



I.O.U. News

Iowa Ornithologists' Union Newsletter

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Pelicans Return to Iowa's Lakes

by Judy Juenger

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Dolliver - Ungainly. Graceful. A loner. Familial. The dominant figure of the sky. A fleeting image crossing the celestial blue. The American white pelican is all of these. An he has returned.

With the advent of spring, observers may view this enigma of the avian world at Tuttle Lake on the border near Dolliver.

Lisa Hemesath, wildlife diversity biologist with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in Des Moines, said the flock living at Tuttle Lake is actually part of a much larger colony which roosts at Heron Lake in western Minnesota. Pelicans are on the increase in Iowa even though they do not breed there.

While flocks may contain from 200 or 300 pairs of birds to a reported 1,000 pairs at Union Slough State Park near Bancroft, colonies of pelicans may number in the many

thousand of pairs.

James Dinsmore, a professor of animal ecology and an ornithologist with Iowa State University in Ames, said the largest colony in the United States, at Jamestown, N.D., may have as many as 10,000 pairs.

Once sought heavily by those involved in the plume trade of the 1800s, and threatened by DDT and other chemicals during the 1960s, pelicans have rebounded and grown to a population of about 100,000 in North America.

White pelicans may have nested at one time in Iowa, but have roosted since in Minnesota, where there are more undisturbed island areas with an abundance of food the birds prefer, Dinsmore said.

He said Heron Lake is inhabited by the pelicans because it is a marshy area surrounded by many private landowners. The situation appeals to the birds' isolation from other creatures. More open waters are used by boaters and does not appeal to the birds, the professor said.

Pelicans do not build nests in the trees. Instead, they cover a small depression in the earth with some branches and lay their eggs in



the nest. Because pelicans prefer the isolation of islands, natural predators such as wolves and foxes do not bother the nests. But gulls, which also like to inhabit islands, will eat pelican eggs or the hatchlings, Dinsmore said.

Pelicans also lose young to hot weather and each other. The maternal instinct in the birds only extends to their own children; any other young pelican that wanders into the wrong nest runs the risk of being killed.

Pelicans lay one to three eggs that take about 35 days to incubate. After two months, the young are ready to leave the nests with their parents.

Male and female pelicans care for their young equally. Dinsmore said the birds have been known to fly 50 miles from their nests in search of food. After scooping up lunch in their expandable gullets, the birds return to the nest. Their young stick their beaks and sometimes their entire heads into their parents' bills to pick out fish. Pelicans do not necessarily regurgitate food to feed their young, Dinsmore said.

Pelicans reach maturity when they are two or three years old. At maturity, they are ready for mating. Pelicans grow knobs on their bills during breeding season.

"Some sort of sexual adornment," Dinsmore said. The knob stays on the bill for about one and one-half months.

People who spend winters in the south may be familiar with brown pelicans, which can be found along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts and in California. White pelicans, which are native to America, winter along the Gulf Coast and fly north as the seasons change. The birds may fly as far north as the Dakotas and into the southern Canadian provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

With a wing span of nearly eight feet, white pelicans hold a distinction among area birds. "They would be the largest flying bird in Minnesota for wing span," Dinsmore said.

Seeing that tremendous span of blindingly white feathers in the sky thrills the Iowa State teacher.

"They're just spectacular that way," he

said.

Although a dominant visual force when flying horizontally, the birds virtually disappear against a bright blue sky when they bank vertically. Dinsmore said many of his students do not believe him when he tells them the birds "disappear" during flight. So when Dinsmore takes them on outings to watch the birds, his students are delighted to witness the "disappearance."

Unlike other birds, pelicans prefer to herd fish and scoop them up with their bills rather than dive from the air and grab a fish from the water. Hemesath said pelicans form semicircles and herd fish to one location. After several hours, when enough fish have been rounded up, the birds begin almost rhythmically dipping their bills into water, taking out tadpoles, bullheads and other "trashy fish," Dinsmore said.



Burke Scholarship

Myrle Burk, a long-time life I.O.U. member and former secretary-treasurer who died in 1992, established a scholarship fund with the Iowa Academy of Science to help students with an interest in ornithology.

It is anticipated that about four \$750 scholarships will be awarded in 1997. Students attending any Iowa college or university or Iowa residents attending a university outside of Iowa and with a demonstrated interest in ornithology are eligible to apply.

Applicants must have at least a 3.0 grade average in their college work. The deadline for application is 1 February. Application materials are available from Jim Dinsmore, Dept. of Animal Ecology, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011.

If you know of students who meet the above criteria, you are encouraged to notify them of this opportunity or to tell Jim of their potential interest. As part of this award, they will also be given a one-year membership in the Iowa Ornithologists' Union.



Late Breaking News

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Iowa Winter Bird Feeder Survey Carol Thompson, Iowa City

There have been some recent difficulties with the Winter Bird Feeder Survey. Because of personnel and budget limitations, the last two years of data has not yet been entered into the database. At the spring IOU meeting, the IOU agreed to fund the data entry. However, the forms need to be coded prior to data entry and IDNR does not have personnel for this task. So at our IOU fall board meeting it was decided that the IOU would explore the possibility of taking over this project. A committee consisting of Rick Hollis, Bud Gode, and Karen Disbrow has been designated to look into the future of this endeavor. This will include developing potential mechanisms for data entry and data analysis, including the possibility of automated forms. I would like to get some more people involved in this, so if you have an interest in working on this let me know.

There have been some questions regarding data analysis. Currently there is an individual working with Rick on statistical analysis of the data. In addition, the IOU has received a proposal for a project from ISU which we will consider at our next meeting.

We will collect the data for this winter (Jan. 1997) since it is felt that it would be better not to have a break in the data if we decide to continue. So please fill out the forms included with this issue.

Myrle Burk Awards

Four graduate students studying various aspects of ornithology recently received Myrle Burk scholarships for 1996. The awardees are:

David Horn - David is a Ph. D. student in the Department of Animal Ecology at Iowa State University. He did his M.S. work at the University of Mississippi and now is studying landscape ecology of nest predation in North Dakota. The study also includes intensive work on the mammalian predators and is funded by Ducks Unlimited.

William Norris - Bill is a Ph. D. student in the Department of Botany at Iowa State University. He also did his M.S. work at Iowa State. His Ph. D. work is on the effect of the quality of woodland habitats and their use by neo-tropical migrants in northeastern Iowa. The study is funded by The Nature Conservancy and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Brenda Peltz - Brenda is a M.S. student in the Department of Biology at the University of Northern Iowa. She did her B.S. work at Northern Iowa. Her study is on the vocalizations of Bobolinks.

Wendy Reed - Wendy is a Ph. D. student in the Department of Zoology and Genetics at Iowa State University. Wendy did her B.S. at Kalamazoo College in Michigan. She is studying the effects of energy investment on survival of young American Coots. She is doing her work in eastern South Dakota.





Christmas Bird Counts



Sat.	Dec. 14	Cedar Rapids	Gail Barels	319/373-9653
Fri.	Dec. 20	Lost Nation	Mark Roberts	319/847-7202
Fri.	Dec. 20	Jamaica	Ray Cummins	515/856-3518
Sat.	Dec. 21	Red Rock	Ann Johnson	515/961-2002
Sat.	Dec. 21	Marshalltown	Ed Savage	515/752-0105
Sat.	Dec. 21	Ames	Dave Edwards	515/292-3790
Sat.	Dec. 21	Sioux City	Bob Livermore	712/239-3954
Sat.	Dec. 21	Bremer	Francis Moore	319/232-0217
Sat.	Dec. 21	Burlington	Chuck Fuller	319/753-0710
Sat.	Dec. 21	Centerville	Ray Cummins	515/856-3518
Sat.	Dec. 21	Spirit Lake	Lee Schoenewe	712/262-8194
Sat.	Dec. 21	Lamoni	Dan Long	515/784-6833
Sun.	Dec. 22	Saylorville	Steve Dinsmore	515/292-3152
Sun.	Dec. 22	Waterloo	Francis Moore	319/232-0217
Sun.	Dec. 22	Davenport	Pete Petersen	319/323-2520
Sun.	Dec. 22	Iowa City	Tom Kent	319/337-5231
Mon.	Dec. 23	Decorah	Dennis Carter	319/382-3754
Mon.	Dec. 23	Keokuk	Bob Cecil	515/277-5709
Mon.	Dec. 23	Clinton	Pete Petersen	319/323-2520
Fri.	Dec. 27	Oakville	Pete Petersen	319/323-2520
Sat.	Dec. 28	Walnut Creek	Ann Johnson	515/961-2002
Sat.	Dec. 28	Muscatine	Pete Petersen	319/323-2520
Sat.	Dec. 28	Grinnell	Bob VanErsvelde	515/236-6600
Sat.	Dec. 28	Yellow River	Darwin Koenig	712/448-2254
Sat.	Dec. 28	No. Linn	Gail Barels	319/373-9653
Sat.	Dec. 28	Des Moines	Dennis Thompson	515/254-0837
Sun.	Dec. 29	Buffalo	Pete Petersen	319/323-2520
Mon.	Dec. 30	Princeton	Pete Petersen	319/323-2520
Wed.	Jan. 1	Boone	Mark Widrlechner	515/233-1532
Sat.	Jan. 4	Shenandoah	Barb Cunningham	712/246-1203
	Jan. ???	Westfield	Larry Farmer	712/568-2940



BIRDFEEDER SURVEY JANUARY 23-26, 1997

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 23rd to Sunday, January 26th. Count birds on two consecutive days only. Please record which days you counted birds for us in the space below.
Check one: Thursday (1/23) and Friday (1/24),
 Friday (1/24) and Saturday (1/25), or
 Saturday (1/25) and Sunday (1/26).
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 1996-97? About _____
8. Comments or additional description of your feeder or yard: _____

HIGHEST NUMBER SEEN FOR EACH SPECIES DURING TWO CONSECUTIVE DAYS

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

Total Different Species Seen

- I would like to receive the free *Wildlife Diversity 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 at (319) 338-9881.

1997 WINTER BIRD FEEDER SURVEY

SPONSORED BY THE IOWA ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION AND
THE IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES NONGAME PROGRAM

On two consecutive days during January 23-26, 1997 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 woodpeckers, 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 “umpteen” or “too many to count”.

Mail the completed form to me by February 12, 1997:

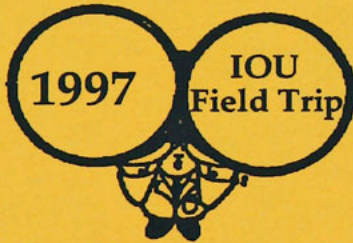
R. J. Hollis
3351 Lower West Branch Road
Iowa City, IA 52245

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 *Wildlife Diversity News* and the I.O.U. Newsletter.



IOU Winter Field Trip

The first IOU field trip of the year will depart for Duluth, Minnesota 13-16 February, 1997. The trip will be led by Jim Fuller and will have a limited number of participants. Target species include Great Gray and Hawk Owl, Bohemian Waxwing, Pine Grosbeak and other northern species. Contact Jim Fuller at 319/338-3561 for further information.



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

Iowa Ornithologists' Union
4025 Arkansas Drive
Ames, IA 50014



Birds in Iowa

By Thomas H. Kent and James J. Dinsmore

Birds in Iowa describes the frequency and distribution of species of birds that have been recorded in Iowa through 1995, including some data from 1996. The status including nesting status, a chart with relative frequency by thirds of months and early and late dates, and maps of county locations for selected species provide a convenient overview of common species. For rare species, more detail and maps of records by county are provided. For Accidental species, all accepted records are listed. For Casual and some rare Regular species, the number of records by year and month are charted. The seasonal and geographic occurrence of each species is summarized in the text. Species' ranges and vagrancy patterns are described, and changes in abundance are provided when appropriate. Introductory chapters describe the state list, geography and birding areas, and history of Iowa ornithology. The intent of this book is to provide a thorough review of bird records in Iowa and serve as a framework for additional study. Birds in Iowa is 400 pages, hardbound, and will be available in December for \$30.00. For additional information call Tom Kent at 319/337-5231.



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

