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“SOME NEEDED BIRD OBSERVATIONS IN IOWA”

WALTER W. BENNETT

President Iowa Ornithologists' Union

Since Dr. Rudolph M. Anderson wrote “The Birds of Iowa” in the year 1907 there have been many changes in conditions over the state. Population has greatly increased, rural districts have become much more thickly settled, sloughs have been drained, woods have been felled, and spots of untouched wild prairie are now a curiosity.

These have greatly changed our bird life. So have other influences. Surprising it is that Dr. Anderson’s splendid book, which is still the authoritative publication for the state, has so well stood the test of time, yet twenty-three years since its issuance cannot do other than necessitate revisions. Some day soon an ornithologist will issue a new book to be entitled, “The Birds of Iowa” portraying the present bird life of the state.

No one man can observe enough about birds in Iowa to write it alone. He has not enough legs or enough automobiles to cover the whole state in field trips. He has neither time nor money sufficient to do it. So a work such as that must result from a concerted effort of many bird observers in every corner of the region over many years. It is the purpose of this writer to here enter a plea for citizens of Iowa to energetically enter into active study of its bird life in all aspects. If several in each county would make continual surveys and records it would not be long until any author would be able to give Iowans an up-to-date authoritative book of instruction on her birds.

Accurate observations are needed. In this day of field identifications without shooting a specimen such things as poor light, reflections on binoculars and other influences cause many mistakes. Perhaps more specimens should be shot by qualified scientists who know what to kill and when to do it. No one should report a Lesser Snow Goose, Acadian Flycatcher or Purple Grackle without knowing what they are talking about; if they cannot obtain a specimen, writing down a field description as they see the bird

will sometimes suffice provided it isn't copied out of a book but is written in the observer's own words while looking at the bird. Others should see it if possible. A corps of accurate observers is needed.

An ornithologist should know what is in need of substantiation at all times. By studying Dr. Anderson's book and other literature of Iowa's birds he will learn this. Then when he discovers valuable facts he can arrange authoritative substantiation. This is just as important as it is to be accurate.

There are now many persons over the state well qualified to give assistance in working out problems. A letter to one of them will get help and they should be consulted often. Among those whom the author knows will be glad to help are:

Prof. T. C. Stephens, Morningside College, Sioux City,
Walter M. Rosen, Ogden,
A. J. Palas, Des Moines,
Walter W. Bennett, Sioux City,

Prof. Stephens is editor of the *Wilson Bulletin* and the other three have been presidents of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union.

Observations of Iowa people do not accomplish much unless the valuable ones are published so future workers may benefit from the record. Too many fine discoveries are lost to oblivion. The best place to publish such things is in the only publication purely Iowan in character, the *I. O. U. Bulletin* published by the Iowa Ornithologists Union. Other good ones are the *Wilson Bulletin*, *Bird Lore*, and *The Auk*.

All of the above points would greatly assist in a revised publication of Iowa bird life such as the population of the state is more and more demanding as bird study becomes more popular.

Then observers frequently ask what are some of our unsolved problems to work on. There are so many that cannot be enumerated here but a few are as follows:

Watch the spread of the Starling, already reported, as it extends over the state.

What is our relative proportion of Gambel's and White-crowned Sparrows?

What is the status of the Henslow, Leconte, Baird or Henslow Sparrows and which ones nest in the state?

What can be done to keep the Prairie Chickens in Iowa?

A series of specimens should be obtained of longspurs in the winter to establish relative abundance of the species.

Is an undue abundance of cats in certain parts of the state decreasing bird life of those areas?

What records can be obtained of the following species in Iowa: Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker, Western Blue Grosbeak, Brewer Blackbird, Western Grebe, California Gull, Richardson Owl, Cackling Goose?

As a matter of ornithological history, what records can be located of the former existence of the Eskimo Curlew, Trumpeter Swan, Whooping Crane and Wild Turkey?

Can more records be obtained of the Black and the Yellow Rail in the state?

Work out the relative abundance of the Eastern and Western Meadowlarks.

To what extent is the Ring-necked Pheasant disturbing the bird life of Iowa?

All of these problems, and many others of which some are perhaps more important, confront the energetic patience of hundreds of Iowa citizens who wish to cooperate in gathering valuable information for the education of her citizens. And this author wishes to again plead for a fascinating indulgence in such effort.

SIoux CITY, IOWA.