



# I.O.U. News

Iowa Ornithologists' Union Newsletter

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## Iowa Big Day Is Not So Cuckoo

### • 3 Birdwatchers Search 19 Hours

by Ross Bielema

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Davenport bird expert Pete Petersen and two friends proved Tuesday that the early bird-watcher gets the birds - 185 species of them, to be exact.

It takes dedication, enthusiasm and perhaps even a kinship with loons to begin a day-long search for birds at 3 a.m..

While some might question the attraction of spending 19 hours scanning the trees, cattails and sky for birds, how many people could identify 185 bird species anyway?

Iowa Big Day could be the ultimate "biathlon" of mental and physical prowess.

During this contest of the state's birding elite, almost anything goes in the race to see the most species in one day. Since participants can chose any day in May to conduct their search, results won't be known until June.

Petersen, Brian Blevins of Davenport and Don Moeller of LeClair, Iowa, had a lofty goal - last year's record 195 bird species, set by Petersen's team.

What lengths would they go to beat rival birders? Consider this:

- They played recorded calls of owls and other birds at 3 a.m. near Montpelier, Iowa. Bird calls are an allowable form of identification, so the trio nailed down a screech owl, chuck-will's widow and several other species within a half-hour.

- Credit Island was closed to the public, due to flooding. But Petersen called park officials ahead of time and the group was allowed to drive down the flooded entrance road to the south end of the island in search of birds.

"Credit Island is a key place for warblers and thrushes," he explained. "I told them why this was important." The effort paid off. They added another six species, including a rare black-throated blue warbler.

- Luck is a factor, too. At Conesville Marsh near Conesville, Iowa, Petersen spotted a yellow rail - the second time in his life that he has observed the elusive bird in Iowa. They also saw an immature little blue heron at Elk River Junction south of Sabula, Iowa. Lady luck disappeared, however, when they tried to find a young trumpeter swan that has been seen since March in the Mississippi River harbor near Lindsay Park, Bettendorf. The bird apparently has migrated.

- They sailed over to Clinton, Iowa, and set up their spotting scopes by the lodge at Eagle Point Park. While scanning the river near Lock and Dam 13, they added canvasbacks, Forster's tern and common tern to their list.

They also saw three sandhill cranes near Goose Lake, Iowa. The Big Day search ended at 10 p.m. "It's a tiring effort," Petersen said.

Results will be published in "Iowa Bird Life," the Iowa Ornithologists Union magazine.





## Fall 1993 Meeting Dan Dorrance, Davenport

All roads that were any good led to the Lost Island Lake Huston Park Nature Center near Ruthven on September 24th for the fall I.O.U. meeting. And, if you arrived past dark, you better have had your map, because Palo Alto County doesn't accept those that forget. Of course it's always fun to arrive at your destination after dark because if you have never been there before it's exciting to see what the surroundings are like in the daylight. The four-county area of Clay, Dickinson, Emmet, and Palo Alto provided the beautiful and historic backdrop for the meeting. The newly constructed Huston Park Nature Center provided an even better atmosphere to hold our meeting, as it sat overlooking Lost Island Lake.

There was plenty of hospitality on Friday night at the Center which is full of natural history displays and drawings. Special thanks to Lee and Nancy Schoenewe for their hard work in hosting the meeting and providing the great Saturday weather. In fact the weather was so great it afforded the opportunity for some to skip the business meeting and observe a Gryfalcon near Kettle-son Hogsback. Gene and Eloise Armstrong, Tim Schantz and Ross Silcock were so proud of their find that they were not shy in reporting it, despite missing the business meeting!

Saturday afternoon programs were fun, fast, and fact-filled. Pete Wickham instructed us on the finer points of shorebird identification. Diane Porter introduced many to the use of computers in keeping track of birding notes and records. DNR biologist, Doug Harr, and Lee Schoenewe concluded the programs with a map highlight tour of birding spots in the four-county area.

Stubbs Ranch Kitchen in Spencer was the site of the Saturday evening banquet which provided both a great atmosphere and delicious food. The Iowa City tag team of Tom Kent, Jim Fuller and Carl Bendorf put together a well organized evening program on their travels to Alaska.

The three tray slide show captivated the audience on Alaska's beauty and vastness. After learning of the area's natural and world history, I'm sure many, like I, had gone to the atlas to look up the far away places of Attu, Pribilof, Gambell, and Nome.

Special thanks to the field trip leaders Harold White, Lee Schoenewe, Matt Kenne, and Doug Harr, who helped some participants locate their first Iowa and life birds! Some of the more interesting birds from the 132 count weekend (same as fall 1992) were: Western Grebe, Eared Grebe, Greater Scaulp, Black-bellied Plover, and hundreds of pelicans and cormorants.

Lee Schoenewe put the weekend into perspective when he showed the Saturday morning field trip participants the Lost Island of Lost Island Lake.

Catch some of the excitement of Iowa birding. Make plans now to attend one of the upcoming field trips and the 1994 spring meeting in Ames on May 20-22.

### Attendance:

Adel:	Janet Eppard
Algona:	Matt Kenne
Ames:	Barb Bettis, Jack Dodd
Ankeny:	Maridel Jackson
Booneville:	Eloise & Eugene Armstrong
Burlington:	Chuck Fuller
Carroll:	Bernice Bliss, Eva Wiedemeyer
Cedar Falls:	Ed & Jean Leonard
Cedar Rapids:	Pete Wickham
Cherokee:	Dick Bierman
Clear Lake:	Joan & Vergil Eness
Clive:	Jane Clark
Colo:	Hank Zaletel
Davenport:	Dan Dorrance, Pete Petersen
Decorah:	Dennis Carter
Des Moines:	Bob & John Cecil, John & Mary Mitchell, Barb Miller
Estherville:	Belva & Dennis Henrickson, Harold White





Fairfield: Gloria Foster, Diane Porter  
 Fort Dodge: Mary Kuhlman, Dorothy Zehr  
 Ida Grove: Pete Erzen  
 Indianola: Jim Sinclair  
 Iowa City: Carl Bendorf, Karen Disbrow,  
 Jim Fuller, Bud Gode,  
 Rick Hollis, Tom Kent,  
 Jim Schieb, Carol Thompson  
 Larchwood: Doug Harr  
 Liscomb: Mark Proescholdt  
 Marshalltown: Joan Buwalda, Alice Smith,  
 Russell Widner  
 Mason City: Carolyn Fischer, Rita Goranson,  
 Curt Nelson  
 Norwalk: Ann Johnson, Sue Spieker  
 Otley: Tim Schantz  
 Paullina: Robby Soukup  
 Princeton: Ann Barker  
 Sioux City: Virginia & Wayne Livermore  
 Spencer: Lee & Nancy Schoenewe  
 Ventura: Pat Hansen  
 Walnut: Marietta Petersen  
 Waterloo: Dick Kraemer, Francis Moore  
 West Des Moines: Pam & Reid Allen  
 Bellevue, NE: Tanya Bray  
 Sioux Falls, SD: Dennis & Sandy McFarland

## Spring 1994 Meeting

In 1934, when the I.O.U. met in Ames, the Sheldon-Munn Hotel in downtown Ames ran a display ad in Iowa Bird Life trying to drum up business among attendees and promising "reasonable rates" for their rooms. The Sheldon-Munn Hotel is no longer in business and the ad didn't indicate what "reasonable rates" were. However, in 1932 when the I.O.U. met in Des Moines, the Hotel Savery ran a similar ad and promised rooms "with bath" for \$2.50 a night. We can't promise rates quite like that for this spring's meeting in Ames but we do think the rates for staying in university housing are very reasonable (and there are baths). The Hotel Savery is still in business; maybe the next time we meet in Des Moines...



## What to Do With Your Birdwatching Equipment at Night, Part I.

Bob Cecil, Des Moines

I am often surprised that my birding friends have never taken their precision optics and gazed into an evening sky. I probably shouldn't be surprised - my birding friends are generally fanatics with a unique singularity of purpose. They look at birds or they don't look at anything.

One evening several years ago, in a moment of weakness, I saw a bright star and put my 20x telescope on it. I was startled to find a bright central orb with what were obviously four moons along a single planetary axis. I learned the next day that I had seen Jupiter and four of its visible moons.

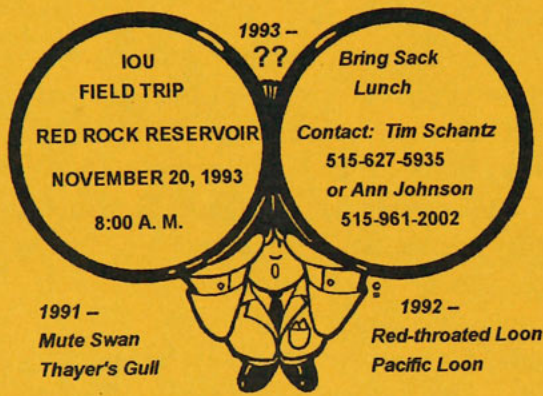
With your new KOWA, you're probably not going to be able to pick out the Crab nebula or a distant quasar, but you can see some of the solar system's most striking sights. Venus, the third brightest object in the sky, goes through phases like our own moon and often appears as a brilliant but slender crescent on the horizon. Saturn, at first glimpse, looks like a tiny oval but a little more focus reveals that the planet's rings are its most conspicuous feature - the planet itself is a minute ball within. Even our familiar moon can be breathtaking - at 40x magnification it occupies almost the full field of view. Mars and Mercury are also frequently visible, but aside from Mars' distinctive reddish color, these planets are not as visually interesting as their counterparts.

40x magnification is good for planet watching. Lower power makes it difficult to pick out Saturn's rings - higher power complicates finding the subject and keeping it from moving quickly out of view due to the Earth's rotation. Finding planets with a spotting scope can be a challenge, especially with higher magnification. An easy way is to position the subject near a tree or roof line, then following the line to the planet.

If you don't like the hit and miss approach, check "Today's Almanac" in the *Des Moines Register*. It is in the weather section, and is updated regularly by Dr. Lawrence Staunton of Drake University.

Part II - Watching Migrants at Night.





Lake Red Rock has had a variety of species since its inception and this year should be no exception. This year's field trip will be held a bit later than last year and may have even more surprises in store. Black-legged Kittiwake has become a nearly annual occurrence. The spillway has always attracted a large number of gulls so nearly anything is possible. There may not be a finer place for a gull identification workshop. Come see the effects of the great flood and how it has altered one of south central Iowa's major birding areas.

Meet at the Visitor's Center at 8:00 a.m. Late comers should look for the group below the dam. Dress warmly and bring a sack lunch. We will meet for lunch at Cordova Park on the north side of the lake. Call Tim or Ann for further details of directions.

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