



# I.O.U. News

Iowa Ornithologists' Union Newsletter

Spring 1998 Volume 14 Number 1

## IOU Members' Mexican Adventure by Matt Kenne, Algona

On Friday, February 13, 1998, a diverse group of Iowans met at the Monterray Inn in Laredo, Texas, to embark on a birding trip through Tamaulipas and San Luis Potosi, Mexico with Bob and John Cecil. Accompanying the Cecils in the "Des Moines" van were Ann Johnson, Matt Kenne, and Jane Clark, who bravely volunteered the use of her van. Ed and Jean Allgood and Ed and Jean Leonard filled the Allgood's car. Karen Disbrow, Rick Hollis, and Barb Beaumont brought up the rear with Carol Thompson in her "Iowa City" Volkswagen

Only a few of the participants had any experience in the tropics. Many, like myself, were going armed with little more than a handful of Spanish words and preconceived notions of Mexican life gleaned from friends' visits to border towns and resort areas. It started on an unlucky day, but I was lucky to be able to take this trip - I had a great time.

### Saturday

We spent most of the day on the road to El Naranjo. It rained hard on the desert, but cleared beautifully as we headed into the mountains. Everyone wanted to see some birds, so we went to the El Salto Falls

area even though the sun was going down. As soon as we got there, we spied an Amazon Kingfisher. Everyone forgot about the drive! As it became dark, John Cecil called in a Ferruginous Pigmy-Owl that landed overhead in the flashlight beams. Then supper at the local seafood place.

### Sunday

Even though band members partied until the wee hours, and Bob and John slept in the van on main street, we were ready to start our usual routine. A little fruit, some pandulce (bakery sweet rolls), a pot of coffee, and we headed back to the El Salto Falls. We got our first up-close look at sugarcane fields, leaf-cutter ants, White-crowned and Red-lored Parrots. Ahh, the tropics! An ant swarm illustrated the fact that birds there are hit-or-miss, first nothing and then birds of all kinds flitting everywhere. Fan-tailed Warbler, Clay-colored Robin, Spot-crowned Woodcreeper, (a Brown Creeper on steroids), Blue-crowned Motmot, Golden-crowned Warbler, Blue Mockingbird, and more were picking off insects flushed by the ants. We found Masked Tityras gobbling berries, Altamira Orioles singing, puzzled over one of the Myarchus flycatchers (Dusky-capped), and squeaked out a Yellow-billed Cacique. Social

Flycatchers were loudly social, and we practiced separating Boat-billed Flycatcher from Great Kiskadee.

We started to make our way up to a fire tower to picnic and have our only chance to see Military Macaws but we never made it. The birding was too good! Stopping along a small stream, the call went out: Trogan! Actually, two birds



were present in the trees overhead. After some wrangling with spotting scopes and books we identified them as immature male Elegant Trogons. A Black-throated Blue Warbler that should have been wintering in the West Indies was there, as were Tropical Parula, Louisiana Waterthrush, the trash bird common Wilson's and Black-throated Green Warblers, Flame-colored and White-winged Tanagers. On to Xilitla!

### Monday

I could describe the festival in the town square or the Italian (?!?) restaurant, but there's no way I could do justice to the El Catillo B&B or Las Pozas (The Pools), both creations of Edward James. A prime example of the phrase "Mad Englishman", he was a gifted artist, and sculpture garden he designed in the jungle was a bizarre but beautiful place to bird. Check out the website at: [www.junglegossip.com/](http://www.junglegossip.com/) to get a look at the site.

The birds were as wonderful as the surroundings: Montezuma Oropendulas are huge, flamboyant, brown orioles with a polygamous lifestyle. Emerald Toucanet, Barred Forest-falcon, Red-throated Ant-Tanager, Crescent-chested Warbler, Yellow-throated Euphonia, Smoky-brown Woodpecker, Ivory-billed Woodcreeper, Mountain Trogon, Yellow-winged Tanager, and Rufous-browed Peppershrike dazzled us as we climbed through the forest and coffee plantations. And then on the road to Tamazunchale...

### Tuesday

For this day, we had a local guide named Rudy, who teaches English and is a strong conservationist and environmental activist. Rudy took us to our most southern point on this trip and also the most remote: the Indian village Tezapotla, surrounded by mountains. Along the way, we birded from a lookout over a wooded valley where we saw Red-billed and White-tipped Doves, Common Bush Tanager, Squirrel Cuckoo, Plain Chachalaca, many parrots flying over the trees, Bronzed Cowbird, Spot-breasted Wren, Black-headed Saltator, and both Green and Brown Jays. Brown Jay is a species that you always think is something fabulous as you see it flying, but

then you realize it's just another ?\*!!\* Brown Jay.

Tezapotla is at the end of a road newly made from several miles of foot trail. We were told we were the first Gringos in the village, and it showed in the way the people (especially the children) turned out to see us. The highlight of Tezapotla happened as soon as we left our vehicles. In a tree next to us were two birds that we couldn't identify, even though we had excellent views. The yellowish tanager-like birds with rusty-orange crowns and rumps were not like any in our books. The possibility, however

◆ *Rudy then invited us to his home for a meal of enchiladas, black-bean soup, flat breads cactus, and dried beef that was delicious.*

remote, that these birds were an undescribed species, is a thrill that you just can't get birding in Iowa, but it sure makes birding in the tropics a blast!

Rudy then invited us to his

home for a meal of enchiladas, black-bean soup, flat breads cactus, and dried beef that was delicious. His graciousness was appreciated as much as his enthusiasm for his environmental work in the surrounding countryside.

### Wednesday

We birded around the grounds of the Hotel Tanninul, near Cd. Valles, all morning. Several of us went out before sunup and soon realized that you can't identify night birds when you don't know the calls! Blooming trees had many orioles and hummingbirds, Aztec Parakeets were everywhere, Crimson-collared Grosbeak and White-throated Robin were near the hot spring, and Yellow-faced and Blue-black Grassquits and White-collared Seedeaters were next to the road.

In pasture land south of Cd. Valles we found many raptors. Laughing and Bat Falcons perched in the open and a very photogenic pair of Aplomado Falcons treated us to close looks. Others in the area were: Gray, Roadside, White-tailed, and Harris's Hawks. Crested Caracara, Black and Turkey Vultures, Chihuahuan Raven and Kestrels



filled the open country throughout Mexico as did Couch's and Tropical Kingbird, Northern Mockingbird, and Vermillion Flycatcher. White Ibis and Wood Storks roosted near the drying creek. On to Cd. Mante, a town with a sugar refinery that gives the area a horrible stench with the wind in the wrong direction.

#### Thursday

The weather held for our last birding day. It was in the 80s every day, and the dry season meant no rain, no mosquitoes, and half the trees were leafless. Plenty of ticks and chiggers to go around, though. Above the town of Gomez Farias, we came to the end of the roads that our

vehicles could manage. If a person walked a few miles or had 4-wheel drive, you could reach Alta Cimas, where it is possible to hire someone to take

you to the cloud forest at El Cielo Biosphere Reserve. But for us, the views we had off the mountain, and the good birds right where we stopped were fine. Barred Antshrike was found almost immediately. Gray-breasted Wood Wren, Brown-backed Solitaire, Tufted Flycatcher, and Hooded Grosbeak flew along the track. Magnificent and Amethyst-throated Hummingbirds were seen. And, amazingly, a flock of 20+ Military Macaws flew overhead along the ridge. We didn't even know they were in these mountains!

Later, in Gomez Farias' town square, we had a fun conversation with Alberto, an employee of the state extension service. He wanted to practice the English he learned in a Dallas college but didn't get to use in Gomez Farias. When he found out our interest in birds, Alberto rounded up a co-worker from Alta Cima to speak with us. The co-worker was working on a project to reintroduce Crested Guan and Great Curassow (victims of overhunting) into the area. He showed us photos of some birds they had in captivity for breeding, and assured us that the Military

Macaws (the third endangered species in the area) were wild. We prowled some orange groves and cactus garden and headed for Cd. Victoria, the state capitol of Tamaulipas.

#### Friday

Another beautiful day, another army roadblock. Once or twice a day we'd get pulled over at a checkpoint, we were used to it by now. Everyday the same questions: Where have you been? Where are you going? What are you doing? Do you have any guns or drugs? Maybe, if some one was bored, they'd look in the trunk or glove compartment or under the seat. Ed Allgood always handled it with a palms to the sky shrug and I know no Spanish smile that seemed to get him waved through quickly.

This morning's trip was quick shot in the dark, an area SW of Cd. Victoria the Cecils had never visited. A winding mountain road took us up to a highland oak forest mixed with cactus, palmettos, and no agriculture. The coolest morning of the trip, the clouds soon broke up and the birds started singing. Bridled Titmouse, Rufous-capped Warbler, Rufous-crowned Sparrow foraged on the hillside. This area seemed more like Arizona than the Mexico we had traveled through, but was very beautiful. The birding ended on a gorgeous note: two Painted Redstarts together in a bare tree.

We made it back to Laredo at 8:00 P.M. Friday and the group split up to make their way back to Iowa. As a group in Mexico, we saw about 240 species. I, personally, had 125 life birds on this trip, including the handful I saw in Texas.

Speaking for the group, I want to thank Bob and John Cecil for inviting us along, and for guiding us through the various small headaches that come from foreign language and travel in other countries. Gracias.

◆ *As a group in Mexico, we saw about 240 species. I, personally, had 125 life birds on this trip, including the handful I saw in Texas.*



# HEARD ON THE BIRDLINE

Winter 1997-98

December 15-March 15

by Jim Fuller, Iowa City

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

Iowa attracted national attention when two ROSS'S GULLS found their way to the state in December. Both birds were winter plumaged adults and each remained exactly five days. Jim Sinclair discovered the first bird at the Red Rock Reservoir dam on the morning of the 13th, and it drew admiring birders to that location through the 17th. Two weeks later, Loren and Babs Padelford reported a second bird from Lake Manawa at Council Bluffs on the 27th, and until the 31st, when it departed, it was often the only gull on the lake.

An adult BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE was a concurrent attraction with the ROSS'S GULL below the Red Rock dam, and two other adult KITTIWAKES were reported, one on the Cedar River near Cedar Falls December 20-22, and the other on the Mississippi River at Muscatine, February 12-14. Other unusual GULLS on the Mississippi River at the Quad Cities and Muscatine after the first of the year included GREAT BLACK-BACKED, LESSER BLACK-BACKED, CALIFORNIA, MEW, GLAUCOUS, and THAYER'S. The Des Moines River reservoirs also attract GULLS, and this winter was no exception, with LESSER BLACK-BACKED, GLAUCOUS, and THAYER'S at Saylorville, and along with those birds, Red Rock had ICELAND and MEW GULLS.

Very unusual were February reports of a COMMON RAVEN, which was a flyover at Lake Manawa on the 5th, and a SPRAGUE'S PIPIT in O'Brien County on the 22nd. EURASIAN COLLARED DOVES, first discovered in the state in August of 1997, continued to be seen at Grinnell all winter, with as many as three birds sometimes

present at the country club golf course location. VARIED THRUSHES appeared in January at feeders in West Branch and near Decorah. A large flock of COMMON REDPOLLS at the Red Rock Reservoir in February contained one HOARY REDPOLL, and they were most likely the same birds originally seen there in November.

PRAIRIE FALCONS were reported throughout the winter, with one spending the season harassing pigeons at Sioux City, and others were seen briefly in Wright and Clay Counties.

There was a rash of seven SNOWY OWL sightings from December 24-26, with birds reported from Hamilton, Wright, and Scott Counties, and single observations from Cerro Gordo County on January 25, and Clay County on February 8. A FERRUGINOUS HAWK was seen near the SNOWY OWL in Cerro Gordo County January 25.

There had never been a mid-winter record of SUMMER TANAGER in Iowa, but in January and February, one visited the feeder of Mary Noble in Iowa City. A number of semi-hardy birds lingered into the winter with numerous reports of BROWN THRASHER, CATBIRD, and HERMIT THRUSH. BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERONS were present at Saylorville on December 21 and at Cedar Lake in Cedar Rapids on January 2, while a DICKCISSEL was seen north of Burlington on January 18.

All four OLDSQUAW sightings came from the latter half of December on the Mississippi River at Dubuque and Ft. Madison, and at the Red Rock Reservoir and West Okoboji Lake.

Single SAW-WHET OWLS were detected in much greater numbers than usual from almost every corner of the state throughout the season, but five birds in one small area at Amana was interesting. Similarly, TRUMPETER and MUTE SWANS were widely reported in the state throughout the winter.

Finally, the fall eruption of WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILLS continued into the winter with flocks widely reported over the state, especially in cemeterys



**Iowa Birdline**  
**319/338-9881**



and in hemlock trees. The 150 birds in the Lake View Cemetery in Dickinson County is noteworthy.

## REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Ann Barker, chair  
Carol Thompson  
Pam Allen

We propose the following slate of officers and directors for election at the spring meeting:

SECRETARY: Jane Clark

TREASURER:

BOARD OF DIRECTORS,  
TWO-YEAR TERMS:

Dan Dorrance  
Jim Scheib

BOARD OF DIRECTORS, REMAINDER OF  
CAROL THOMPSON'S TERM:

Phil Walsh



## A PLEA FROM THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE....

Despite months of valiant efforts, we have been unable to find anyone to agree to accept the job of IOU treasurer if elected. We know without a doubt that there are many members who would be quite capable of serving our organization very well in this capacity. It's only a matter of finding one who is willing.

The good news is that, thanks to our

very helpful Board of Directors, the job of the treasurer is now significantly less time-consuming than it has been in the past. At its last meeting, the Board voted to appoint a registrar to handle membership records and mailing labels. The treasurer, then, will be responsible only for the financial matters of the organization and membership renewal notices.

We will need to have a nominee from the floor for treasurer at the spring meeting. We implore all members to seriously consider the possibility of accepting the responsibility for this job. The board has gone the extra mile to make this a more equitable position; now we simply need the membership to do its part.

If you can help, or have any ideas of another member who might, please contact any of the following:

Ann Barker: (319) 289-3175  
*e-mail: lostcreek1@aol.com*  
Carol Thompson: (319) 338-5361  
*e-mail: cthompson@igsb.uiowa.edu*  
Pam Allen (515) 223-0563  
*e-mail: ra0711S@acad.drake.edu*  
Mark Proescholdt (515) 496-5219

## Rare Bird Hosts

A procedure has been set up whereby hosts of rare birds can be recognized and thanked by the IOU. Every year willing folks let us into their homes to see rare species. Now we will honor them with a certificate of thanks and a one year membership to the IOU. Please send your nominations to any board member or officer of the IOU and they will be acted on at the subsequent board meeting.



# IOWA SPRING BIRD COUNT IS YOUR COUNTY COUNTED?

The 6th annual Iowa Spring Bird Count will be held on Saturday, May 9th, 1998. It is always held on the same day, and according to the same rules, as the North American Migration Count, so that totals may be submitted to both counts. Each county is a count territory, and in the interest of expanding our knowledge of spring migration in the state, we would like to have participation from as many of Iowa's 99 counties as possible. A county compiler organizes the count within the county, assigns territories to be covered, and compiles the results, which are then submitted to the state compiler, and published in Iowa Bird Life.

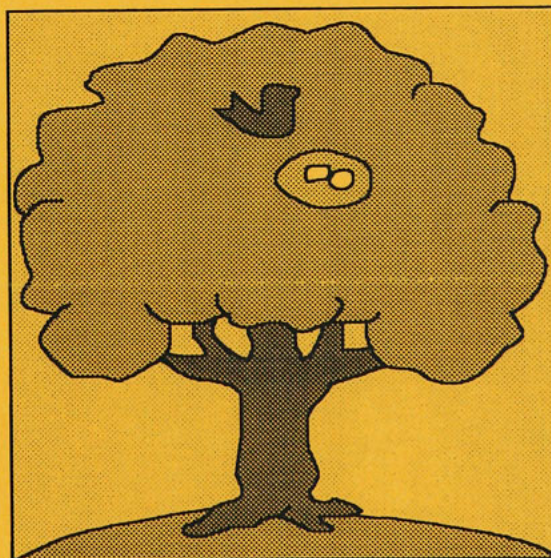
The following counties have compilers assigned, and will be participating: Allamakee, Boone, Bremer, Clay, Clinton, Dallas, Des Moines, Fremont, Jackson, Jefferson, Johnson, Scott, and Warren.

The other 86 counties need compilers to organize a count for them! Can you help? Compilers may do the count themselves, without any help, or may organize parties to cover assigned territories. One person can act as compiler for more than one county. Even if only one individual counts birds for part of a day, results can be submitted and will contribute to the data base. A count may be done as a county Big Day, or as a competition for a fund raiser for your local birding club. Use your imagination! If you can act as compiler for a county not listed above, please contact me at the address below, and the forms will be sent to you. Thanks!

Ann Barker  
25368 - 250th Street  
Princeton, Iowa 52768-9720  
(319) 289-3175  
e-mail: [lostcreek1@aol.com](mailto:lostcreek1@aol.com)

## State & County Bird Lists

Members are encouraged to submit their state and county bird lists for the 1997 calendar year. Submission can be for one or all of the counties. The threshold for the state is 200 species and 150 for counties. This is a life long total and covers all species of wild birds positively recorded within the county or state. It is hoped that everyone will be able to submit a total of 150 species for their home county. One does not need to be a resident of Iowa, just an IOU member. Records through 1997 are due by May 25 and should be sent to Mary Lou Petersen, 235 McClellan Blvd., Davenport, IA 52803



**Co-Editors**  
**Hank & Linda Zaletel**  
1928 6th St.  
Nevada, IA 50201  
515/382-5427  
e-mail: [madowl@nevia.net](mailto:madowl@nevia.net)



# Natural History Week at Iowa Lakeside Laboratory

Natural History Week at Iowa Lakeside Laboratory will be August 10-14, 1998. Seven courses will be offered this year for anyone who is interested in learning more about Iowa's natural history and resources. The courses are as follows:

- Amphibians and Reptiles (Michael Lannoo)
- Nature Photography (Thomas Rosburg)
- Mushrooms and Other Fungi (Lois Tiffany)
- Fish Biology (Neil Bernstein)
- Prairies and Prairie Restoration (Paul Christiansen)
- Life in Lakes (Ken Lang)
- SCUBA Driving (Jerome Symons)

These courses meet Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. so only one Natural History Week course can be taken. Enrollment in these courses is limited to 10 students. One credit can be obtained by registering either through one of the regents universities or Iowa Lakes Community College. It is also possible to take these courses on a non-credit basis. Room and board will be available at Lakeside during Natural History Week at the normal student rates.

Another short course that should be of particular interest to members of the Iowa Ornithologists Union, Birds and Birding, will be offered June 22-26, 1998, at Lakeside. This course will be taught by Neil Bernstein from Mount Mercy College.

Other courses being offered during the summer of 1998 are--First Term (May 25 or May 31-June 19): Archaeology, Ecology, Environmental Geology of Northwest Iowa, Fish Ecology, Wetland Ecology; Second Term (June 21-July 17): Aquatic Biology, Ecology and Systematics of Diatoms, Evolution, Plant Taxonomy, Prairie Ecology; Third Term (July 19-August 7 or 14): Freshwater Invertebrates, Field Mycology, Landscape Approaches to Environmental Planning, Plant-Animal Interactions, Soil Genesis and Landscape Relationships.

The Laboratory is located on 140 acres on the shores of West Okoboji Lake. All Lakeside courses offer hands-on learning. Most of the campus is a nature preserve that is used as a living classroom in Lakeside courses. A large part of the campus has been restored to prairie. The Iowa Great Lakes region has some of the best natural areas remaining in the state, and this makes it an ideal location for studying prairies, lakes, rivers, wetlands, fens, and forests and their flora and fauna.

For more information about Lakeside, please contact the Lakeside Administrative Office (131 Bessey Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011-1020; phone 515-294-2488; email [lakeside@iastate.edu](mailto:lakeside@iastate.edu)) or log onto our Web site (<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~Lakeside>). The complete 1998 *Iowa Lakeside Laboratory Bulletin* and registration form is on the Web.





## Come Celebrate with Big Bluestem and Iowa Ornithologists' Union

This year is the Big Bluestem Audubon Society's 30th Anniversary and the Iowa Ornithologists' Union's 75th Anniversary. Help us celebrate by attending the Spring Meeting on May 15-17, 1998. The place is the Willow Residence Hall of Iowa State University. Great birding trips, interesting speakers, wonderful fellowship and an air of celebration will be the focus of the weekend. The event kicks off with an informal registration and get-together as well as a field trip to view "birds on weather radar" on Friday evening.

On Saturday and Sunday mornings there will be field trips to sites especially chosen as the best birding areas around. They include: Ledges State Park, Saylorville Reservoir, Colo Ponds and Hendrickson Marsh, Bob Pyle Marsh and Little Wall Lake, and Brookside Park.

After the field trip on Saturday, talks on topics such as "Partners in Flight", "Birds on Weather Radar", and "Before the LOU" will capture birders attention. During the meeting copies of the newly updated "Birds of Story County" will be on sale. Saturday evening a banquet will be held with keynote speaker Jim Herkert sharing his expertise on "Grassland Bird Conservation in Illinois". To round out the evening we will share some Anniversary Cake.

Sunday morning enjoy a field trip and afterward meet at McFarland Park for the Noon meal. For those wanting to linger, the park offers more great birding.

May 15	Friday	7-9 pm	Willow Residence Hall - social hour - field trip to National Weather Service to view radar
May 16	Saturday	6:00-6:45 am	Continental breakfast Willow Residence Hall
		7:00-11:30 am	Field trips
		11:30-1:00	Lunch on your own
		1:00-5:00 pm	Programs and IOU business meeting
		6:30 pm	Banquet Willow Residence Hall
		7:30 pm	Banquet speaker Jim Herkert
May 17	Sunday	6:00-6:45 am	Continental breakfast Willow Residence Hall
		7:00-11:30 pm	Field trips
		12:00 Noon	Lunch and compilation McFarland Park







## Motels

Heartland Inn, I-35 & Hwy. 30	1 / 800-334-3277
Best Western Starlite Village, E. 13th & I-35	1 / 800-903-0009
Hampton Inn, I-35 & Hwy. 30	1 / 800-426-7866
Ames Thrift Lodge, 229 S Duff	1 / 800-525-9055

## Camping

Hickory Grove Park, Colo — Ledges State Park, Boone — Whispering Oaks, Story City

### Registration

Registration includes IOU-75th anniversary cloth baseball cap with log	\$12.00	.....	\$	_____
<i>Breakfasts</i> - fruit, rolls, pastries, coffee, juices	\$3.00	.....	Sat.....\$	_____
			Sun.....\$	_____
<i>Banquet</i> - ham, roast beef, vegetable, salad, cake, ice cream	\$10.00	.....	\$	_____
<i>Lunch</i> - grilled chicken breast sandwich, salad, vegetable	\$7.50	.....	\$	_____
<b>Total</b>		.....	\$	_____

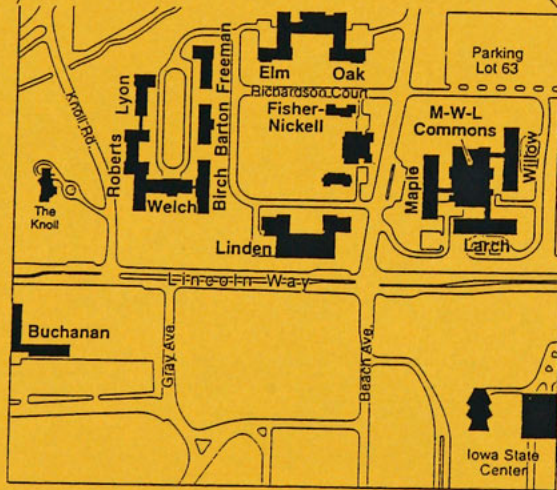
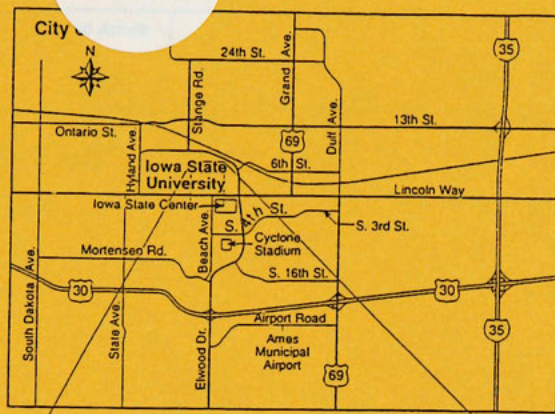
Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to **Big Bluestem Audubon**. Deadline for meal registration is **Wednesday, May 13**. Mail registrations to: Sherry Dragula, 2121 Burnett Ave., Ames, IA 50010, 515/233-1532, e-mail: mpwskd@aol.com





Willow  
 ⇐ Residence  
 Hall

Iowa Ornithologists' Union  
 4024 Arkansas Drive  
 Ames, IA 50014



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

