

STATE BIRD OF IOWA: THE GOLDFINCH

## I. O. U. NEWS

Spring 1987

Newsletter of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Volume 3 Number 1

### CHRISTMAS COUNT BY SEA (WELL, ALMOST) - Jim Sinclair, Indianola

"How do I get myself involved in this kind of lunacy?" I mutter as the canoe quietly slips through the grey waters of the Des Moines River just below the Saylorville Dam. It's 7:30 a.m., December 27, 1986, and Steve Dinsmore and I have just embarked on the first ever Des Moines Christmas Count pelagic trip. I must admit, when Steve first proposed the idea of a Christmas count by boat, I was immediately intrigued. According to Steve, no one had ever done a Des Moines count via the river before, so a unique opportunity could be ours. Not only an opportunity for a first, but also an opportunity to tally some good water-related species for the count.

The first stretch of river has already rewarded us with a Bald Eagle, and in a quiet eddy a flock of Mallards explodes skyward giving us a chance to sort out at least one Black Duck. As we continue downstream, three familiar figures appear on the far bank. Bob Meyers, Francis Moore and Berry Engebretson, also members of the count team, hail us over to check our luck so far. After a brief chat covering target species and the such, Steve and I continue downriver. We begin to add more species to the list. Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, American Goldfinch, the ubiquitous crows, and the first of several Song Sparrows.

Not surprisingly the weather man has duped us completely. A day which had been predicted to be unseasonably fair is anything but. Low, dense cloud cover with patches of fog coupled with a brisk wind and temperatures in the 20's make conditions for canoeing somewhat uncomfortable. Steve and I decide to find a sheltered spot, beach the canoe and do a little birding on land, as much to warm up as anything. After a rejuvenating walk, we again head downstream. Ahead we hear the distinctive rattle of a Belted Kingfisher and on the shoreline our best mammal of the day, a mink. In a scene which is positively Alaskan we flush two mature Bald Eagles from their perches high atop the riverside cottonwoods. The eagles swoop low over the choppy waters and then rise majestically into the mist, certainly a sight to warm even the coldest Christmas count participant.

The vigorous paddling we are required to do to make headway into the wind helps keep us warm, however, a female Common Merganser pays us little attention as we slide by. Ahead, a small flock of Common Goldeneyes moves nervously towards the center of the river before taking off. Steve focuses on a smaller duck that gets up just behind the goldeneyes. "Widgeon!" he calls excitedly, a good bird here in central Iowa during the winter. A Red-tailed Hawk flushes at our approach, and Steve and I both comment on our surprise at the number of red-tails along the river--this was our fourth of seven we



CHRISTMAS COUNT BY SEA (cont'd)

would see. We had been carefully sorting through each flock of starlings in hopes of picking up a Common Grackle or a Red-winged Blackbird. Our patience was rewarded when a single grackle got up with a small flock of starlings which had been feeding along the bank.

Adding water-related species to the count list was our primary reason for using the canoe, and I can now recommend this method based on our success. Steve and I totaled 11 species of birds found primarily or exclusively in aquatic habitats, 4 of which were the only ones of their species tallied on the count day. Of course, not every Iowa winter is going to be as mild as this one has been so far, and any time one is canoeing, the weather factor has to be carefully considered.

Our last "target species" to be found is a Great Blue Heron. By now, the shoreline is quite residential and, in fact, we are able to check a few feeders - from the canoe! As we approach the Botanical Center, where we will leave the river, our avian friends provide us with one last piece of entertainment. A small flock of crows has found a Great Horned Owl roosting in the sparse growth by the river. The Owl, attempting to keep its composure, has nowhere to hide. Each time the owl moves, a few more crows join the riotous mob, each one trying to outdo his brothers in vocal bravado.

We can still hear the scolding crows as we haul out at the Botanical Center in downtown Des Moines. We have covered the approximately nine miles in 4½ hours with time out for two short breaks to warm up. Our species total for the morning is 35, a figure Steve and I are pleased with. Although we have not tallied any extraordinary species, Steve and I feel that our unique approach added a new dimension to the Des Moines Christmas Count and perhaps to Christmas counts across the state of Iowa.

Author's note: Please be advised if you are considering doing a Christmas Count by boat that mid-winter boating demands the utmost caution.

I.O.U. MEMBERS IN THE NEWS

With the help of a cane, Elton Fawks received on February 13 an award from Illinois Gov. James Thompson for helping keep the bald eagles flying near the Quad-Cities.

Fawks, 79, of Moline and long-time I.O.U. member, was honored with a plaque and Thompson's proclamation that made Feb. 13 "Elton Fawks Day" throughout Illinois for his more than 60 years of nature conservation work.

Illinois Department of Conservation Director Mark Frech, who was in town for Bald Eagle Appreciation Days this weekend, made the presentation. Frech said Fawks was "instrumental in the establishment" of the Oak Valley Eagle Refuge along the Mississippi River near Hampton. The refuge, which survived a highly controversial attempt to rezone the land for a hotel in 1980, is one of 13 in Illinois used by about 1,400 bald eagles as a winter home.

Preservation of the roosting area is now under one consolidated public ownership. Without Fawks' "dedication and determination," we'd have never seen this day come," Frech said. Fawks, he added, "encouraged, fought, cajoled" to preserve the roost in a heavily wooded area near Interstate 80.

(Reprinted with permission from Quad-City Times, February 14, 1987)

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Jack Holloway has accepted a graduate assistantship at the University of Arizona, Tucson, where he has started work on a M.S. program. His project will involve studying the effects of burning on bird populations in southern Arizona. Jack recently received a Woodward Brown Scholarship from the I.O.U.

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Dr. Charles Walcott, director of the Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology, will speak on the Continuing Mystery of Bird Navigation at Indian Creek Nature Center, Cedar Rapids, Sunday, March 29 at 2:00 PM. Members free. Non-members \$2.50.

## CANDIDATES

The nominating committee of Beth Proescholdt, Ross Silcock and Hank Zaletel has assembled the following slate of candidates for the 1987-88 year:

President - Jim Dinsmore, Ames  
 Vice President - Carol Thompson, Iowa City  
 Board Member - Bob Cecil, Keokuk  
                   Jim Sinclair, Indianola  
                   Carl Bendorf, Iowa City  
                   Beth Brown, Osceola  
                   (1 year remaining of  
                   Carol Thompson's term)

Nominations will also be taken from the floor at the time of the election.



## BIRDATHON

The I.O.U. plans to sponsor a Big Day (Birdathon) again this year. Anyone who is potentially interested in participating should send their name and address to Ray Cummins, 609 S. Main St., Centerville, IA 52544. As soon as plans are finalized, you will be sent details and entry forms.

## AUCTION

The following donated materials will be offered at silent auction at the Spring Meeting. Mail bids must be to the IOU News editor by May 27th.

Adventures in Birding by Jean Piatt, 1973  
 Arctic Birds of Canada by L.L. Synder, 1957  
 Ontario Birds by L.L. Synder, 1951  
 Birds of Hawaii by G.C. Munro, 1966  
 Birds of America by J.J. Audubon, 1953  
 Bird Nests: A Field Guide by R. Headstrom, 1961  
 Audubon Land Bird Guide by R.H. Pough, 1949

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dorothy and I enjoy getting the I.O.U. News, and we particularly liked seeing the pictures of Phil DuMont and Fred Pierce in Volume 2 Number 3. Phil in particular was very hospitable to me when I was stationed in Washington, D.C., and he made me feel welcome as an expatriate Iowan by enrolling me as a member of the Atlantic Naturalist group, the birdwatchers in the D.C. region. Would you believe that Roger Peterson was a member then, too, and meeting him was quite a memorable occasion for me.

I have been worrying about the little Goldfinch you use on the News. He looks a bit unhappy to me, maybe because he has his adult plumage but still retains the mandibular commissure that he had when he was still a juvenile. So forgive me for being an unmasked volunteer, but I've cleaned him up a little for you, and you're welcome to substitute the new one for the original if you would like.

- Joe Brown, San Antonio, Texas

(Mission accomplished - Ed.)



## BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

Carol Thompson, Iowa City

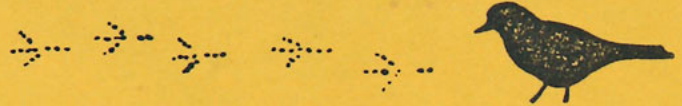
The Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas Project is a five-year effort to learn more about the distribution of Iowa's breeding birds. The project is cosponsored by the I.O.U. and the Department of Natural Resources. Breeding bird atlases are being done throughout North America. Nine states and two Canadian provinces have already completed projects, and eighteen states and four provinces are currently collecting data. Iowa's project has been underway for two years. So far, only about 125 blocks have been worked on. Coordinators are still needed for 40 counties. Clearly, a greater effort is needed to complete this project.

(cont'd page 6)



## COMING EVENTS IN IOWA

- Sat., Mar. 14 Workshop: Landscaping for Wildlife, with Iowa's Urban Wildlife Biologist, Laura Jackson. Co-sponsored by Mississippi Bend Bird and Nature Club and the Quad City Audubon Society. For information, call Doris Sandvick (319) 225-6191.
- Sat., Mar. 14 Lee County Conservation Board - Waterfowl Observations, 2:00 PM, Linger Longer Rest Area. (319) 463-7673.
- Sun., Mar. 15 Iowa City Bird Club field trip to the Mississippi River at Montrose. Meet at 6:30 AM at the parking lot north of the Iowa Memorial Union. Leader: Carol Thompson (319) 338-5361.
- Tues., Mar. 17 Birds of the Midwest, Gladys Moore, wildlife photographer. Davenport Public Library Meeting Room, 7:00 PM.
- Wed., Mar. 18 Pheasants in Iowa, Palo Alto County Conservation Board. ILCC Auditorium, Emmetsburg, 7:00 PM. (712) 837-4866.
- Sat., Mar. 21 Jackson County Conservation Board, Spruce Creek Park, Bellevue. Bird House Seminar. (319) 652-3783.
- Sat., Mar. 21 Cedar Rapids Audubon Society field trip to Coralville Reservoir. Meet at Coe Gym at 7:00 AM. Leader: Jim Messina (319) 362-8023.
- Thurs., Mar. 26 A Bit about Birds, Sac County Conservation Board. Hagge Park, 6:00 PM. (712) 662-4530.
- Sat., Mar. 28 Quad City Audubon Society field trip to LaSalle Co. (Illinois) Nuclear Plant for waterfowl and open country birds. Meet at Moline Airport Holiday Inn at 7:00 AM. Bring a lunch. Leader: Pete Petersen (319) 355-7051.
- Sat., Apr. 4 Cedar Rapids Audubon Society field trip to Behrens Ponds and Hanging Bog. Meet at Coe Gym at 9:00 AM. Skunk Cabbage and amphibians are the targets, perhaps Central Newts and Blue-spotted Salamanders. Boots and a tape recorder would be handy. Leaders: Ruth and Gene Goellner (319) 363-9361.
- Sat., Apr. 4 Big Bluestem Audubon (Ames) field trip to Hendrickson Marsh. Meet behind C.Y. Stephens Auditorium in Ames at 8:00 AM. Hank Zaletel (515) 377-2889.
- Sun., Apr. 12 Quad City Audubon Society field trip to Syracuse Wildlife Area for migrant birds and Woodcock nuptial flight at dusk. Meet at parking lot on north side of Ramada Inn, N. Brady St., Davenport, at 2:00 PM. Bring a picnic supper. Leader: Pete Petersen (319) 355-7051.
- Sun., Apr. 12 Warren County Conservation Board field trip to Runnells Game Area for Eagles and waterfowl. Meet at Indianola Pamida at 1:00 PM or at Runnells Game Area at 1:45 PM. Kathleen Regnier (515) 961-6169.
- Sat., Apr. 18 Cedar Rapids Audubon Society field trip to Dows Preserve for wildflowers, birds. Meet at Coe Gym at 7:00 AM. Leader: Jim Messina (319) 362-8023.



COMING EVENTS IN IOWA (cont'd)

- Tues., Apr. 21      Big Bluestem Audubon Program - Warblers at Brookside Park, Paul Martsching. Room 181-1, College of Design, ISU Campus, 7:30 PM.
- Wed., Apr. 22      Kossuth County Conservation Board, Breeding Bird Atlas Information Meeting, 7:30 PM. (515) 295-2138.
- Fri., Apr. 24      Dubuque County Conservation Board, Evening Woodcock Watch. Swiss Valley Nature Preserve. (319) 556-6745.
- Sat., Apr. 25      "Stroll through Springtime" bird and wildflower walk, sponsored by Black Hawk State Park, Rock Island, IL. Meet at Watchtower Inn for birding at 7:00 AM, program at 9:00, and wildflower walk at 10:00. For information, call Bob Motz (309) 788-8389.
- Sat., Apr. 25      Warren County Conservation Board Woodcock Watch at the Conservation Center five miles south of Indianola, 6:30 PM. Kathleen Regnier (515) 961-6169.
- Sat., May 2        Quad City Audubon Society field trip - May Dawn Bird Concert. Meet at lodge on Credit Island at 5:30 AM. Will be finished around 8:30. If park is flooded, site will be Duck Creek Park. Leader: Pete Petersen (319) 355-7051.
- Sat., May 2        Cedar Rapids Audubon Society field trip to Lacey-Keosauqua State Park. For information, call Jim Messina (319) 362-8023.
- Sat., May 9        Big Bluestem Audubon (Ames) field trip to McFarland Park for warblers. Meet at park parking lot at 8:00 AM. Hank Zaletel (515) 377-2889.
- Sat., May 16      Cedar Rapids Audubon Society field trip to Beam's Cabin near Stone City for wildflowers, birds. Meet at 7:00 AM at Revco Drug, Marion. For information, call Jim Messina (319) 362-8023.
- May 22-25        Cedar Rapids Audubon Society field trip to Agassiz NWR and Itasca Park in northern Minnesota. Participants are responsible for their own housing arrangements. Plan early! For information, call Weir Nelson (319) 848-4846.
- Sat., May 30      Cedar Rapids Audubon Society field trip to Squaw Creek Park for warblers, songbirds. Meet at 7:00 AM at Revco Drug, Marion. For information, call Jim Messina (319) 362-8023.
- Sat., June 13     Cedar Rapids Audubon Society Breeding Bird Survey. For information, call Roberta Oppedahl (319) 393-2573.
- Sat., June 27     Cedar Rapids Audubon Society field trip to Amana Woods and Williams Prairie. Meet at 7:00 AM at K-Mart, Westdale Mall. Leader: Pete Wickham (319) 363-6884.
- Sat., June 27     Big Sand Mound Seminar, Muscatine. All-day event, including field trips. Hosted by Iowa-Illinois Gas and Electric Co. Held at the Monsanto Recreation Bldg., 7 miles south of Muscatine on Co. Rd. X-61. For information, call Pete Petersen (319) 355-7051.



## BREEDING BIRD ATLAS (cont'd)

Iowa has been divided into 860 blocks, each nine square miles in area. On each block, a species can be listed as observed, possible, probable, or confirmed. All of the categories are based on easily observable activities such as singing males or carrying nesting material, etc. Generally about 20-25 hours will be spent in a block spread out over several months.

The atlas is a worthwhile project, but it's also a lot of fun. It's a great way to pass the summer birding doldrums. Many people find that atlasing has taught them to watch birds, not just identify them. A whole new area of birding can be opened up while sharpening your observation skills. Many of you reading this feel that your birding skills are not adequate for this project. This is not the case. Probably you have been frustrated while trying to observe little flitting birds during migration. Atlasing can be a more leisurely birding activity. Breeding birds will be in an area for a longer period of time allowing repeated observations to be made. If identification is still a problem, then the coordinators will get a more experienced birder to go out with you.

Atlasing can be a good club activity as well. "Blockbusting" field trips can be arranged by local clubs or nature centers to stimulate interest or for hard to cover blocks. Another possibility for trips would be to look for specific species such as owls.

Even if you can't go out and cover the blocks yourself, we could still use your help as a coordinator. The coordinator assigns blocks, collects and edits the field cards, and then sends them to the DNR. A newsletter is being prepared for our coordinators to give them some helpful hints.

A new steering committee has been formed, and we hope to stimulate renewed interest and enthusiasm for the atlas. A regular column in the newsletter will

cover items of interest about the atlas. Doug Reeves will provide reports on our progress and interesting finds. It would be nice to hear from our atlasers on exciting birds, interesting behavior, or amusing anecdotes. We hope you will volunteer to be a part of the Iowa Breeding Bird Atlas Project. For more information contact one of the atlas committee members.

### Atlas Committee Members

Doug Reeves  
Wildlife Research Station  
Boone, IA 50036  
515-432-2823

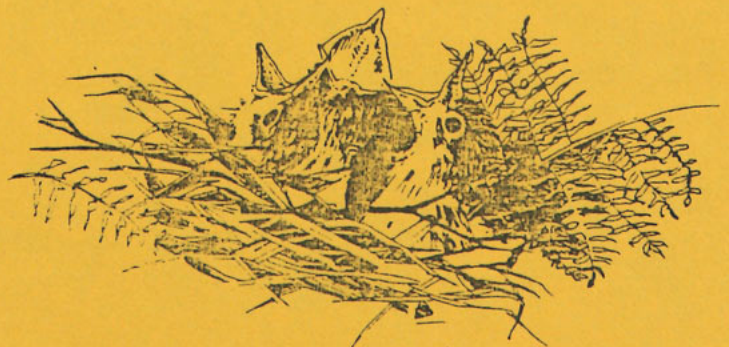
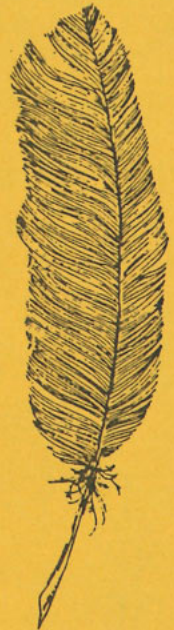
Darwin Koenig  
Box 389  
Montezuma, IA 50171  
515-623-2102

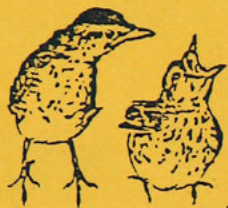
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Iowa Ornithologists' Union Spring Meeting  
 Briar Cliff College, Sioux City, Iowa  
 May 29-31, 1987

SCHEDULE

Thursday	7:30 p.m.	Loess Hills Audubon Program Night - Sioux City Art Center Pete Peterson talks on I.O.U.
Friday	7:00 - 9:00 p.m.	Registration and social time - Briar Cliff College, Noonan Hall Coffee, tea, and snacks
Saturday	6:00 a.m.	Breakfast - Briar Cliff College Cafeteria Eggs, sausage, french toast, hash browns, and beverage
	6:30 a.m.	Field trips: meet at parking lot on west side of campus 1) Stone State Park (will need state sticker) 2) Hillview Park - Plymouth County Park 3) Sioux City Prairie - Nature Conservancy Preserve
	10:00 a.m.	Late registration - Heelan Hall

SLEEPING ACCOMMODATIONS

Holiday Inn, I-29 & Hamilton (712) 277-3211  
 Camping - Stone State Park  
 Dorm Rooms (see below)

MEALS

Saturday: 3 meals (banquet included) - \$11.50  
 Sunday: 2 meals - \$ 5.50



REGISTRATION FORM

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Registration Fee: \$2/person \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Room: \$13/person (single) per night (avail. Fri. & Sat.) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

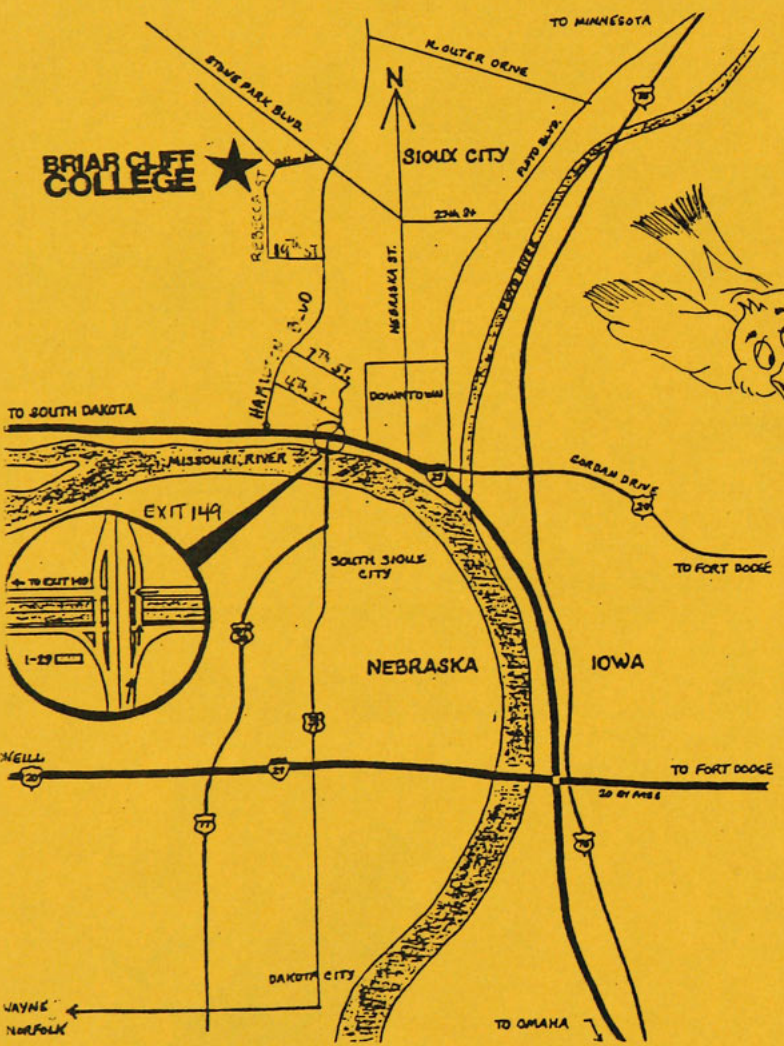
\$10/person (double) per night (avail. Fri. & Sat.) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Meals: Sat. - \$11.50/person \$ \_\_\_\_\_

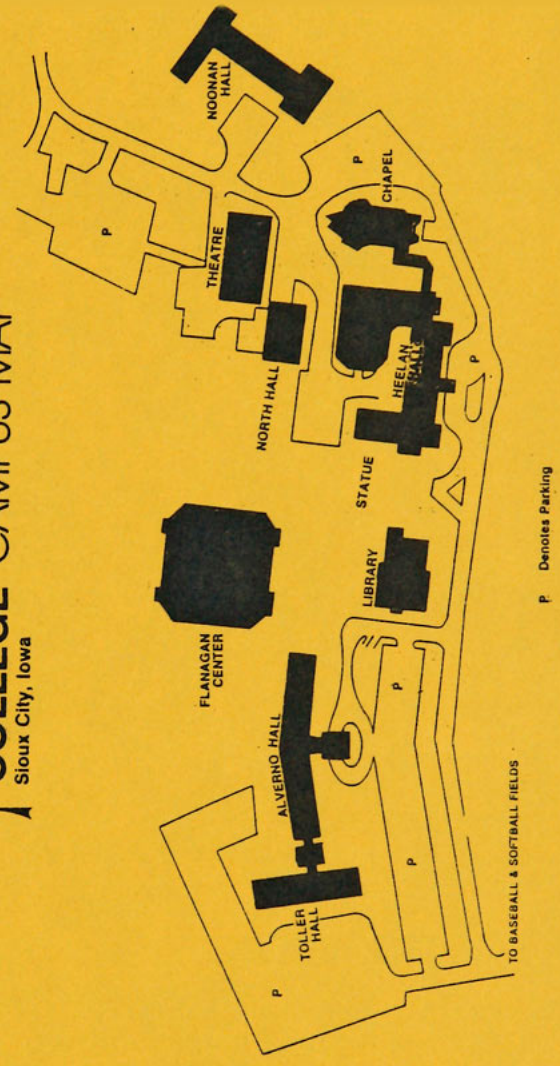
Sun. - \$5.50/person \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Registration deadline is May 15, 1987. Make checks payable to Loess Hills Audubon.  
 Please mail check to Randy Williams, 2730 So. Cornelia, Sioux City, Iowa.  
 Information numbers: 276-3618, 239-3954 (area code 712).



**BRIAR CLIFF COLLEGE CAMPUS MAP**  
Sioux City, Iowa



# Iowa Ornithologists' Union



STATE BIRD OF IOWA: THE GOLDFINCH

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