



I.O.U. News

Iowa Ornithologists' Union Newsletter

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Bird-Watching Facility Discussions to Continue

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"Not in my backyard," was an attitude expressed by a sizable minority of the board of directors of the Cedar County Historical Society May 24 as they discussed an offer of a Johnson County group to site an unusual bird-watching facility on property owned by the organization.

However, a majority approved continuing discussion of the proposal and a committee was named to work with the Johnson County group. The proposal could result in the development of rural property southeast of Buchanan into a major educational project.

Barbara Boyle, representing the Johnson County Songbird Project (JCSP), described the organization's environmental and fieldwork projects. Their most recent project has been the acquisition of the Sherman Chimney Swift Tower.

Boyle traced the history of Althea R. Sherman, internationally recognized ornithologist from National, north of Dubuque, who had intended the tower and surrounding property, a dooryard laboratory she called her "Acre of Birds," to remain a bird sanctuary, with her house providing for a caretaker.

However, relatives and the society to which she had made the bequest, contested the will. The land was sold, the home razed and personal possessions, records and correspondence were sold or burned.

The tower, for watching the life cycle of

Chimney Swifts, was rescued and moved to Harper's Ferry. The JCSP is committed to the preservation and future protection of the Sherman tower and the written materials, as well as the vision and intentions of the important Iowa woman.

The goals include an older, 2-story farmhouse which would be harmonious with the historical and cultural significance of the tower. It must be in an area with trees and habitat suitable for the establishment of a bird sanctuary. The house and/or outbuildings would serve as home for a caretaker for historical and educational programs and events, community meeting space and, eventually, an educational museum.

Boyle explained to the group that the organization has been operating on a \$12,500 a year budget and has the backing of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and anticipate raising \$300,000 for tower acquisition and staffing. At present it has 250 to 300 members and was organized in 1990. She assured the group that because Miss Sherman had national contacts there would be many sources of funding forthcoming.

Offers of restoration services have been offered and the building has already qualified for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. This is unusual, because it is seldom granted to a building which has not acquired a permanent home.

At present the tower is in Iowa City in protected storage, waiting for a home. It was found to be in remarkably good condition when it was winched up and moved.

Using slides and descriptions, Boyle gave the group a picture of the 28-foot tall, 9-foot square tower built for the nesting and observation of Chimney Swifts. The wooden tower has 4 levels and a winding staircase



from bottom to top, enclosing a 2-foot square artificial chimney. It has doors, windows and peepholes, which allowed Sherman to watch, weigh, measure and draw the nesting swifts.

For 18 years she studied the swifts in the tower. Over 400 hand-written journal pages record the observations. They have been microfilmed, along with other documents. Hundreds of visitors, from all over the world, were led up the tower's steps to see the swifts.

The tower was built in 1915, and used by Miss Sherman until she died in 1943.

In looking for a farmstead and natural area Boyle said the JCSP feels it has found the ideal location to expand its educational focus.

"You folks contacted us," she said, showing photos of the Sherman house and the house on what is known as the Larkin property on the Cedar River, which was recently bequeathed to the Cedar County Historical Society.

Following the 45 minute presentation, Jeff Kaufmann, president of the Cedar County Historical Society, opened the extensive discussion.

Don Stout said he would hate to see the group rush in, "because we have a jewel there." He said he could see so many problems and when more people (some bad ones) are allowed on to the property the problems multiply.

Lee Eberly suggested electronic surveillance, but Stout was not reassured, saying that there have always been hunters....

Edie Ford said she was apprehensive about a group which had such a fine base and influential members and feared what a limited partnership would mean. The basic premise is great, but she "fears an entanglement."

Kaufmann said he wanted to argue about the good part and asked if there was any other way to get 100's of Cedar county kids onto the property. He added that something the Smithsonian Institution considered remarkable should be give consideration.

Joyce Hamiel said there was the potential of being in the position of a minnow with a whale and being overwhelmed.

Stout reiterated that it should continue as a farm and timber, as it had for the past 150 years.

Sue Eberly said it was time to think concretely and that the opportunity was there to have a tremendous working relationship.

Kurt Voparil said "we have a beautiful natural resource" and that he had been all over its acres of bluebells and wildflowers. "Every penny is going to go into the house and yard," he added and "for the next 20 years we can't do anything else. We have to have outside help and can't just sit there. It's one of the nicest educational tools in the county with rock, waterfront, timber...."

Belle Hinkhouse wanted to know how the group could control the public and "what do we have to give up to them (JCSP)?"

Martin Fay suggested a long term lease. John Witmer said he would be concerned about accepting restoration of the house from the group. Sharon Lynch said, "They just want to help us." On a motion by Fay to explore a partnership, a secret ballot was taken. There were 14 in favor, 8 against and one abstention.

Discussion continued after the passage of the proposition. Hamiel suggested nature trails and Voparil said an old railroad bed to the river would be ideal. He said there are other, endless possibilities.

Fay reminded the group that the JCSP is still looking at other sites, though it was admitted they had been fruitlessly looking for several years.

There are 176 acres of farmland on the Larkin property, but most of the 540 acres is in forest reserve.

Stout reiterated that because it is a historic farm they have to carry on farming and the kids in the county have opportunities for other places to observe.

Sue Eberly said the historical group is not doing much in the school and that is could do so much.

For further reading:

Taylor, H.J. 1943. Iowa's Woman
Ornithologist: Althea Rosina Sherman,
1853-1943. Iowa Bird Life 13: 19-35.

Wood, S.E. 1989. Althea Sherman and the
Birds of Prairie and Dooryard.
Palimpsest 70: 165-184



1996 Spring Meeting by Mary Kuhlman, Ft. Dodge

The IOU Spring Meeting was held May 17-19, 1995 in Burlington. Chuck Fuller was in charge of all the local arrangements. The weekend began with a social gathering Friday night at the Ramada Inn.

Beautiful spring weather added to the enjoyment of the field trips held both Saturday and Sunday mornings. Destinations included Starr's Cave, Lacey Keosauqua State Park, Shimek State Forest and Geode State Park.

Members enjoyed four informative programs on Saturday afternoon. The first two speakers examined the two new species entering Iowa in this area of the state. Kelly McKay spoke about the range expansion of the Fish Crow and Chuck Fuller described the growing numbers of the Eurasian Tree Sparrow as, "our claim to fame in Des Moines County."

Binoculars are, "a magical kind of technology," stated Michael Porter as he spoke on the future of birding optics. "They give us superhuman viewing powers without batteries!" Members were intrigued with being able to try new binoculars that included image stabilization technology. He predicted that optics will soon include video and computer technology to link the image with location and identification information.

Ann Johnson demonstrated the rapidly changing and expanding possibilities of Birding on the Web. She provided members with a list of e-mail addresses for our own computer birding.

At the IOU business meeting, election of officers was held. Jim Scheib became treasurer and Mary Kuhlman was elected secretary. Dan Dorrance and Beth Brown were elected to the Board of Directors.

The Saturday night banquet featured photographer Ty Smedes with a program called, "A Bird for All Seasons." He showed beautiful slides of birds he chose to represent each season of the year in Iowa.

The weekend concluded when field trip participants gathered at Starr's Cave

Preserve for the traditional Sunday picnic lunch and compilation. Special thanks to all who helped make the weekend so successful. The fall meeting will be Sept. 6-8 at the Lime Creek Nature Center near Mason City.

Attendance: Ed & Jean Allgood, Eugene & Eloise Armstrong, Ann Barker, Carol & Galin Berrier, Barb Bettis, Aaron Brees, Betty Brown, Joan Buwalda, Bob & John Cecil, Jane Clark, Ray Cummings, Jim Dinsmore, Karen Disbrow, Dan Dorrance, Jean Eige, Joan & Vergil Eness, Janet Eppard, Carolyn Fischer, Nicole & Tim Fenske-Crawford, Micheal & Paul Freiberg, Chuck Fuller, Ellen Fuller, Jane Fuller, Jim Fuller, Judy Garton, Bud Gode, Albert & Rita Goranson, Maridel Jackson, Ann Johnson, Tom Johnson, Tom Kent, Edna Kirse, Bernie & Cal Knight, Cathy Konrad, Mary & Rick Kuhlman, Beth McBride, Francis Moore, Ron Muilenburg, Kurt Nelson, Dixie Overton, Mary Lou & Pete Petersen, Diane & Micheal Porter, Beth & Mark Proescholdt, Russell Reisz, Ava Reynolds, John Rutenbeck, Jim Scheib, Hilda Sickels, Ty Smedes, Linda Tasler, Richard Tetrault, Carol Thompson, Janice Walter, Russ Widner, Charlie Underwood, Hank Zaletel.

The Birds of Story County

Steve Dinsmore and Hank Zaletel have recently published *The Birds of Story County*. Funded by the Big Bluestem Audubon of Ames, it is an annotated list of the 300 species of birds recorded in Story County through May of 1996. It includes information about seasonal abundance, breeding and historical status, early and late dates, and a summary of some of the popular birding spots in Story County.

The book sells for \$3.00. It is available by sending a check for \$4.50 (book plus postage and handling) to Big Bluestem Audubon, in care of Hank Zaletel, 1928 6th St. Nevada, IA 50201-1126.



Iowa Ornithologists' Union Fall Meeting
Lime Creek Nature Center
Mason City, Iowa
September 6-8, 1996

North Central Iowa's natural areas offer an interesting mix of prairie, timber and wetlands. Several newly acquired wetland areas in Cerro Gordo and Worth County look promising. Some of this year's nesting species have included Least Bittern, Virginia Rail, Loggerhead Shrike, Gray Partridge and Black-crowned Night-Heron. This year also saw the release of 4 Peregrine Falcons at the Holnam Cement Plant adjacent to the Lime Creek Nature Center.

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| Friday, Sept. 6
6:30 - 9:00 P.M. | Registration, Social Gathering at Lime Creek Nature Center |
| Sat., Sept. 7
6:30 A.M. | Breakfast on your own
Field trips depart from Lime Creek Nature Center Parking Lot |
| 12:00 Noon | Lunch at Lime Creek Nature Center |
| 1:00 - 3:00 P.M. | Workshops
Jim Bangma - Sea Gulls Made Simple
Tom Kent - The Iowa List Past and Future
North Iowa Nature Club - Birding in North Central Iowa |
| 3:30 P.M. | Business Meeting |
| 6:30 P.M. | Banquet at the Prime 'N Wine Restaurant - 300 4th St. SW
(Highway 18 W), Mason City. Program: <u>New Jersey's Jim Bangma</u>
<u>In Search of the Rare and Elusive Ibisbill; Birding in India</u> |
| Sunday, Sept. 8
6:30 A.M. | Breakfast on your own.
Field trips depart from the Lime Creek Nature Center Parking Lot. |
| 12:00 Noon | Picnic lunch with compilation at Lime Creek Nature Center |



Motels

Camping

Ashley Inn, Hwy 65 S. 515/423-9471
 Colonial Inn, Hwy 65 S. 515/423-6325
 Comfort Inn, 410 5th SW 515/423-4444
 Days Inn, 2301 4th SW 515/424-0210
 Hawkeye Motel, Hwy 65 N 515/423-4826
 Hanford Inn, Hwy 18 W 515/424-9494
 Holiday Inn, Hwy 18 W 515/423-1640
 Mason City Thriftlodge, 24 5th SW 515/424-2910
 Willow Inn, Hwy 18 W 515/423-8221

MacNider Campgrounds,
 Mason City
 Wilkinson Pioneer Park,
 Rock Falls
 Lime Creek Nature Center
 (primitive camping only)



Registration

Name _____	Registration	\$5.00
Address _____	Saturday Lunch	\$6.00
Phone _____	Saturday Banquet	\$12.00
	Sunday Lunch	\$6.00

Make checks payable to North Iowa Nature Club and send to Curt Nelson, 22675 Spruce Ave., Mason City, IA 50401. Phone: 515/696-5600.

Registration Deadline: September 3, 1996.

For Information call: Rita Gorenson - 515/423-1699
 Carolyn Fischer - 515/423-9909



Adopt-A-Book

by Pam Allen, West Des Moines

Please help the I.O.U. purchase 781 copies of the Breeding Bird Atlas. They will be distributed to Iowa middle/high schools and county conservation boards. To make your donation, send your check for \$11.50 per book (payable to IOU) to Jim Scheib, 10 Longview Knoll, Iowa City, IA 52240.



NEW I.O.U. Decals

The new I.O.U. decal features our logo. They are made of removable plastic and adhere to the inside of car windows or glass. Each logo costs \$1.00 and can be obtained by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to Jim Scheib, 10 Longview Knoll, Iowa City, IA 52240. Checks should be made payable to I.O.U.

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