



## Summer of Birds 2021

Final Report

5 February 2022

### Project background and goals

Iowa Young Birders promotes engagement of our natural world and conservation issues by empowering young Iowans to study and enjoy birds and birding. We strive to build young peoples' birding knowledge and skills by offering interactive and educational birding programs in a fun and safe environment. We also hope to foster an interest in birds and birding among young people and provide them with the knowledge and tools to succeed.

Since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, people have increasingly become disconnected with nature, a problem that is most prevalent among youth (Soga and Gaston 2006) and was exacerbated by social distancing due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, finding creative ways of encouraging engagement with the natural world among youth and their families during this time of social distancing is imperative for not only building support for conservation issues, but also for improving public health (Shanahan et al. 2015). During the summer of 2020, with support from Big Bluestem Audubon Society, Des Moines Audubon Society, Iowa Audubon, the Iowa Ornithologists' Union, and Wild Birds Unlimited in Ames, Iowa Young Birders launched a unique summer birding program to encourage youth to spend time outdoors watching birds while social distancing. The success and impact of this unique program prompted us to replicate and expand the effort in 2021.

Through the "Summer of Birds 2021" program, our goals were to 1) encourage self-guided engagement with birds and the outdoors among Iowa youth, 2) educate youth on the different habitat types in Iowa and the birds that use them, with a focus on grasslands, forests, and wetlands, and 3) equip youth with a tool to master identification of Iowa birds by providing a field guide to the first 50 youth that signed up for the program.

### Project impact

A total of 214 youth from 29 Iowa counties (Figure 1) registered for the 2021 Summer of Birds Program, an increase of 44 youth from 2020. Of those that registered, the first 50 received field guides through support from this grant. The age of registered youth ranged from a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 18. The median age of registered youth was 8. Perhaps most surprising, only 4 of the registered youth were current members of Iowa Young Birders and only 27 were youth who participated in the program in 2020. Therefore, **193 youth were brand new to our programs.**

Of the 214 registered youth, 30 logged a total of 457 birding hours and completed 328 bird-related activities (Table 1). The most frequently completed activity by registered youth was reading a book about birds (Table 1). Activities that explored the different habitat types in Iowa (wetlands, forests, and grasslands) were completed 56 times by youth throughout the summer



(Table 1). A total of 13 youth reached the top prize level, either logging 25 birding hours and completing 5 bird-related activities (9) or logging 15 birding hours and completing 10 bird-related activities (4). Youth who reached the top participation level received either a hummingbird feeder or field guide (if they didn't already receive one for registering), and one young birder was drawn to receive a brand-new pair of Vortex Diamondback 10x32 binoculars.

#### Acknowledgements

Funding for this project, for which we are extremely grateful, was provided in part by the Warren B. and Juanita E. Reynolds Fund and Iowa Audubon, Wild Birds Unlimited in Ames, and through generous donations from our members and supporters.

#### Additional project outcomes

Presentations given:

“Summer of Birds: Self-guided engagement with birds and the outdoors”. September 2021.  
Annual Fall Meeting of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union, Centerville, Iowa.

“A fantastic Summer of Birds!”. January 2022. Monthly meeting of the Des Moines Audubon Society, Des Moines, Iowa.

Publications:

Harms, T.M., and N. Grudens-Schuck. Changes in youth knowledge and competency following participation in a novel summer bird-watching program. In preparation for *Natural Sciences Education*.



Figure 1: Locations of youth who participated in the 2021 Summer of Birds Program.

### Summer Birding Program Participants 2021

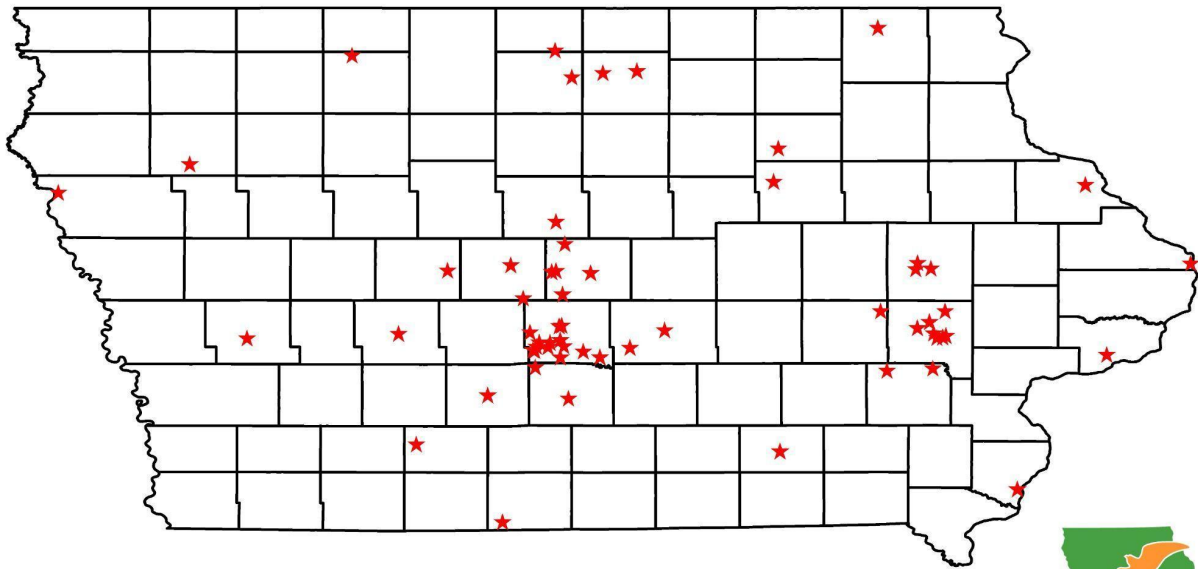




Table 1: Number completed for each Summer Birding Program activity, 2021.

<b><u>Activity</u></b>	<b><u>Number completed</u></b>
Put up a bird feeder in your yard	30
Explore a new natural area	45
Take a friend or family member birding	36
Participate in Iowa Young Birders event	4
Count how many birds you hear in your yard	19
Watch an Iowa Young Birders presentation	4
Sketch a bird online with David Sibley	11
Start a bird list for your yard	20
Start a birding or nature journal	13
Build a Bluebird, Wood Duck, or Bat box	0
Submit an eBird checklist	17
Read a book about birds	46
Visit a wetland and identify two wetland birds	17
Visit a grassland and identify two grassland birds	16
Visit a forest and identify two forest birds	23
Complete one of the Audubon for Kids learning modules	10
Learn about a bird using Birds of the World or eBird	10
<u>Learn the song of a bird using Bird Song Hero</u>	<u>7</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>328</b>