/04  
Two Queen Size \$66.99/night

### RED ROOF INNS

1220 Park Place NE  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402  
1-866-378-8080 or 319-378-8000  
BLOCK Reserved till 08/27/04  
King or Two Queens \$59.99/night

### HAWTHORNE SUITES,LTD

4444 Czech Lane  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402  
319-294-8700  
BLOCK Reserved till 08/24/04  
King STN \$95.00/night  
Two Queen BN \$108.00/night  
Suites with kitchen & living area.

### RAMADA LTD. SUITES

2025 Werner Ave NE  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402  
319-378-8888  
BLOCK Reserved till 09/10/04  
STD 2 queens or 1 King \$65.00/night

### GUESTHOUSE

2215 Blairs Ferry Rd NE  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402  
1-800-21-GUEST or 319-378-3948  
BLOCK Reserved till 08/24/04  
Single Bed \$54.00/night  
Two Beds \$54.00/night

### CEDAR RAPIDS MARRIOTT

1200 Collins Road NE  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402  
BLOCK Reserved till 9/03/04  
Deluxe Double Queen \$79.00/night  
Deluxe King \$79.00/night  
1-800-541-1067 OR 319-393-6600

### HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS

1230 Collins Road NE  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402  
BLOCK Reserved till 9/05/04  
Standard : Two Queens \$69.00/night  
King Leisure: King size with sofa  
\$69.00/night  
800-HOLIDAY OR 319-294-0407



---

---

## Conference Speakers

### *Scott Swengel*

Scott and his wife, Ann, are active nature researchers who go on 3 to 4 day research trips every week during the warm season. Scott has degrees in Systematics and Zoology and in Geology from the University of Kansas. For almost 20 years he worked at the International Crane Foundation (Baraboo, WI) in the breeding and reintroduction of cranes. Since 1988 he and Ann have intensively studied habitat preferences of grassland birds and prairie-specialist butterflies in 6 Midwestern states, including Iowa. Their primary focus is the effects of land management on these populations. They have also studied the oak-pine barrens and sphagnum bog butterfly communities in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

### *Jodeane Cancilla*

Jodeane is widely known for her presentations on behalf of the MacBride Raptor Project, of which she is the Director. The project is a cooperative of the University of Iowa and Kirkwood Community College and engages many volunteers in caring for Eastern Iowa's birds of prey through rehabilitation, education and research programs including the new Osprey Reintroduction Program.

### *Carl Kurtz*

Carl and Linda Kurtz operate a prairie seed business on their family farm near St. Anthony, in Western Marshall County with a focus on habitat reconstruction for grassland animals, (birds, mammals, insects, amphibians, etc.) utilizing a diverse plant community to get the highest quality habitat for the maximum number of species. Carl is a Naturalist and Farmer whose work encompasses freelance writing, photography, teaching, lecturing, and tallgrass prairie reconstruction and seed sales. He is widely known for using his photographic skills to

enhance that appreciation in others and most recently was the featured speaker at last spring's Prairie Preview in Iowa City.

### *Ty Smedes*

Ty is an accomplished photographer who grew up on a farm just south of Granger Iowa, and now resides in Urbandale. He has had a lifelong interest in natural history and his photography and writings have appeared in more than 25 major publications. Specializing in landscape, wildlife, and prairie wildflowers, he also loves to photograph Iowa people, and cultural events. He markets his photography and writings both locally and nationally, and sells matted prints, as well as slides for publication. Ty teaches classes in nature photography, and has led tours to the Yellowstone/Teton region and to Brazil. He will lead a nature photography tour to East Africa, in January 2005.

### *Christopher A. Brochu*

B.S., Geology, Univ. of Iowa; M.A., Ph.D Geological Sciences, Univ. of Texas at Austin. Chris presently holds the positions of Assistant Professor, Department of Geoscience, University of Iowa. He is a research associate at Vertebrate Paleontology Laboratory, Texas Memorial Museum, Austin, and the Field Museum, Chicago, and the Science Museum of Minnesota, St. Paul. Chris is an ornithologist at heart, having spent many spring breaks birding the lower Rio Grande Valley from Big Bend to Brownsville and along the SE Texas coast. He is widely published, including bird related titles such as "Temporal congruence and the origin of birds" and "Phylogenetic context for the origin of feathers." This is also known as one of the primary investigators of the famous South Dakota T. rex fossil named Sue, now on view at the Field Museum in Chicago. Chris has used CT scans to study the ancient life of Sue.



Wickiup Hill Natural Area is located along the Cedar River northwest of Cedar Rapids and is part of the Cedar River Greenbelt. It features woodland, wetland, prairie and savannah habitat. Photo by Jim Durbin.

## CAMPING

### PLEASANT CREEK STATE RECREATION AREA

4530 McClintock Road  
Palo, IA 52324  
319-436-7716  
Modern Area has showers and flush toilets  
Electric sites \$13.00/night, non-electric sites \$8.00/night  
Maps at [www.state.ia.us.us/parks](http://www.state.ia.us.us/parks)

### MORGAN CREEK PARK\*

Worcester Rd (About 4 miles from Wickiup)  
36 campsites with electricity, water, fireplace & picnic table  
\$16.00/night  
\$8.00/night for tent camping in a different area, short walk from parking area; has water & restroom

### SQUAW CREEK PARK\*

Hwy 100 & Hwy 13 (Take Hwy 100 to Collins Rd and I-380 to get to Wickiup)  
Electric \$14.00/night, non-electric \$9.00/night

\* Linn County Conservation Parks. Go to [www.co.linn.ia.us/conservation](http://www.co.linn.ia.us/conservation) for maps



---

## Fall Birding *Continued from page 1*

other on the failure of seabirds to breed at traditional locations in the North Sea can be found on pages 8 and 9 of this newsletter.

Another interesting aspect of the fall season is the list of birds that are peculiar to the season. Some regularly-occurring species of birds, like Sabine's Gulls, are found almost exclusively in the fall. Others, like Western Sandpipers and Black-throated Blue Warblers have been found in both migration seasons, but are far more likely to occur in the fall. Birders hoping to find a Brant or a California Gull should go looking in October or November. Some accidentals that have occurred in Iowa more than once, but only during the fall season, are Black Vulture, Red Phalarope, Pomarine Jaeger, Groove-billed Ani, Lewis's Woodpecker, and Gray Jay. The

state's only Wood Stork, White Ibis and Reddish Egret were all found in the fall. Plus, three of the last five birds added to the state list, Crested Caracara, Arctic Tern and Lesser Goldfinch were found in the fall.

Two longspur species, Smith's and Chestnut-collared, present fall challenges for birders, with only a handful of observations in the last 100 years. Iowa lies within the corridor of the Smith's Longspur's migration, and the species almost certainly occurs in the state every fall. The Chestnut-collared Longspur breeds longitudinally north of western Iowa, on the Felton Prairie in Minnesota, but has only been detected once in the state during the fall season, in October of 2002.

-Paul Hertzell, Fall Season Editor, IBL

---

## June and July Get New Big Day Record Totals

North Iowa birders set new Big Day records for the month of June and the month of July. Rita Goranson and Paul Hertzell found 117 species on June 1, three more than the previous record total, and Lee Schoenewe and Gary Grange set a new July record with 105 species.

### June

On June 1, 2004, Rita Goranson and Paul Hertzell hit the road at 1:30am to begin finding birds in an effort to push the June Big Day total beyond 114. They solicited responses from a pair of Barred Owls, but missed Great Horned during the night, and never did encounter one during the day.

Still at night, the two flushed a Whip-poor-will off a gravel road in Worth County, and then headed for Hanlontown Slough to catch dawn birds. Common Moorhens and both bitterns have been seen there, but this morning, none would show themselves. They marked off several expected species, and then began working their way west toward Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge in Kossuth County.

The morning and afternoon netted a couple of bonus species, including a Cattle Egret at Eagle Flats and a Golden Plover in a flooded Hancock County field, but they arrived at USNWR about ten species behind schedule. There, the water levels were so high, their hopes for herons, gulls, terns and shorebirds lined up and eager to be counted, were drowned out. A side trip to southern Kossuth County in search of Upland Sandpiper came up empty. They headed home with 109 species, five short of the record.

But on the way home, a couple of Kestrels showed themselves, a Caspian Tern was found at Clear Lake, and a check of Zirbel Slough yielded a very unexpected Tennessee Warbler. Within two of the record, they stopped at Bruce Marzinske's house in Mason City, and played a tape of the Carolina Wren's voice. The only known local wren responded

within minutes. Then, at Parker's Woods, where Rita knew the exact location of a Cooper Hawk nest, they tied the record with the female hawk sitting on eggs.

At dusk, at a small wildlife area south of town, they hoped for a new record with a Great Horned Owl. Instead, to their surprise and delight, a Woodcock began calling. They finished the evening with two more species, and a new June record of 117.

### July

On Saturday, July 24th, Gary Grange and Lee Schoenewe hooked up early for a day of birding. The weather looked to be great and they had not been out together for over a month.

Working the Little Sioux River valley, they checked out the tornado damage at the Burr Bridge, and had to detour through Sioux Rapids to get to the other side of the river. By noon, they were in Ruthven, and had a pretty good list of 82. Then, while eating lunch by Mud Lake, they added four more species, and that good fortune gave them the resolve to make a run at the July Big Day record of 103. Neither thought they could get there, but they agreed they had to head for Dickinson County if they were going to make it.

A stop at Cheever Lake to see if the Red-necked Grebe was still around didn't find that species, but Grange found a diving duck among the lily pads and it turned out to be a Ring-necked Duck. Two Least Bitterns also vocalized from the cattails while they scoped the water.

Not one but two Common Loons were at the north end of Spirit Lake. The only two misses they really had were not finding the Eurasian Collared-Doves near the Fish Hatchery in Spirit Lake nor the Osprey at the platform nest where they were unsuccessful this year.

They ended the day at 105, two more than the previous total.





---

## 2004 Pelican Festival: Sept 12

The 5th Annual Pelican Festival will be held on Sunday, September 12, at Jester Park from 10am–6pm. This festival has grown to become Iowa's largest one day birding festival. Thousands of American White Pelicans gather at Saylorville Lake during the fall migration to their southern wintering grounds.

The festival is free to the public and offers activities for all ages. Educational speakers present interesting programs every half hour on topics such as migration, pelicans, osprey, and birdwatching. Live bird releases will follow two of the speaker presentations. Dozens of high-powered spotting scopes are on site and accompanied by a knowledgeable birder. Younger guests can enjoy numerous crafts and games in a special tent just for them. NEW this year will be a commemorative Lewis and Clark area in honor of their bicentennial celebration. Lewis and Clark's journal entries speak of pelican encounters during their exploration. Hands-on activities and various programs will taken place in this area from 11am–5pm.

Polk County Conservation Board, Des Moines Audubon, the IA DNR Wildlife Diversity Program, and the US Army Corps of Engineers-Saylorville Lake will be your hosts during this spectacular event. Come see us on September 12th for a beautiful day at the park. Refreshments and merchandise will be available for purchase. Jester Park is located northeast of Granger, Iowa. A park map can be downloaded at [www.conservationboard.org](http://www.conservationboard.org) or by calling 515-323-5300.

Kami Rankin, Community Relations Coordinator  
Polk County Conservation Board

---

## Where Have All The Pelicans Gone?

*The following Associated Press article first appeared on July 12, 2004, and is reprinted here with permission.*

CHASE LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, North Dakota (AP) — The air here this time of year usually is filled with the grunts and squawks of thousands of white pelicans and their chicks. The giant birds have made the refuge their home for at least 100 years.

Now their nesting grounds are quiet. The pelicans are gone — and no one knows why.

The 4,385-acre refuge in central North Dakota had been known as the home of the largest nesting colony of white pelicans in North America. The nearly 28,000 birds that showed up to nest here in early April took off in late May and early June, leaving their chicks and eggs behind.

Normally, the pelicans stay at the refuge through September, raising their young and feasting on crawfish, small fish and salamanders from small ponds known as "prairie potholes." The area is filled with the stench of droppings from the thousands of birds and their chicks.

Now, sweet-smelling wildflowers have taken hold in the guano-rich soil.

### Seeking reasons

Wildlife officials have considered diseases, food supply,



American White Pelicans at Jester Park, Saylorville Lake, Iowa.



---

water quality, weather, predators and other factors, but have found no satisfactory explanation for the exodus, said Mick Erickson, the Chase Lake refuge manager.

“Right now, everybody has an opinion,” Erickson said. “But honestly, there isn’t any explanation. This is the first time it’s happened.”

The white pelican is one of the largest birds in North America, measuring six feet from bill to tail. They weigh up to 20 pounds and have a wingspan of nearly 10 feet. While awkward on land, white pelicans are acrobats in the air.

Pelicans have been monitored at Chase Lake since 1905, when the birds numbered about 50. President Theodore Roosevelt designated the site as a bird refuge in 1908, when many of the birds were being killed for their feathers and for target practice.

Samples from about two dozen dead pelicans from the reserve and from other parts of the Upper Midwest are being tested at the National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, Wisconsin.

“There has been no consistent finding as to cause of death,” said Kathryn Converse, wildlife disease specialist with the center.

Researchers had found botulism in two of the dead pelicans from the reserve, Converse said. None of the pelicans had tested positive for West Nile or other viruses, she said.

Erickson said officials initially blamed a coyote that had a den about a mile from the nesting grounds, and killed it. But the exodus continued.

“It’s weird,” Erickson said. “We feel helpless because we don’t know what else to look at.”

### Species support

Wildlife officials have been doing annual aerial surveys of the pelicans since 1972. The number of pelicans had tripled at the refuge in the past 30 years. A record 35,466 breeding pelicans and 17,733 nests were tallied in 2000 at Chase Lake, Erickson said.

This year, there have been reports of extraordinary pelican sightings in Illinois, Wisconsin, Montana, Nebraska and Michigan. But the numbers reported throughout the Upper Midwest do not add up to the nearly 28,000 recorded at the refuge in May, before the exodus, Erickson said.

“For whatever reason, they picked Chase Lake to nest for hundreds and maybe thousands of years,” Erickson said. “I’m pretty confident they’ll come back.”

The pelicans may be making some kind of a natural correction, said Ken Torkelson, a spokesman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Bismarck.

“They’ve been relying on Chase Lake a long time, and maybe they felt it could no longer support the species so they picked up and moved some place that could,” he said.

---

## SHETLAND SEABIRDS IN DIRE STRAITS

*In another ecological mystery, thousands of seabirds failed to breed this summer at their usual locations among cliffs of islands in the North Sea. Some are calling this event an ecological disaster. The IOU News contacted Dr. Martin Heubeck, an ornithologist with the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. He kindly offered IOU News readers the following measured perspective.*

The Shetland Islands, the northernmost of the British Isles, hold internationally significant numbers of breeding seabirds. Along the cliff coastline there are very large colonies on the high cliffs at the four extremities of the island group - Hermaness and Saxavord in the North, Noss in the east, Sumburgh and Fitful Heads in the south, and Foula to the west, while the small island of Fair Isle mid-way between Orkney and Shetland also holds very large breeding numbers. The main species are Northern Fulmars, Northern Gannet, European Shag, Black-legged Kittiwake, Common Guillemot, Razor-bill and Puffin. However, seabirds of one species or another nest almost continuously along the lower cliffs, so much so that it is impossible to delimit a ‘colony’ of Northern Fulmars! Inland, Red-throated Divers and Great and Arctic Skuas inhabit the moorland, while Arctic Tern colonies are found in a variety of habitats, as are the five breeding species of Larus gulls.

Immediately before, and during the breeding season most species are largely dependent upon lesser Sandeels *Ammodytes marinus*, there being no alternative large stocks of small shoaling fish around the islands. Sandeels spawn in January and the larval fish (0-group) only become free-swimming and available to seabirds from June onwards, when most species are attempting to feed chicks. Prior to breeding and during incubation, sandeels spawned the previous year (1-group) or earlier are key prey. However, some species such as Northern Gannets, Great Cormorants and Black Guillemots have a more varied diet, while scavenging on fisheries waste can also be an important food supply for others. Fortunately, the population changes and breeding fortunes of Shetland’s seabird have been well studied over the past 30 years with groups such as the Shetland Ringing Group, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Fair Isle Bird Observatory and the Universities of Aberdeen (via the Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group) and Glasgow all contributing to long-term data sets.

The late 1970s and early 1980s were a good time for most seabird species, with increasing populations and (weather permitting) generally good breeding seasons. By the mid-1980s, however, signs that all was not well culminated in extremely poor breeding seasons in 1988-1990. The species most affected were the small, surface-feeding Arctic terns and Black-legged Kittiwakes, Puffins, and the Arctic Skuas which kleptoparasitise all three. However, dietary studies showed that more subtle changes in feeding and breeding ecology were occurring in other species, apart from simple breeding failure. While the immediate cause was clearly a lack of sandeels, the cause of this was unclear. An obvious target for blame was the local industrial fishery for sandeels, which began in the mid-1970s, peaked at a catch of 54,000 tonnes in 1982, and then declined as seabird fortunes also began to; during this period



the fishery was essentially unregulated. However, a joint study by fish and seabird biologists during 1990-92 concluded that a lack of recruitment of 0-group sandeels to the area, probably caused by changes in ocean currents, was the most likely explanation rather than fishing effort.

During the 1990s there were some good seasons and some bad, although the latter predominated. Seabirds in Orkney, just 60 miles to the south of Shetland, generally fared better and there was evidence that Arctic Terns and possibly Black-legged may have relocated from Shetland to Orkney colonies. As recently as 1999 and 2000 most of Shetland's seabirds experienced reasonably good success but the situation worsened again and the 2003 and 2004 seasons were characterised by non-breeding, late laying, low colony attendance by off-duty birds, weak territoriality, and low hatching success - all suggesting that a scarcity of 1-group sandeels in the pre-laying and incubation periods was the main problem, rather than a lack of 0-group during chick rearing that was the case in the late 1980s. The main shock within Shetland this year has been the extent to which Common Guillemots have been affected, with most colonies thought to have produced few if any young. An illustration of this was the well-timed annual visit by the Shetland Ringing Group to the boulder colony of 2-3,000 pairs at Compass Head, where in a 'good' year perhaps 800 chicks could be ringed. On 3rd July, however, not a single adult or chick was present and vegetation growth suggested the colony had been deserted for some time. Just to the south, at Sumburgh Head, breeding success in a closely monitored study plot was a very optimistic 0.08 chicks fledged per egg-laying pair, although because of predation by gulls it is uncertain whether any chicks actually survived to leave the colony. Great Skuas have also fared particularly badly, with (for example) only two chicks large enough to ring being found during a search of over 400 territories on Foula - "unprecedented", according to Professor Bob Furness who has been studying the species there for decades.

The other main feature of this year's breeding problems is that it extends far southwards, through Orkney and eastern Scotland and halfway down the east coast of England, south to Bempton Cliffs in Yorkshire. In contrast, colonies on the west coast of Scotland and around the Irish Sea have generally fared well, suggesting little commonality with the marine ecosystem of the north-western North Sea. The scale of the problem this year has prompted much media attention, and speculation on possible causes. Global warming, rising sea temperatures, changing sea currents, and changes in the abundance and species composition of plankton are all being touted as possible explanations. What is probable is that enough pieces of the jigsaw exist for oceanographers and marine biologists to put their heads together this winter and try and construct a picture. What is also probable is that there is nothing that can be done, other than monitor and better understand a worrying situation. Whatever, the 2004 seabird breeding season will be a landmark one, the first year in nearly 30 years of observation that I have seen Common Guillemots presenting strands of seaweed to their mates instead of display fish.

Martin Heubeck, University of Aberdeen (SOTEAG),  
c/o Sumburgh Lighthouse,  
Virkie, Shetland ZE3 9JN, Scotland, UK.



Davenport, Iowa, will host the Midwest Birding Symposium October 13-16, 2005! The Quad Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau with help from many IOU members are hosting the meeting. The headquarters for the 2005 Midwest Birding Symposium is the RiverCenter in downtown Davenport, Iowa. Located along the Mississippi River, the RiverCenter is ready for the fun and excitement of hosting the speakers, trade show, and workshops.

For information, contact Joe Taylor, President/CEO, Quad Cities CVB, 2021 River Drive, Moline, IL 61265. Email: [jtaylor@visitquadcities.com](mailto:jtaylor@visitquadcities.com) Phone: 563-322-3911 Ext. 116 [www.visitquadcities.com](http://www.visitquadcities.com)

Membership application to the IOU  
can be made on the web site at  
<http://www.iowabirds.org>  
or by writing to the Registrar at

David C. Edwards  
2308 State Street  
Ames, IA 50014-8344

Or contact any member for help.







You Are Invited

**3rd Annual RIVERS & BLUFFS  
FALL BIRDING FESTIVAL**

**November 12, 13 & 14, 2004**



Peak Season for Close-up Views of Thousands of Elegant Tundra Swans  
Hundreds of Thousands of Colorful Ducks and Geese, Numerous Bald Eagles and Hawks  
Search for Golden Eagles + Other Interesting & Unusual Species  
Majestic Mississippi River Ecosystem + Beautiful Bluff Overlooks  
Explore Mother Nature's Best Kept Secret – the Rivers & Bluffs Where 3 States Meet  
Field Trips Discover Hidden Treasures in: Iowa, Minnesota & Wisconsin

*Just 40 miles downriver from La Crosse, WI; 30 miles upriver from Prairie du Chien, WI  
Or, 35 miles west of Viroqua, WI and 35 miles east of Decorah, IA*

**“Identifying, Enjoying and Understanding All Birds Around Us”**

**HIGHLIGHTS:**

- \* Half-Day Field Trips on Sat. and Sun. – One to Each of the Three States
- \* Talks by World-renowned Authority on Birds as Modern-day Relatives of Dinosaurs
- \* Several Cruises on Mississippi River to Get Closer to Swans & Many Other Birds
- \* Several Live Bird Programs with Top Naturalists from the Tri-State Area
- \* Many Door Prizes, Gift Certificates, Silent and Live Auctions to aid Conservation
- \* Live Music and Extra Special Fun on Saturday Night
- \* Enjoy the Best Local Restaurants and Pubs

**Registration Info. plus Updated and Expanded Itinerary Available in September**

*Headquarters:* KEE High School, 569 Center Street, Lansing, Iowa

*Festival Co-Sponsors:* Lansing Chamber of Commerce, Lansing City Council, Iowa Audubon Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program, Alliant Energy, Upper Mississippi River Campaign of National Audubon, Upper Iowa Chapter – Audubon, [www.lansingiowa.com](http://www.lansingiowa.com), Iowa Ornithologists' Union, Allamakee County Economic Development

Any Income Beyond Expenses will be used to Support Future Bird Education and Bird Conservation Activities  
Numerous Improvements on Highly Successful Festivals in '02 and '03  
For More Details email: [Ric.Zarwell@mchsi.com](mailto:Ric.Zarwell@mchsi.com)



Iowa Ornithologists' Union  
2308 State Avenue  
Ames, IA 50014

[Address Service Requested]

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
MASON CITY, IOWA  
Permit No. 251

Thomas H  
KENT  
211 RICHARDS ST  
IOWA CITY IA 52246-3519

I o w a   O r n i t h o l o g i s t s '   U n i o n

# IOU News

## CONTENTS

Fall Birding . . . . .	1	Pelican Festival . . . . .	8
IOU Kirtland's Warbler Trip <i>Kent Nickell</i> . . . . .	3	Where Have All the Pelicans Gone? <i>Associated Press</i> . . . . .	8
2004 Fall Meeting <i>Sharon Stilwell</i> . . . . .	4	Shetland Seabirds in Dire Straits <i>Martin Heubeck</i> . . . . .	9
New June & July Big Day Records. .	7		

