

STATE BIRD OF IOWA: THE GOLDFINCH

I. O. U. NEWS

Summer 1987

Newsletter of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Volume 3 Number 2

BIRDING THE STANDARD BLOCK - by Barb Wilson (Hastings, IA), and Tanya Bray (Omaha, NE)

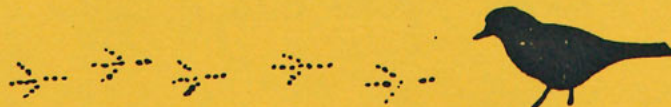
Birders often get stuck in a rut, visiting the same areas over and over again until no surprises remain. Birding the Standard Breeding Bird Atlas Block, however, can take you into undiscovered territory. Besides producing valuable data for the Atlas project, it can lead you to your own personal birding hot spot.

The Standard Breeding Bird Atlas block nestles forlornly in the southern corner of a township, devoid of parks, recreation areas, or other obvious attractions. Even at its dullest, however, it contains 50 or so nesting bird species. Standard blocks do not reveal their treasures readily, but with diligence you can find a little birding gem in each block, whether it be 40 acres of fine woods, a Barn Owl in a windbreak, a sedge meadow, or baby raccoons in a hollow tree in an abandoned farmyard (abandoned, that is, except for the three bulls currently in residence).

Most standard blocks are entirely private property. Of course, once a special birding spot is found, you will want to ask permission to enter it. These conversations with land owners can provide information about nesting pheasants or night visits by Hoot (=Great Horned) Owls in the block. Sometimes, indeed, you can get information and permission without having to visit the farm house--a farmer will often stop to find out why you are poking around under his bridge.

Nonetheless, most or all of the standard blocks can be censused successfully from the road. It can even be done from the highway at 55 mph. This means that several blocks can be covered in a short time--the authors once did 17 blocks this way in one day as we traveled to our destination!

Bird the standard block with a friend, preferably one who can read a county map (available with atlas blocks marked from Doug Reeves, Wildlife Research Station, Route 1, Boone, IA 50036). If you yourself are proficient at map reading, let your friend do the driving while you give directions and note the birds seen. While reading the map, pay special attention to streams (check under bridge for nests of Rock Dove, Eastern Phoebe, House Sparrow, Barn and Cliff Swalls, etc.). Roads marked Minimum Maintenance usually have the best habitat but the signs aren't kidding. Watch out on muddy days! Cover all the habitats your block presents remembering that to birds grazed pastures, hayfields, and cornfields are all



BIRDING THE STANDARD BLOCK (cont'd)

different. Purple Martin houses may not have martins but can usually confirm at least Starling or House Sparrow as breeders. Cemeteries are often superb bird habitat and are semi-public.

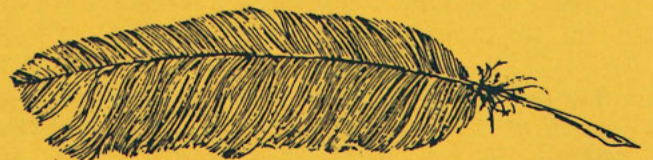
Stop at landmarks like corners and record all birds heard singing (Atlas Code X). If you return at least one week later and hear the same species at the same corner, it moves up to a "Probable Breeder" in atlas terms with Code T (territorial behavior). Clearly, becoming familiar with song of our common native birds is helpful. If a Red-winged Blackbird seems agitated (Code A), walk closer. It will probably call in the neighbors and fly at you (Code DD-distracted display). Although that will confirm breeding, take another minute to search out the nest as most Red-wing nests have Cowbird eggs, thus confirming that species also (Code NE).

As the car goes by, it is often profitable to look through the roadside bushes to detect the dark lump of a Loggerhead Shrike or Red-winged Blackbird nest. Profitable that is, if you are the passenger. If you are driving at the same time, you may soon find your car protruding into the roadside shrubbery.

Other evidence gathered from a moving vehicle can put species into the "probable" or "confirmed" categories. Since they are so aggressive, two kingbirds sitting peacefully within 200 feet of each other are a pair (Code P), although this is not always true of social species like swallows. In spring, a small flock of cowbirds dashing madly over the landscape has a female in the lead, and is demonstrating a type of courtship display (Code C). A brood of pheasants being herded off the roadway by a parent is Code FL (fledglings). One of us once confirmed Red-winged Blackbird in a standard block while driving 55 mph as the begging baby hopped across the road behind its low-flying father.

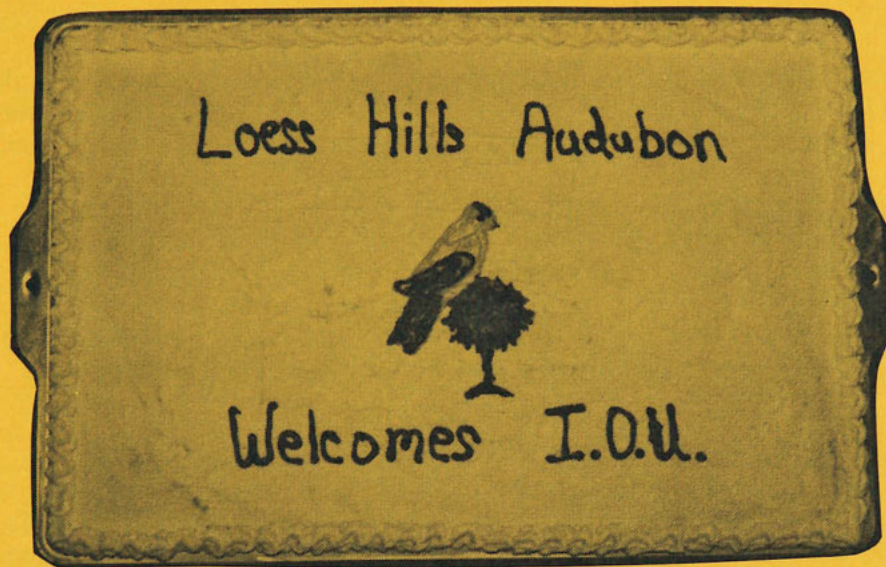
1987 is the third year of a five-year effort to map the distribution of Iowa's breeding birds. Many of the 900 blocks have received no attention at all. Everyone's help is needed if we are to complete the project on time. Basically, though, the project is fun. Atlas work can provide the satisfaction of applying birding skills well, the beauty of an unexpected scenic vista, the discovery of a small fascinating park not on the map. Whether it is a woodcock in June or a parula singing in a microscopically small riparian woods, the birds are a constant surprise. Atlas work is a slow, gentle birding with time to enjoy a look at the intimate family life of birds. Hear the rising trill of a fledgling Barred Owl. Observe a Green Heron carrying a 12-inch nightcrawler toward his hungry nestlings. See a young meadowlark's first encounter with a telephone wire. When it stopped fluttering, it fell off while still hanging on with its feet and hung upside down trying to figure out what to do next!

Bird the Standard Block! Collect data! Have fun!



FIELD CHECKLIST OF IOWA BIRDS

The I.O.U.'s new Field Checklist of Iowa Birds--1987 Edition is now available. The new version features the latest official list of Regular and Casual species as determined by the Records Committee, a three-fold format with the same outside dimensions as the 1982 Edition, more room for notes, slightly more space for each species, and information about the I.O.U. Checklists can be purchased at spring and fall meetings (10 for \$1.00) or by sending a personal check to Iowa Bird Life, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52240 at the following rates (postpaid): 10 for \$1.65, 25 for \$3.50, or 100 for \$11.60.



SPRING MEETING

The spring meeting of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union was held May 28-31 at Briar Cliff College, Sioux City, hosted by the Loess Hills Audubon Chapter. Approximately 90 people were in attendance.

At the Loess Hills Audubon Program Night, held at the Sioux City Art Center on Thursday evening, local members and those arriving early for IOU heard a talk by Davenport ornithologist Peter C. Petersen on his trip to Churchill, Manitoba.

An informal social gathering on Friday evening served to kick off the meeting in traditional style. Members were treated to refreshments which included a cake beautifully decorated by Cindy Livermore with the IOU logo and "Loess Hills Audubon Welcomes IOU."

By dawn Saturday, the previous day's off-and-on showers had given way to consistently warm, sunny weather. Following a hearty breakfast at the college cafeteria, members could choose between field trips to Stone State Park, Hillview Park, or the Sioux City Prairie. Back at campus at mid-morning, three workshops were presented, from which those attending could select two. These were: 1) "Bluebird Activity in Iowa" with Rita Efta, Auburn, IA; 2) "Avifauna of the Nature Conservancy's Preserve on the Niobrara River" with Mark Brogie, Creighton, NE; and 3) "Birds of Western Iowa and Where to Find Them" with Bill Huser, South Sioux City, NE, and Jerry Probst, Sioux City, IA.

After a hot ham and cheese croissant lunch, paper sessions were held, with the following presentations: 1) "All About the Loess Hills of Iowa" with Ken Baldwin, Briar Cliff College; 2) "How to Identify Birds," a demonstration with slides by Tom Kent and Carl Bendorf, both of Iowa City; 3) "Breeding Bird Atlas Project in Iowa" with Barb Wilson, Hastings, IA, and Carol Thompson, Iowa City, IA.

At 3:00 PM, the spring business meeting was held. Minutes for this, as well as the Board meeting, will be published in the next issue of Iowa Bird Life. At the meeting, the newly revised Field Checklist of Iowa Birds was unveiled. The new format is a tri-fold card, slightly smaller than the old version, but with more room for field notes and information about IOU and membership. Hank Zaletel held a silent auction of old bird books which had been donated to IOU, raising a total of \$62.

Members and guests re-convened at 6:30 PM in the cafeteria for the banquet, featuring roast sirloin, with baked Alaska for dessert. Awards for the Big Day competition were presented by Eugene Armstrong. Our speaker was Dr. Eugene Ulrich, Sioux City, an educator for 27 years who has taught both high school and college science. While with the Sioux City schools, he was named High School Teacher of the Year in Iowa and was one of four national finalists for the honor. The title of his presentation was "Australia's Great Barrier Reef and More," with outstanding slides portraying the geography and wildlife of the area. Especially endearing were several close-up shots of Koala Bears.

Sunday morning's schedule included another great stick-to-the-ribs breakfast, and field trips to the following locations in search of Iowa's western specialities: 1) Brown's Lake and Snyder's Bend; 2) Five Ridge Prairie Preserve; 3) IPS - New Lake area.

After lunch in the cafeteria, a compilation of species found for Sunday and for the entire weekend was done. 115 species were seen on Sunday, with an additional 14 on Saturday, for a weekend grand total of 129. Highlights were: Least Bittern, Cattle Egret, Snow Geese, Cooper's Hawk, Virginia Rail, Piping Plovers, White-Rumped Sandpiper, Least Tern, Willow and Alder Flycatchers, Western Kingbird, Northern Mockingbird, Loggerhead Shrike, Bell's Vireo, Blackpoll and Kentucky Warblers, Scarlet Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Great-tailed Grackles, and Orchard Oriole.

Our special thanks go to Briar Cliff College for an outstanding facility, with ample and well equipped meeting rooms, delicious food, and dorm space. And most importantly, thanks to the Loess Hills Audubon Chapter and its members listed below who made us feel wonderfully welcome and provided us with great western Iowa birding: Bob and Cindy Livermore, Jerry Probst (who can, indeed, find Western Kingbirds), Randy Williams, Bill Huser, Art and Kay Huser, Wayne and LorRayne Livermore, Brad and Marla Grier, Morris Peterson, and Teri Dolezal.

Mark your calendars for the fall meeting which will be held November 13-15, 1987 at the 4-H camp near Luther. Anyone wishing a copy of the official species list for the spring meeting may contact Ann Barker, RR #3, Box 190, Davenport, IA 52804.

WORKSHOP PRESENTERS



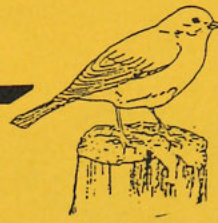
Avifauna of the Nature Conservancy's Preserve on the Niobrara River by Mark Brogie.



Birds of Western Iowa and Where to Find Them by (l. to r.) Bill Huser and Jerry Probst.



Bluebird Activity in Iowa by Rita Efta.



IOWA'S BLUEBIRD CONFERENCE

The Nongame Program, in cooperation with the folks from Marshalltown, will host the second annual bluebird conference at the Fischer Community Center in Marshalltown on August 29. Registration will be held from 8:00 to 9:00 AM. The conference will run from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM.

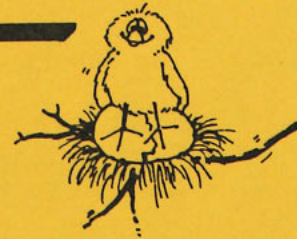
There will be a poster session where all individuals attending the event are invited to bring a map and photos of their bluebird trail. People can "tour" each other's trail and learn about special features that have added to the success of different trails. There will also be a variety of papers and slide shows. Topics will range from new designs in boxes and predator control to bluebird populations in Iowa.

For more information call: Laura Jackson (515) 281-4815.



Purple Martin Colony Registry

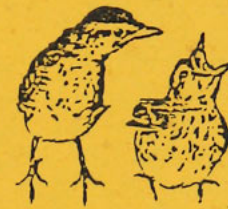
The Colony Registry Program of the newly formed Purple Martin Conservation Association seeks the help of all persons in locating and registering Purple Martin colonies throughout all of North America in preparation for several projects designed to help this man-dependant species experiencing long-term declines within parts of its breeding range. If you know of someone who has a martin colony or is trying to attract one, or if you are interested in starting a colony yourself, please write to the P.M.C.A. You can further assist by looking for martin houses or gourds in peoples' yards during your travels. If you locate some, please try to obtain the mailing addresses from either the street and house numbers, rural mailboxes, phone books, or by stopping to ask. Please send addresses to: The Purple Martin Conservation Association, P.O. Box 178, Edinboro, PA 16412



NEW MEMBERS

Please take the opportunity to welcome these new members:

Mark Brogie, Creighton, NE; David Conrads, Cedar Falls, IA; Frances Crouter, Cedar Falls, IA; William Cunningham, Ft. Dodge, IA; Evelyn Ehlers, Reinbeck, IA; Jeanette Eyerly, Des Moines, IA; Adele Feller, Dubuque, IA; Chet Hall, Grand Rapids, MI; Shirley Hamilton, Des Moines, IA; Nancy Hawken, Grinnell, IA; Lois Hughes, Iowa City, IA; Holly Humpal, Clemons, IA; David Johnson, Des Moines, IA; Lowell Konradi, Odebolt, IA; Dorothy Pohl, Corydon, IA; Dean Rigdon, Jesup, IA; Dr. Thomas Schulein, Iowa City, IA; David and Sandra Sedivec, Whiting, IA; Ruth Swaner, Iowa City, IA; Opal Uher, Waterloo, IA; Sharon Wendling, Independence, IA; and Greg Woodley, Fayette, IA.



Gene Armstrong presents (r. to l.) Bob Livermore and Jerry Probst the award for having the highest county count.



Gene presents to Francis Moore and Tom Kent (Tetrault's Tigers) the award for having the highest statewide count.



IOWA'S BIG DAY - Ray Cummins, Centerville

Six teams participated in this year's Big Day, two county counts and four state-wide counts. The best county total was by Bob Livermore, Jerry Probst, and Alan Rose with 100 species in Woodbury County. Ray Cummins and Tom Johnson were second in Appanoose County with 95.

The statewide open class produced four teams: Tetrault's Tigers (Tom Kent, Francis Moore, and Dick Tetrault), Moore's Marauders (Francis Moore, Tom Kent), AA&T (Eugene and Eloise Armstrong and Dennis Thompson), and Quad City's Ann Barker and Tom Brush. Tetrault's Tigers bested the field with 143 followed by the Marauders at 138, AA&T at 124, and Quad City at 120. The teams contributed \$337 to the IOU endowment fund and other projects; Tetrault's Tigers led the field with \$120 in contributions.

The one common theme of the 1987 Big Day might be summed up when Ray Cummins asked Eugene Armstrong, "Where were all the warblers this spring?" Gene pointing to the sky said, "Forty thousand feet and flying by."



WILDLIFE CARE CLINIC - by Cecelia Burnett, Story County Conservation Board

Dr. Sue Barrows feels "exuberant" whenever she releases a rehabilitated raptor. And this occasion was no exception as she tossed the red-tailed hawk into the air on Valentine's Day at Saylorville Lake.

The hawk was observed lying on its back near the Cottonwood Recreation Area at Saylorville in mid-January. When it was inspected by the staff, the bird showed signs of shock and stress, so they carefully covered the bird and brought it to Dr. Barrows at the Wildlife Care Clinic in Ames.

Dr. Barrows is director of the clinic, a part of the Iowa State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital. The clinic first developed from a need to provide medical care and treatment, as well as surgery, for wildlife, rather than the usual pets and livestock. "We have an obligation to take care of our wildlife," Barrows says. "The extinction of many wildlife species is due to human activity, including use of DDT, trapping, and, especially, habitat destruction. We need to do what's right and give these animals a fair chance of survival."

The Veterinary College has never budgeted for wildlife teaching, so the wildlife clinic scrounges for food, leftover materials and equipment, medicinal supplies, space, and volunteer help from other sections of the hospital. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will pay for the care and treatment of threatened and endangered species, including bald eagles, short-eared and long-eared owls, burrowing and common barn owls, northern harriers, red-shouldered and Cooper's hawks, peregrine falcons, and trumpeter swans.

Cooperating closely with the DNR, the clinic handles mostly raptors, especially red-tailed hawks and great-horned owls, broad-winged hawks, and a few waterbirds, such as pelicans, herons, ducks, and geese. In 1986, three bald eagles and two ospreys were admitted to the clinic. Very few mammals are treated, although the clinic has seen opossum, mink, and one bobcat. The clinic is especially busy during spring and fall migrations and hunting seasons and admits a number of songbirds during early summer.

When an injured animal is brought to the clinic, it is carefully examined, especially for trauma, shock, and stress. Its potential post-release survivability is assessed, and the examining student or doctor must decide if treatment can be effective. Warm fluids and heat are generally applied, and steroids are administered for shock. Diagnostic tests, surgery, and medicinal treatment follow if warranted. Eventually, and hopefully, the animal recuperates enough to regain its appetite and strength. Finally, the animals go through "physical therapy" or pre-release conditioning to rebuild their strength and stamina.

In the case of the birds of prey, or raptors, this means flying back and forth in a long hallway in the hospital before and after public hours to exercise their wing muscles. Large birds such as the bald eagle are transported to the DNR flight cages at the Wildlife Research Station in Boone for exercise.

Because no money is available for hiring a caretaker, the clinic depends on volunteer veterinary students and staff to provide medical and surgical treatment, as well as rehabilitation care, for wildlife for release back to the wild. This involves initial examination, care and treatment, surgery if necessary, cleaning cages, feeding the animals including tube and hand feeding, changing bandages, recording treatments, and exercising the animals. Interested volunteers have even formed a club - the Zoo, Exotics, and Wildlife (ZEW) Club - to organize their efforts.

In too many cases, the animal is permanently crippled and cannot be released into the wild where it would be unable to feed or defend itself and eventually die. Some of these animals, including a screech owl with an amputated wing and a great-horned owl with large golden eyes, become "exhibit birds," useful as teaching and learning tools for veterinary students and the general public. Other times, these cripples are placed in zoos or nature centers. Many threatened and endangered species are used in breeding and restoration programs.

Some animals die during hospitalization, and others must be euthanized. This outcome is usually the result of stress, severe injuries, and time delay before treatment. Most of the injured animals brought to the Wildlife Care Clinic have traumatic injuries rather than infectious diseases. Of the 34 raptors admitted to the clinic in 1986, a majority had broken bones, especially in the legs, toes, and wings. Soft tissue wounds, paralyzes, nutritional deficiencies (especially in young birds), eye trauma, and parasite infestation affected the rest of the birds. Natural diseases were rarely diagnosed in the raptors. Most of the traumatic injuries could be directly related to human activity, including trapping, flying into cars, wires, and barbed wire fences, and gunshots. "This suggests that trauma precedes natural disease in reducing wild raptor populations in Iowa," Barrows says.

The Wildlife Care Clinic operates on a very limited budget, so the clinic is soliciting donations to raise money to expand its facilities and to provide proper treatment for a greater number of wildlife animals. Barrows says donations may be made to the ISU Veterinary Medicine Endowment Fund (Wildlife Care Clinic) and sent to Dr. Frank Ramsey at the College of Veterinary Medicine. Donations will be used to build outside flight cages to exercise the birds and to purchase perches, cages specially designed for wildlife, refrigerators, examining tables, cabinets, diagnostic equipment, towels, carpeting for cages, snares and nets, and leather for restraining jesses and hoods.

"We're not here to save every wild animal or bird," Barrows says. "No one person or small group of people can do that. But we are here to save that one that can be saved and to put it back into the wild instead of taking it out. If we treat one animal, it doesn't mean we're saving the species. But we have to start somewhere, and even educating people can help to draw their attention to the problems of endangered and threatened wildlife and how human activity affects the problems."

With a gentle push, the red-tailed hawk spreads its wings and soars as the small crowd of people applaud. Dr. Sue Barrows feels "exuberant" once again.



BIRDLINE UPDATE - (319) 622-3353

Since its inception by Rick Hollis in late 1981, the Iowa Birdline has logged over 6,000 calls as birders listen to weekly reports. The message is usually updated every Monday around noon, except for special mid-week updates about extremely unusual birds.

There are two ways to leave your message. First, after listening to the complete report you will hear a short tone. After the tone, our answering machine will record as long as you speak. Be sure to include your name, phone number, date and location of the observations, and complete directions for unusual birds.

If you are calling from a Touch-tone phone, you can leave a message without listening to the end of the recording. At any time during our report, press "5" on your Touch-tone phone. This will stop the machine and you will hear a short beep. After the beep, you can leave a message of any length. Simply hang up when you are done. This method works nicely if you have already heard the complete report and are calling back later in the week just to leave a message.

Our greatest need is contributions. We also need information. Please call on a regular basis and leave a message about your observations. Your "routine" find just might be what someone else would like to hear about. For rare birds, the Birdline is the best way to share your good fortune. Just as you appreciate when others call you about sightings, you can return the favor and share your information with others.

Carl J. Bendorf, Iowa City



1987/1988 OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

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Box 217, RR 5
Osceola, Iowa 50213

Eugene Armstrong
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Booneville, Iowa 50038



SECOND ANNUAL IOU SUMMER FIELD TRIP

When: Saturday, August 14, 1987

Where: Fremont County, river bottom flats near the Nebraska City bridge;
Forney's Lake, Waubonsie State Park

Meet: At the southwest parking lot at Forneys Lake at 7:00 AM

Highlights: Little Blue Heron, Cattle and Snowy Egrets, Both Night-Herons, other
large waders, shorebirds, butterflies

Please contact Tanya Bray, 9708 Grover, Omaha, NE 68124 if interested. More information
and maps will be sent on request at a later date. Also Barb Wilson and I would like some
idea of how many people to expect.

Iowa Ornithologists' Union



STATE BIRD OF IOWA: THE GOLDFINCH

Hank & Linda Zaletel
715 West
Colo, Iowa 50056

Thomas H Kent
211 Richards St
Iowa City IA 52240

BLK. RT.

