



I.O.U. News

Iowa Ornithologists' Union Newsletter

Winter 1995 • Volume 11 Number 4

Economic Development Grant for Bluebird Trail

By Michele Mihalovich

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Messenger

Sac City - Five years ago you wouldn't have recognized Tom Lake. His looks haven't changed much - but his attitude toward nature sure has. Lake and his buddies loved to hunt and fish - and make fun of Larry Stone, an outdoor reporter with the Des Moines Register. "He wasn't like the other sports reporters at the Register," said 46 year old Lake. "He was always writing about wildflowers and stuff like that."

But five years ago, something happened to Lake that changed the way he thought about Mother Nature - he saw a bluebird. Lake, who lives in Wall Lake but owns Lake's Tree Farm in Sac City, said he was out fishing for walleye by the Raccoon River when the bluebird swished past his face. "I had never seen one before in my life," he said. And he's never been hunting since.

Lake isn't alone. Few people have been lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the eastern bluebird, with its sky-blue back and rusty brown chest. They started becoming a rare sight around Iowa in the 1930's because the birds insist on nesting in cavity structures such as rotten-out fenceposts or trees. But humans tend to insist on removing "unsightly" dead trees and have moved toward using metal fenceposts.



House sparrows and starlings, which were imported from Europe, dramatically contributed to the bluebird's decline. Those birds, also cavity-nesters, are more aggressive than bluebirds and usually win the fight over which gets to occupy a suitable home.

Widespread, and often careless, pesticide use on crops also affected the eastern bluebird numbers in the Midwest. But thanks to Lake and other concerned bluebird lovers in Sac and Carroll Counties, the bird may soon be as common a sight as the robin.

Lake went to see Brian Gibson with the Resource Conservation and Development office in Sac City. Gibson wrote a proposal asking for a \$5,000 Rural Development Through Forestry (RDTF) grant to establish a bluebird trail.

"They wrote back to me saying they couldn't see how a bluebird trail would have any kind of positive economic impact," said Gibson. "So I wrote a second proposal - and this time I went on a tangent."

In the proposal, he described how a Bluebird Trail along the Sauk Rail Trail and the Raccoon River Road could be the site for an annual Bluebird Festival. "This has been done in other parts of the country, generating millions of dollars. We could draw people in from hundreds and thousands of miles away."

The trails also will include a series of butterfly gardens, interpretive stations and workshops. "We already have several assets in the area," said Gibson. "The Sauk Rail Trail is the only existing trail system linking two state parks. The 33-mile trail runs from Black Hawk Lake in Lake View to Swan Lake in Carroll. It's a safe off-road trail where people already hike, bike, cross-country ski and jog."

Gibson asked for a \$25,000 grant the second time - and this time, he got it. An additional \$25,000 will be matched locally. The Carroll Builders Association and the Sac City Kiwanis built the 700 cedar bluebird houses. Lake said about 180 houses have been set up along the trails. "Most of them are located along the Raccoon River Road now. We hope to get more volunteers to set up and help monitor the other bluebird houses."

Once all the boxes are put up, Lake said he will need about eight people to check on the boxes spaced 100 yards apart. Basically, the monitors need to "evict" unwanted guests like sparrows and check on the progress and safety of bluebird nests, eggs and chicks.

The Times Herald in Carroll donated metal sheets used to print their newspaper. The sheets are wrapped around the post holding up the bluebird house so that raccoons, cats and other predators can't get to the house.

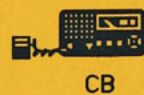
The bluebirds began arriving in March and Lake has been keeping a close eye on the parents and their chicks. He's watched the entire cycle: bluebirds selecting a home; the female laying one egg a day until she has at least four eggs; watching the male bringing occasional insect snacks to his mate who is busy sitting on the eggs; faint chirps from the newborn chicks; lots of activity from parents feeding their young; changing from fuzzy little chicks to feathered ones learning to fly.

"I've had so many people come up to me and say they have never seen a bluebird," said Lake, who enjoys telling folks the best box to check or the best area to look. He said it's very exciting when people see their first bluebird.

Lake has big dreams for the eastern bluebird. "We hope to organize a statewide bluebird society and host the North American Bluebird Society's annual meeting. We want to be known, someday, as the bluebird capitol of the world."

Another Birding Tool by Gerald White, Muscatine

The purpose of this article is to develop an interest in designating a CB channel as the official IOU channel. The channel could be monitored by birders that wanted to seek or share information about birds in the state. The use of the channel would be on a voluntary basis and would not require any funding by the IOU. A favorable vote at the Spring Meeting would give us one more tool to use in our search for birds.



A couple of obvious uses would be to use the CB radio on a stake out of rare birds or during automobile convoys to birding areas. When we have a group of birders scattered around a lake in pursuit of a bird, it's not unusual for someone to spot a second interesting bird. Wouldn't it be nice to have that information before you drive off on your return home? A simple radio call would alert everyone within three or four miles of recent developments. It isn't necessary to have a CB handle or use jargon in our case. A person could simply ask if there are any birders standing by, then carry on a normal conversation relative to the subject at hand. If you want to identify yourself, you could use your name. If I were to choose not to broadcast my name, I would call myself "Muscatine", it wouldn't take much to figure out who I was. As mentioned before, it would be a personal choice to monitor the radio

If you have an old radio, it's a simple task to rig it for temporary use. I have mine fitted with a power cord that plugs into the cigarette lighter, the cord is long enough to allow the radio to rest on the front seat. My magnetic base antenna mounts on the roof without any clamps or screws. Another choice would be to use a portable. They also come with power cords for the lighter and adapters to use an outside antenna. The power cord would save on batteries and the outside antenna would increase transmitting range.

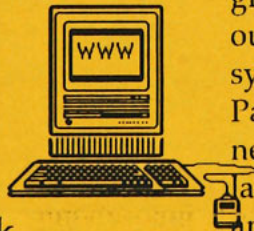


The cost for used radios, especially for the twenty-three channel models, is very cheap since the fad has passed. Many can be found at auctions or yard sales. A used antenna is harder to find, so it would probably be best to purchase it new. They have antennas fitted with a coil that permits the length to be reasonably short. If it is only a foot or so long, it would probably limit the radios broadcast range. If you think the portable sounds like the route for yourself, I would recommend Maxon as a brand name. It is priced in a range that makes it attractive for occasional use.

In conclusion, I should think it would be painless to designate a channel between one and twenty-three. It should be noted that channel nine is reserved for REAC and nineteen is used heavily by the truckers.

Birding on the World Wide Web

by Ann Johnson, Norwalk



The IOU now has presence on the Internet. With Internet usage growing exponentially, this is rapidly becoming a great way to receive current information on birding around the world. The "Bird Iowa" page is still in its infancy but will continue to grow as time and resources allow.

To find our page, use the following URL address: <http://storm.edu/~birding/index.html>. While you're there, be sure to check out some of the other links provided. The U.S geographical guide is crawling with great information for travelers.

If you have anything to contribute, please send or e-mail to Ann Johnson 77634.221@compuserve.com. If anyone else has an e-mail address and would like to be included in the list of Iowa contacts, please send it along.

Many thanks to Simpson College for making server space available to the Iowa birding community.

Notes From The Editors

We usually don't add many personal notes in the I.O.U. News but we thought we would reflect on 12 years of putting out this newsletter. We have always had a MacIntosh computer in our home and our first one is a dinosaur these days. We still have that one and it's on its second hard drive. The first years were full of text importing and a lot of cut and pasting of artwork. As we look back, each of those first issues had a different font type or were designed just a little differently. There was not much in the way of continuity.

As we learned the tricks of the trade, improvements were made in the newsletters. In 1993 we redesigned the newsletter to its current form. But then our old computer began giving us problems. So last year we sacrificed our kitchen remodeling for a new computer system. We upgraded our Mac, upgraded our Pagemaker program that we use to create the newsletter, purchased a scanner and a new laser printer. It felt good to be able to sit down and produce the newsletter in one place. The last two issues seem to have been the hardest. Many glitches and bugs seemed to crop up. We couldn't get the printer to print the IOU logo, so it was back to paste ups. After much consternation, we finally figured out what was wrong. We bought more memory for the printer and Voila, the whole newsletter printed on our new printer. It's wonderful to sit down and be able to design and print the newsletter all at once. As we sit here tonight and marvel at the wonders of technology, it's a nice feeling to know that we are keeping up. As for the new kitchen...it can wait, besides, I (Linda), don't cook anyway!

Hank & Linda Zaletel, Editors
1928 6th St.
Nevada, IA 50201-1126
515/382-5427
BirdHank@AOL.com
MadOwl@AOL.com





1996 IOU Field Trips

By Ann Johnson, Norwalk

April 14th - Southwest Iowa with Babs and Loren Padelford. Will be looking for migrating shorebirds (remember last year's Ruff?) and early arriving passerines.

April 27th - Sweet Marsh with Francis Moore. Explore one of Iowa's best birding spots with one of Iowa's best birders.

September 21st - Snake Creek Marsh. Once again we will search for the elusive Yellow Rail. Past trips have yielded Sharp-tailed and LeConte's Sparrows and Merlin.

November 16th - Northeast Iowa with Mark Proescholdt. Target species will be numbers of migrating Tundra Swans on the Mississippi River and Golden Eagles arriving at their winter roost along the Upper Iowa River.

Watch for specifics on each of these trips in upcoming newsletters. Details will also be available on the Internet's World Wide Web - <http://storm.edu/~birding/index.html>. Jim Fuller will also have current announcements of field trips on the Birdline.

Field Trip Committee

The Field Trip Committee has been ably run by Ann Johnson and others since its inception several years ago. Several of the members have indicated that they would like to take a break after this year. I would like to hear from those of you that would be interested in working on this committee. I believe much of next year's agenda is already set at least to places. Please contact me if you are willing to serve on this committee. Carol Thompson, 1116 Muscatine Ave., Iowa City, 52240-5500, 319/338-5361.

Heard on the Birdline

Sept. 15 - Nov. 15
by Jim Fuller, Iowa City



Cellular

Many of the birds previously considered to be rare, have become rather widely report in the fall. These include the three Scoter species, Surf, Black, and White-winged, Western and Red-necked Grebes, and Pacific and Red-throated Loons. There were fifteen Scoter reports during the two months, including a hat trick of all three species in Linn County on November 3. Four Pacific Loons were reported across the state, all in a narrow window from October 26 - November 3, and Red-throated Loons were at the Saylorville Reservoir and Pleasant Creek Recreation Area in Linn County in November.

The outstanding sightings were a juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper that John Rutenbeck and Chuck Fuller observed north of Burlington on October 13, and a Clark's Grebe found by Chris Edwards and Allen Martin, that stayed at Pleasant Creek Recreation Area from November 12-14. Other exceptional reports were a drake Eurasian Wigeon that showed up at the visitor's center at DeSoto NWR on November 3, and the Red Phalarope reports that came from the upper end of the Saylorville Reservoir from



September 19 through October 27. It is not known, but is likely that there were multiple birds involved. Also unusual were the two hummingbirds visiting feeders in Cedar Rapids in November. One was a *Selasphorus* (Sp.), most likely an immature male Rufous, and the other was an immature male Ruby-throated or Black-chinned, most likely a Ruby-throated.

Reports of September 24 from Lake Manawa at Council Bluffs included a Jaeger (Sp.) and a Black-legged Kittiwake. The Kittiwake was easy to find there through October 4. Yellow Rails were more widely seen than usual, with September and October reports from Snake Creek Marsh in Greene County, the Runnells area, and Johnson County.

The only other waterfowl report to mention was an Oldsquaw at Hallet Quarry near Ames on October 31. Shorebirds of note included a Red Knot at Saylorville from September 28 - October 4, and American Avocets in Polk, Des Moines, and Lee Counties, the latter as late as October 30 at Heron Bend Conservation Area.

Snowy Egrets were late at Union Slough NWR and in Jasper County in early October, while a Sandhill Crane was seen at the Amana Lily Lake on October 30. A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was a one-day wonder on October 16 in Dickinson County.

The parade of rare gulls started with up to three juvenile Sabine's Gulls at the Saylorville Reservoir in late September. First-year California and adult Laughing Gull were found at the Runnells area on October 3. Two more juvenile Sabine's Gulls were spotted at Blackhawk Lake in Sac County, and at least one stayed through mid-October. A Mew Gull appeared at Lake Rathbun on November 4, and a first-year Glaucous Gull was found at Blackhawk Lake on November 12.

Reports of winter visitants included single Common Redpolls in Polk and Clayton Counties on October 28 and November 11, an Evening Grosbeak at Mason City on November 4, and a pair of Varied Thrushes at Waterloo on November 11, and a female Varied Thrush at Cedar Rapids on November 11-15.



1995 Bird Feeder Survey

There was no analysis done of the 1995 Bird Feeder data. The Non-Game Program of the Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources did not have the \$500 necessary to have the material keypunched at Iowa State University. It is the editors hope that the board of the IOU will authorize the expenditure of funds to tabulate and analyze both the 1995 and 1996 survey results.

IOU People

G. Homer Rinehart, 84, of Marshalltown, died October 18, 1995. Homer was a long-time member of the IOU and of the Central Iowa Ornithologists of Marshalltown.

Dr. Bery Engebretsen, executive director of Primary Health Care Inc. at Broadlawns Medical Center in Des Moines, was given the Samuel U. Rogers Achievement Award in Chicago on Sept. 10. The award is given to a primary care doctor who exemplifies excellence in the provision of health care "and devotion to the needs of the medically underserved and minority populations," according to a statement from the Iowa/Nebraska Primary Care Association.



Extended Snow Goose Hunting Season

by Jim Dinsmore, Ames

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources recently approved a two week late winter hunting season for Snow Geese. The season will only affect the southern half of Iowa (south of Interstate 80).

There, Snow Goose can be hunted from 24 February to 10 March 1996. This is the first "spring" waterfowl hunting season in Iowa since the early 1900s. Snow Geese have had fairly high nesting success in recent years, and their populations have increased. The larger populations of geese have strained the food resources near the nesting grounds and, as a result, the geese have destroyed much of the vegetation near those areas.

This loss of vegetation has had a detrimental effect on populations of Canada Geese that nest in the same area. The high numbers of Snow Geese also increase the risk of huge dieoffs due to disease; such risks are especially great during migration or on the wintering grounds when the geese are concentrated. For birders, this new hunting season means that they will have to be aware of hunters during this two-week period and use caution, especially on areas like Riverton and Forney Lake where large numbers of Snow Geese commonly congregate in spring migration.

Coming Dates

Jan. 11, Thurs. - Carl Kurtz photographer and naturalist rm. 2532 Vet Med, ISU, Ames 7:30 p.m.

Jan. 16, Tues. - Our Quest for our 500th Life Bird, Pam & Reid Allen, Westminster Church, Beaver & Franklin, Des Moines, 7:15 p.m.

Feb. 20, Tues. - World Series of Birding, Ann Johnson, Westminster Church, Beaver & Franklin, Des Moines, 7:15 p.m.

Iowa Wildlife Viewing Guide

The full-color Iowa Wildlife Viewing Guide is now available. It contains information on 77 of the state's best viewing locations. The book describes landscapes and wildlife typical of Iowa's four main viewing areas, the Loess Hills, the Prairie Pothole Region, the rugged Northeast Plateau, and the Heartland.

Falcon Press published the book. All of the authors are IOU members including Jim and Steve Dinsmore, Bruce Ehresman of the DNR Wildlife Diversity Program and Laura Jackson formerly the state, DNR non-game biologist.

To order the guide, send a check or money order for \$10.95 payable to the Iowa Wildlife Diversity Program to: Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources, Wallace State Office Bldg., Des Moines, IA 50319-0034.

\$1.00 from the sale of each book goes to wildlife conservation efforts in Iowa.



Future IOU Meetings

**Burlington, Ramada Inn,
May 18-20, 1996**

**Mason City,
Sept. 6-8, 1996**

**Tri-State with Nebraska and South
Dakota, Sioux City area,
Spring 1997**

**Iowa City,
Fall 1997**



Christmas Bird Counts

Red Rock	Sat., Dec. 16	Ann Johnson	515/961-2002
Bremer	Sat., Dec. 16	Francis Moore	319/232-0217
Rathbun	Sat., Dec. 16	Mary Montgomery	515/856-6947
Shenandoah	Sat., Dec. 16	Barb Cunningham	712/246-1203
Ames	Sat., Dec. 16	Dave Edwards	515/292-3790
Cedar Rapids	Sat., Dec. 16	Weir Nelson	319/848-4846
Burlington	Sat., Dec. 16	Chuck Fuller	319/753-0710
Marshalltown	Sat., Dec. 16	Ed Savage	515/752-0105
Quad Cities	Sun., Dec. 17	Pete Petersen	319/355-7051
Cedar Falls/Wat'loo	Sun., Dec. 17	Francis Moore	319/232-0217
Saylorville	Sun., Dec. 17	Steve Dinsmore	515/292-3152
Iowa City	Sun., Dec. 17	Tom Kent	319/337-5231
Lost Nation	Mon., Dec. 18	Mark Roberts	319/847-7202
Keokuk	Mon., Dec. 18	Bob Cecil	319/277-5709
Jamaica	Tues., Dec. 19	Ray Cummins	515/856-3518
Eldora	Wed. Dec. 20	Ramona Sommerlot	515/486-5422.
Princeton	Thus., Dec. 21	Pete Petersen	319/355-7051
Clinton	Fri., Dec. 22	Pete Petersen	319/355-7051
Decorah	Sat., Dec. 23	Dennis Carter	319/382-3754
Des Moines	Sat., Dec. 23	Dennis Thompson	515/254-0837
Sioux City	Sat., Dec. 23	Bob Livermore	712/239-3954
Muscatine	Sat., Dec. 23	Pete Petersen	319/355-7051
Lamoni	Sat., Dec. 23	Dan Long	515/784-6833
DeSoto	Sat, Dec. 23	Mindy Sheets	712/642-2772
Yellow River	Wed., Dec. 27	Darwin Koenig	712/448-2254
Andalusia	Wed., Dec. 27	Pete Petersen	319/355-7051
North Linn	Wed., Dec. 27	Weir Nelson	319/848-4846
Walnut Creek	Sat., Dec. 30	Ann Johnson	515/961-2002
Spirit Lake	Sat., Dec. 30	Lee Schoenewe	712/262-8194
Grinnell	Sat., Dec. 30	Bob VanErsveldes	515/236-6600
Boone	Sat., Dec. 30	Mark Widrlechner	515/233-1532
Westfield	Tues., Jan. 2	Larry Farmer	712/568-2940

GOOD BIRDING IN 1996



BIRDFEEDER SURVEY JANUARY 25-28, 1996

Please fill out carefully. Feel free to copy the form for friends and patrons. Thank you and enjoy yourselves!

1. Name _____
- 2A. Address _____
- 2B. County _____ 2C. City _____ 2D. Zip _____
3. The feeder survey period this year runs from *Thursday, January 25th to Sunday, January 28th*.
Count birds on two consecutive days only. Please record which days you counted birds for us in the space below.
Check one: ___ Thursday (1/25) and Friday (1/26),
 ___ Friday (1/26) and Saturday (1/27), or
 ___ Saturday (1/27) and Sunday (1/28).
4. Is your feeder in Town (including suburbs) or in the Country? Circle T or C.
5. Check the ONE description which best describes the area within a 2-block circle around your feeder:
 ___ suburban, houses with shrubs and small trees but few trees wider than 20 inches.
 ___ suburban bordered by: (circle 1) timber, grass, field or row crop.
 ___ town, neighborhood has many mature shade and street trees.
 ___ downtown with mostly buildings, sidewalks, roads, parking lots, high rises
 ___ pasture
 ___ row crop (corn, beans, etc.)
 ___ timber
 ___ farmstead with mature trees and shrubs around house.
6. Type and number of feeders: ___ Thistle, ___ Sunflower(only), ___ Fruit, ___ Safflower, ___ Peanuts, ___ Mixed seed,
 ___ Peanut Butter, ___ Suet, ___ Cracked Sunflower, ___ Corn, ___ Millet(only), ___ unfrozen water,
 other _____
7. On what date did you start feeding during 1995-96? About _____
8. Comments or additional description of your feeder or yard:

HIGHEST NUMBER SEEN FOR EACH SPECIES DURING TWO CONSECUTIVE DAYS

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ___ Ring-necked Pheasant | ___ Tree Sparrow (American) |
| ___ Rock Dove (Common Pigeon) | ___ Song Sparrow |
| ___ Mourning Dove | ___ White-throated Sparrow |
| ___ Red-headed Woodpecker | ___ White-crowned Sparrow |
| ___ Red-bellied Woodpecker | ___ Harris' Sparrow |
| ___ Downy Woodpecker | ___ Dark-eyed Junco (All races) |
| ___ Hairy Woodpecker | ___ Red-winged Blackbird |
| ___ Flicker (All races) | ___ Grackle (Common) |
| ___ Blue Jay | ___ Brown-headed Cowbird |
| ___ Crow (American) | ___ Purple Finch |
| ___ Black-capped Chickadee | ___ Common Redpoll |
| ___ Tufted Titmouse | ___ Pine Siskin |
| ___ Red-breasted Nuthatch | ___ Goldfinch American |
| ___ White-breasted Nuthatch | ___ Evening Grosbeak |
| ___ Brown Creeper | ___ House (English) Sparrow |
| ___ Robin (American) | ___ House Finch |
| ___ Cedar Waxwing | ___ (other) _____ |
| ___ Starling (European) | ___ (other) _____ |
| ___ Cardinal (Northern) | ___ (other) _____ |

___ TOTAL DIFFERENT SPECIES SEEN

- ___ I want to receive the free Wildl. Diver. News. (NEW SUBSCRIBERS ONLY)
- ___ I would like information about the Iowa Ornithologists Union which is a statewide bird organization.
- ___ If you see a rare or unusual bird, please report it to the Iowa birdline 319-338-9881.

**1996 WINTER
BIRD FEEDER SURVEY**

**SPONSORED BY
THE IOWA ORNITHOLOGIST'S UNION**

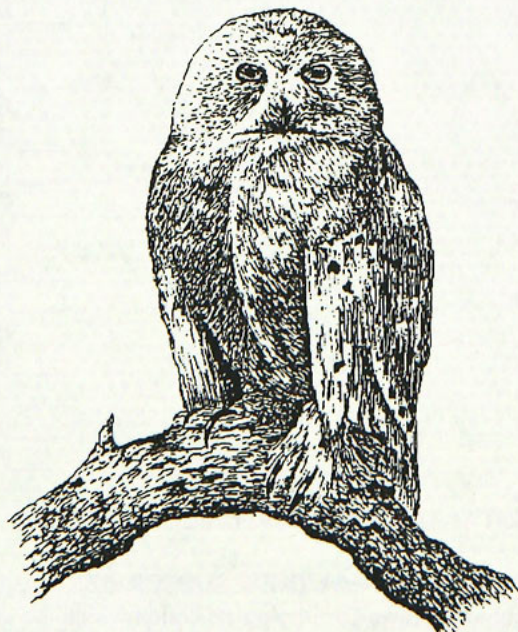
AND THE IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCE'S NONGAME PROGRAM

On two consecutive days during January 25-28, 1996 observe your feeder and using this form, describe your feeder and record the birds that visited you. In the space provided, list the highest number of each species that you saw together at any one time. For example, if you saw 10 juncos at 9:00, 11 at 12:00 and 7 at 4:00, the number you should record is 11. If males and females can be distinguished (cardinals, downy woodpecker etc.) record the combined total. For example, if you saw 3 male cardinals at 11:00 then 1 male and 2 females at 2:00, record 5 cardinals--the highest count for the males and the highest count for the females combined. Count only on the two consecutive days and record only the birds that you see at your feeder, under your feeder, or in the trees around your feeder. Do not count birds which just flew past your house and did not use your feeder area. We want information only about birds influenced by your feeders. If you cannot get an exact count, record your best estimate. An honest estimate is far more useful than 'ump-teen' or 'too many to count.'

Mail the completed form to me by February 11, 1996:

**R. J. Hollis
3351 Lower West Branch Road
Iowa City, IA 52245**

If you would like a personal reply, please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope and be patient; it may take 12 months before I can get back to you. Look for results in the Wildlife Diversity News and the I.O.U. newsletter.



New I.O.U. Decals

The new I.O.U. decal features our logo. They are made of removable plastic that adhere to the inside of car windows or glass. Each logo cost \$1.00 and can be obtained by sending a self-addressed stamped envelop to Pam Allen, 1601 Pleasant St., West Des Moines, IA 50265-2331. Checks should be made payable to I.O.U.



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 Pam Allen, 1601 Pleasant St., West Des Moines, IA 50265-2331.



Iowa Ornithologists' Union
4024 Arkansas Drive
Ames, IA 50014



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Iowa City IA 52246-3519

