



I.O.U. News

Iowa Ornithologists' Union Newsletter

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A BIG WARBLER DAY

By Jim Sinclair, Indianola

It is 5:45 a.m., May 14, 1999 and David Youngblut and I are on our way to the first stop on our annual Warren County "Big Day". As we approach the Norwalk sewage lagoons, we can already hear the strange calls of one of Warren County's newest residents, the Great-tailed Grackle. Because of the geography of Warren County, any opportunity for water related species needs to be productive. Quickly we add American Coot, Northern Shoveler, a late Snow Goose and in a piece of good fortune, all six swallow species found in Iowa!

Any "Big Day" is often notable for its misses as well as for its good birds and the Pied-billed Grebe and Ruddy Duck that were here last week disappoint us on this day. As we prepare to leave, we do hear the first warblers of the day, a Common Yellowthroat and a Yellow Warbler.

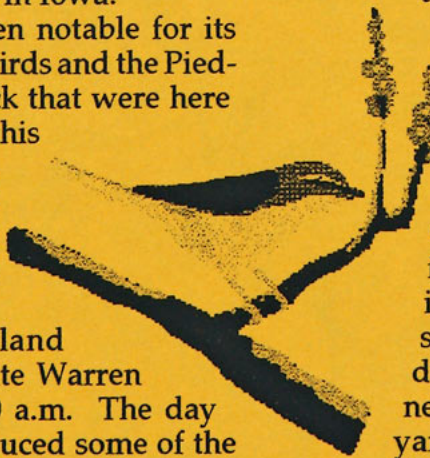
We arrive at Woodland Mounds Preserve, my favorite Warren County birding spot, at 7:30 a.m. The day before this location had produced some of the very best passerine birding I had ever experience. The level of activity and number of species had been remarkable, leaving me both exhausted and exhilarated. David and I can only hope for a repeat of my earlier good fortune. Hiking the first ridge, towards the bottoms, the activity level gradually intensified. Warblers, vireos and flycatchers surround us – Redstart, Black-throated Green Warbler, Wood Thrush, Least Flycatcher and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. As we

skirt the bottom, the resident Louisiana Waterthrush sings and an Acadian Flycatcher calls from one of the hollows.

During the 1980s, Kentucky Warblers expanded their range into central Iowa, however, as the 90s have progressed they have retreated leaving only Woodland Mounds Preserve as a reliable location for this species in Warren County. As we approach the next ridge top, we hear an alarm chip note coming from a brush pile. I believe it is our Kentucky Warbler and some gentle "pishing" lures the culprit out. The area we are in now has had Cooper's Hawks nesting for many years and although on this day we would not detect any activity, the nest appears to be maintained and probably contains young nestlings. Scarlet Tanager and Cerulean Warbler are identified as we prepare to hike down an old logging road.

We move down the road and with each step the level of bird activity increases. We realize we have intersected with a huge, multi-species foraging group – birding doesn't get any better than this. The next half an hour we move barely 50 yards as we are overwhelmed with Northern Orioles, Empidonax Flycatchers, and more warblers than would seem possible. And not only the usual suspects, amongst the Ovenbirds and Tennessee Warblers are at least two Bay-breasted Warblers and a surprising number of female Golden-winged Warblers.

I signal David and point ahead. I can't believe our good luck as the distinctive chipping song of a Worm-eating Warbler is discernible



amongst the various other songs and calls. We start slow, careful stalk in an effort to get a look at this elusive and rare Warren County visitor. The song of the Worm-eating Warbler is somewhat ventriloquial and this, coupled with the distraction of so many other birds, makes locating the warbler difficult, but we persevere and finally both get good looks at a great bird.

Finally, the foraging group moves on leaving us a moment to collect our sense before we finish the loop back to the car. Although things have slowed down considerably we still manage to pick up two more warbler species, a Northern Waterthrush and a late Yellow-rumped Warbler, before reaching the parking lot. Time to rest a minute and do a quick tally. The time is 10 a.m. and although our total species number is not that impressive, the figure of 21 warbler species jumps out at us. David and I confer and decide that we should refocus and concentrate on finding as many warbler species as possible. A Big Warbler Day! And why not?

Our next stop is a brushy pasture kept in a successional stage by a combination of neglect and an irregular grazing schedule. Because of these conditions, this area attracts Blue-winged Warblers and Yellow-breasted Chats, and on this day we hear and see the chat before we even leave the road! Not having the same kind of luck with the Blue-wing, we begin to move through the locust scrub and multiflora rose tangles. Quickly David alerts me to movement ahead which David identifies as a male Mourning Warbler. As I maneuver to catch a glimpse of the Mourning Warbler, another small bird catches my attention. A male Wilson's Warbler comes into view and eventually David and I can watch both species foraging in the same bush! This run of good luck is becoming more than slightly amusing and now, as if to reinforce this feeling, the Blue-winged Warbler sings in the distance. In less than half an hour, we have picked up our

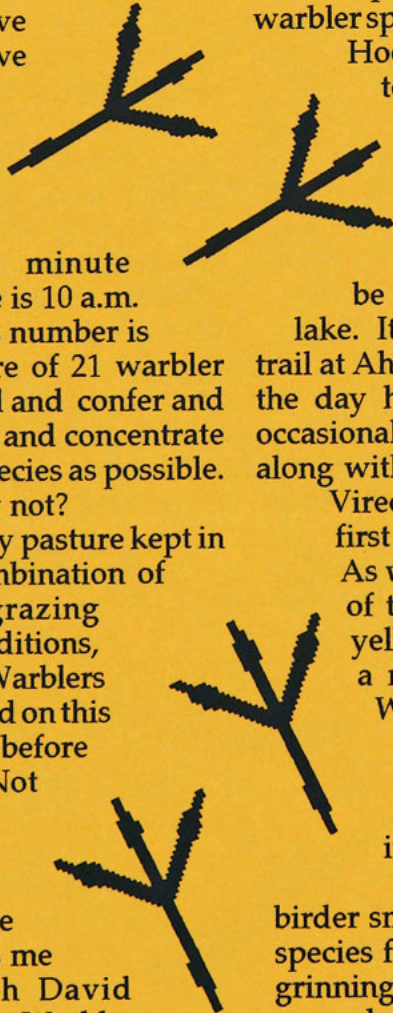
two target species plus two bonus birds!

The drive to Lake Ahquabi State Park is full of animated birding conversation. Although not yet noon, we have 25 warbler species, which as far as David and I can recollect, is as many as either one of us has ever had in one day – ever. By focusing on this one group of birds, we have energized our big day. Can Lake Ahquabi sustain our good fortune?

In truth, David and I are virtually positive that Ahquabi will produce at least one more warbler species. For the last two years two male Hooded Warblers have set up adjacent territories on the west side of Lake Ahquabi State Park. The Hooded Warbler is one of the loudest and most persistent singers in the Warbler family. Consequently, at least one or both of these birds can be heard on virtually every trip to the lake. It is well past noon as we hit the lake trail at Ahquabi. The activity level of earlier in the day has slowed to a mere trickle – the occasional warbler chip note can still be heard, along with the constant song of the Red-eyed Vireo. True to expectations we can hear first one, then the other, Hooded Warbler. As we work our way down the west side of the lake, a predominately black and yellow warbler catches our attention. Just a moment earlier one of the Hooded Warblers had been singing close to this location, so imagine our surprise and delight when not a Hooded Warbler, but a Canada Warbler hops into view!

It doesn't take much to make a birder smile and believe me, with 27 warbler species for the day, David and I are a pair of grinning idiots. Not only that but we still have some decent birding left. Is 30 possible? We check our list again and find one glaring miss. No Black and White Warbler! Although the list of possibilities is now quite restricted, surely we can find one Black and White Warbler.

Just where the lake trail and the trail down from Camp Wesley Woods intersect, David spots a small, dull colored warbler foraging high in the tree tops. Neither one of us gets an adequate look before we lose the bird,



then find it again, then lose it again! David confirms my fears when he agrees that we may just have missed a female Cape May Warbler – of the few warbler species we have yet to tally for the day. I head up the Wesley Woods trail while David stays by the lake, both of us hoping for one more glimpse of the missed bird. Moments later, I hurry back down the trail in response to David's calls. In one more in a series of strokes of good fortune, David has found another of our needed warbler species – a Yellow-throated! Now I know this tale is beginning to strain the limits of credibility, but bear with me. As we are enjoying the Yellow-throated Warbler we spot another bird foraging high in the same Sycamore tree – our mystery bird has reappeared! This time we get more than adequate looks and indeed identify a female Cape May Warbler, probably a first spring bird.

The Cape May was our last new warbler leaving us with the astounding total of 29 warbler species for the day. And even that impressive number barely can express the fun and excitement that David and I had experienced as we tallied warbler species after warbler species. Surely this is what birding is truly about – the confluence of good birds, good luck and good company adding up to a memorable day!

HEARD ON THE BIRDLINE

Summer 1999

June 1-September 1

Jim Fuller, Iowa City

All sightings reported to the Iowa Birdline are considered tentative until submitted and approved by the Records Committee of the Iowa Ornithologist's Union.

For many birds, the fall migration affects Iowa in the summer, especially during July and August. This year was no exception, with most of the sightings of rare birds involving those that were southward bound. It is also no coincidence that the season's highlight bird was discovered by Steve Dinsmore during his brief

visit in the state. On 18 August, Steve found an adult ARTIC TERN at the Saylorville Reservoir, and then the following day produced a juvenile ARTIC TERN there. These birds represent potential first state records. It is interesting that also on 18 August, two other rarities appeared, with a MACGILLIVRAY'S WARBLER at Burlington, and a juvenile SABINE'S GULL at the Hawkeye WA in Johnson County.

The spring migration was pretty well complete by 1 June this year. However, a misdirected RED-THROATED LOON spent the last week of June at Big Spirit Lake. The only report of BARNOWL came from Taylor County, where Zelbert Freemyer once again hosted nesting birds in his barn, beginning in June. A YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT HERON was seen in Emmet County in a flooded field on 25 June.

A COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULL near the Dickinson County landfill seen on the 10th, and a juvenile RUFF at Harrier Marsh in Boone County on the 17th, highlighted July sightings. A WORM-EATING WARBLER was found at its traditional Shimek SF location in Lee County on 10 July, and three birds were seen there on 20 August. A WESTERN GREBE took up residence on Big Spirit Lake on 27 July and hung around for nearly a month, while another was at Black Hawk Lake in Sac County on 31 July.

A strong representation from post breeding dispersal brought numerous LITTLE BLUE HERONS and SNOWY EGRETS into all areas of the state during August. A second year LAUGHING GULL was spotted at the Hawkeye WA on 10 August. Unusual shorebirds reported in August included WESTERN SANDPIPER at the Hawkeye WA on the 10th, and Saylorville Reservoir on the 19th, RED-NECKED PHALAROPES at the Runnells WA on the 15th and Dunbar Slough in Greene County on the 29th, and AMERICAN AVOCETS in Johnson, Polk, Kossuth, Louisa, and Appanoose Counties.

WARBLERS seemed to be moving south unusually early this season, with the best



sightings being CONNECTICUT at Grammer Grove Park in Marshall County on the 15th, BREWSTER'S at Shimek SF in Lee County on the 18th, and BLACK-THROATED BLUE at Hickory Hill Park in Iowa City on the 31st. The only IBIS (Sp.) report came from Carroll County on 23 August.

MISSISSIPPI KITES were seen periodically in Des Moines throughout the season, but a nesting location was never located this year, and KITES at Ledges SP in Boone County were seen early, but not after mid July. EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVES were still present throughout the season at their original location at Grinnell, but were also reported in August from Ankeny and Mason City. When the first reports of RED-BREASTED NUTHATCHES in July ballooned into numerous sightings in every corner of the state in August, it became apparent that this would be an invasion year for this species.



provided an excellent buffet with numerous selections, and the elegant atmosphere of the dining hall provided a wonderful location for the banquet.

Darleen Ayres and her crew hosted a well-organized event. They had dozens of bird feeders and other favors for participants. Darleen also stocked an interesting table of books and other items for sale. In addition, there were other vendors with a few other tables of bird feeding and bird watching related items.

Field trips were held on Saturday and Sunday, and those who traveled to Lacey Keosauqua State Park on Saturday were treated to a "fallout" of sorts, with several species of migrants challenging the best identification skills of those present. Bird banding was conducted on the grounds of the Camp, and several people were able to observe the netting and banding on Saturday.

Although there was a gentle rain on Sunday morning that put a damper on the birding opportunities, the birders realized the rain was much needed by the area. Later, the day cleared and those who visited Pioneer Ridge County Park after Sunday lunch were able to enjoy a beautiful fall afternoon.

IOWA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION FALL MEETING

September 10-12, 1999
by Jane Clark, Clive

The Ottumwa Bird Club hosted the Fall 1999 meeting of Iowa Ornithologists' Union at Forest Lake Camp south of Ottumwa. This meeting was held in conjunction with meetings of the Association of Field Ornithologists, Inland Bird Banding Association, and North American Banding Council. Social time and registration for IOU were held at the Days Inn in Ottumwa on Friday night. Meetings, programs, and presentations were held at the Forest Lake Camp facility. Several of those attending the weekend events stayed at the Camp in dormitories or camped on the grounds. Meals were served at the Camp, also, except for the Saturday night banquet, which was held at the Parkview Plaza Hotel in downtown Ottumwa. The hotel

Attendance:

Ames: Ed & Elizabeth Carbrey.
Ankeny: Carol & Galin Berrier.
Centerville: Ray Cummins, Bill & Marge Heusinkveld, Tom Johnson.
Chicago, IL.: Peter Lowther.
Clear Lake: Joan & Vergil Eness.



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Council Bluffs: Chris Williams.
Des Moines: Bob Cecil, Phil Walsh.
Dubuque: Charlie Winterwood.
Fairfield: Dave Killman.
Ft. Dodge: Judy Garton, Mary Kuhlman,
 Sibyl Sand.
Ft. Myers, FL: Jerry Jackson.
Hampton, IL.: Kelly McKay.
Huxley: Paul Bystrak.
Indianola: Jim Sinclair.
Iowa City: Jim Fuller, Dick Tetrault.
Liscomb: Beth & Mark Proescholdt.
Marshalltown: Joan Buwalda, Jean Eige, Chuck
 & Martha Gazaway, Laura Glasgow,
 Linda Tasler.
Mason City: Rita Goranson.
Nevada: Hank Zaletel.
Norwalk: Ann Johnson.
Oskaloosa: Doug & Mary Beth Hunt.
Ottumwa: Darlene Ayres, Mary Nuerson.
Shenandoah: Jean Braley, Marie Tiemann.
Story City: Marilyn Lekwa.
Waterloo: Tom Schilke, Francis Moore.
West Des Moines: Dick & Sharon Stillwell.

Solve the Crime: Save the Song of Spring Learning Trucks and Guide are now available

Solve the Crime: Save the Song of Spring, the Neotropical Migratory Birds and Their Midwestern Connections Activity Guide and the corresponding Learning Trunk are now available for use in the classroom from your local area education agencies (AEA's).

Our migratory birds are in trouble! A neotropical migratory bird spends its breeding season in temperate North America taking advantage of our summer's "protein pulse" of insects to feed its young. It winters in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South America. Neotropical migrants include many of our songbirds such as thrushes, flycatchers, tanagers, swallows, and warblers plus waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors.

Help solve the crime of the decade! The learning truck and activity guide are filled with the things students will need to search for clues. The

students will do their own research, mentor, role-play, and take action to discover the culprits behind the alarming population declines being documented for many species of neotropical migrants.

If you would like to let your area teachers know about the trunk and guide book, send us an E-mail and we'll send out an AEA list of contacts to them or anyone.

To purchase the activity guide make checks payable to Iowa Ornithologists' Union for \$14.00 by mail or \$10.00 in person and send to Linda Zaletel, 1928 6th St., Nevada, IA 50201-1126 (madowl@nevia.net)

This project was supported by a REAP-CEP grant, Iowa Ornithologists' Union, Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources, Iowa Conservation Education Council, Partners in Flight, The Nature Conservancy (Iowa Chapter), The Wildlife Society, Iowa Audubon chapters, area education agencies, and the Johnson County Song Bird Project.

Iowa Science Teachers Conference: A Success

by Linda R.F. Zaletel & Kay Neumann

The Iowa Science Teacher Conference was held in Des Moines on October 14 at the Polk County Convention Center. Over a thousand science teachers were in attendance. The IOU booth was very successful. We made contacts with hundreds of people and got the word out on the IOU and our teaching guides: *Solve the Crime: Save the Song of Spring* and *A Teachers Activity Guide About...Iowa Birds* which the IOU has sponsored. We sold 60 books with more orders coming in. Our session on Solve the Crime: Save the Song of Spring, had 25 attendees! As part of the REAP-CEP grant we have had teacher in-service workshops for over 40 teachers. In all, teachers were thrilled to see information on Iowa birds!



Recent Literature



These articles can be obtained from your local library. Ask them to order on interlibrary loan for you.

Alisauskas, R.T. 1998. Winter range expansion and relationships between landscape and morphometrics of midcontinent Lesser Snow Geese. *Auk*: 115:851-862.

Alisauskas, R.T. , E.E. Klaas, K.A. Hobson, and D.C. Ankney. 1998. Stable-carbon isotopes support use of adventitious color to discern winter origins of Lesser Snow Geese. *J. Field Ornith.*: 69:262-268.

Best, L.B., H. Campa, K.E. Kemp, R.J. Robel, M.R. Ryan, J.A. Savidge, H. P. Weeks, and S.R. Winterstein. 1998. Bird abundance in CRP and crop fields during winter in the Midwest. *Amer. Midl. Nat.*: 139:311-324.

Riley, J.Z., W.R. Clark, D.E. Ewing, and P.A. Vohs. 1998. Survival of Ring-necked Pheasant chicks during brood rearing. *J. Wild. Manage.*: 62:36-44.

Iowa Birdline

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