LOESS HILLS BIRD CONSERVATION AREA

The Loess Hills Bird Conservation Area (BCA) is located in the most unique landscape of Iowa, created by windblown loess from the Missouri River bottomland and piled 200-300 feet deep. Once nearly totally covered by prairie, today the Loess Hills’ land cover is a mixture of native prairie, Bur Oak savanna, and woodlands. This BCA contains 94,048 acres in Monona and Harrison counties, of which nearly 19,000 acres are protected by conservation easements or publicly owned.

Bird diversity here is exceptional, with 249 species identified, including 80 Iowa Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Currently, 111 species are known to nest in this BCA’s prairies, savannas, woodlands, and wetlands. This same crucial habitat supplies important bird wintering grounds and migratory stopover sites. Special birds of this area include Wood Thrush, Bell’s Vireo, Whip-poor-will, Red-headed Woodpecker, Grasshopper and Field sparrows, Blue-winged Warbler, and both meadowlark species. The BCA’s western Iowa location makes it a good place to see western bird species that are less often seen elsewhere, like Western Kingbird, Townsend’s Solitaire, and perhaps Lazuli Bunting.

BIRD CONSERVATION AREAS
In recent decades, alarming declines in a large number of species of North American birds have led to the emergence of national and international programs dedicated to the conservation of game and non-game birds. Since 1999, bird conservation organizations and enthusiasts have worked together under an umbrella called the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABC), "conserve all birds in all habitats.” As part of this initiative and in an effort to protect dwindling populations of many Iowa birds, Iowa’s Bird Conservation Area (BCA) program was established by the DNR Wildlife Bureau in 2001.

The present model BCA encompasses at least 10,000 acres of public and/or private lands with 35% or more of the area as key bird habitat. Research suggests that viable bird populations require conservation efforts at a landscape-oriented level. Each BCA should also include a large “core” area (at least 2,000 acres) of protected high-quality habitat. Around this core is both private land and additional public tracts, managed for good bird habitat and at least maintained to be neutral in how they affect bird life.

IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS
The Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program is a global effort initiated by the National Audubon Society to identify and conserve areas that are vital to birds and other biodiversity. Designated IBAs include sites for breeding, wintering, and/or migrating birds. By working to identify and implement conservation strategies, the IBA Program hopes to minimize the effects of habitat degradation and loss on birds and other wildlife. All Iowa BCAs are also considered IBAs.

LOESS HILLS

PLANTS
The Loess Hills contain many unique native prairie species. Bluemont prairies are sprinkled with several colorful milkweed species, as well as Snow-on-the-Mountain, Prairie Larkspur, Fringed Puccoon, Dotted Blazing Star, Locoweed, and Western Purple Coneflower. Interspersed with sprawling Bur Oaks, another unique and threatened Iowa ecosystem - Oak Savanna - includes prairie plants such as Side-oats Grama, Lead Plant, Meadow Rose, Prairie Phlox, and Wild Strawberry.

ANIMALS
Besides birds, this BCA is home to a diverse group of other animals. These include 105 butterfly species, such as the Ottowe, Pawnwe, and Fiery skippers, as well as Monarch and Regal Fritillary. Bumble Bees, Long-horned Bees and Mason Bees are important prairie flower pollinators. While strolling through the prairies, keep an eye open for unique reptiles, such as the Six-lined Racerunner, Bullsnake, and Blue Racer, as well as for small mammals, like the Plains Pocket Mouse, Western Harvest Mouse, and Prairie Vole. After heavy summer rains, listen for the loud quacking call of a most unique amphibian, the Plains Spadefoot. Two toads that may be encountered, also unique to western Iowa, include Woodhouse’s Toad and Great Plains Toad.

PARTNERSHIPS
The Loess Hills Bird Conservation Area is made possible by many partnerships, including: Harrison and Monona County Conservation Boards, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, Iowa Audubon, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Loess Hills Audubon Society, Loess Hills Alliance, Loess Hills Preservation Society, Pheasants Forever, and Iowa Department of Natural Resources.
Bird Checklist for Loess Hills BCA

Iowa Wildlife Action Plan Migratory Species of Greatest Conservation Need

Bird Checklist for Loess Hills BCA

Iowa Wildlife Action Plan Migratory Species of Greatest Conservation Need

- Greater White-fronted Goose
- Snow Goose
- Ross’s Goose
- Canada Goose
- Trumpeter Swan
- Wood Duck
- Gadwall
- American Wigeon
- Mallard
- Blue-winged Teal
- Northern Shoveler
- Green-winged Teal
- Redhead
- Ring-necked Duck
- Lesser Scaup
- Bufflehead
- Common Goldeneye
- Hooded Merganser
- Common Merganser
- Ruddy Duck
- Gray Partridge
- Ring-necked Pheasant
- Sharp-tailed Grouse
- Wild Turkey
- Northern Bobwhite
- Pied-billed Grebe
- American White Pelican
- Double-crested Cormorant
- American Bittern
- Great Blue Heron
- Great Egret
- Cattle Egret
- Green Heron
- Black-crowned Night-heron
- Turkey Vulture
- Osprey
- Mississippi Kite
- Bald Eagle
- Northern Harrier
- Sharp-shinned Hawk
- Cooper’s Hawk
- Northern Goshawk
- Red-shouldered Hawk
- Broad-winged Hawk
- Swainson’s Hawk
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Rough-legged Hawk
- Chuck-will’s-widow
- Eastern Whip-poor-will
- Chimney Swift
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird
- Belted Kingfisher
- Red-headed Woodpecker
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
- Downy Woodpecker
- Hairy Woodpecker
- Northern Flicker
- Pileated Woodpecker
- American Kestrel
- Merlin
- Peregrine Falcon
- Prairie Falcon
- Olive-sided Flycatcher
- Eastern Wood-Pewee
- Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
- Acadian Flycatcher
- Alder Flycatcher
- Willow Flycatcher
- Least Flycatcher
- Eastern Phoebe
- Great Crested Flycatcher
- Western Kingbird
- Eastern Kingbird
- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
- Loggerhead Shrike
- Northern Shrike
- White-eyed Vireo
- Bell’s Vireo
- Yellow-throated Vireo
- Blue-headed Vireo
- Warbling Vireo
- Philadelphia Vireo
- Red-eyed Vireo
- Blue Jay
- American Crow
- Horned Lark
- Purple Martin
- Tree Swallow
- Northern Rough-winged Swallow
- Bank Swallow
- Cliff Swallow
- Barn Swallow
- Black-capped Chickadee
- Tuffed Titmouse
- Red-breasted Nuthatch
- White-breasted Nuthatch
- Brown Creeper
- Carolina Wren
- House Wren
- Winter Wren
- Sage Wren
- Marsh Wren
- Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
- Golden-crowned Kinglet
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- Eastern Bluebird
- Townsend’s Solitaire
- Vireo
- Gray-cheeked Thrush
- Swainson’s Thrush
- Hermit Thrush
- Wood Thrush
- American Robin
- Gray Catbird
- Brown Thrasher
- Northern Mockingbird
- European Starling
- American Pipit
- Cedar Waxwing
- Lapland Longspur
- Smith’s Longspur
- Snow Bunting
- Ovenbird
- Northern Waterthrush
- Louisiana Waterthrush
- Golden-winged Warbler
- Blue-winged Warbler
- Black-and-white Warbler
- Prothonotary Warbler
- Tennessee Warbler
- Orange-crowned Warbler
- Nashville Warbler
- Connecticut Warbler
- Mourning Warbler
- Kentucky Warbler
- Common Yellowthroat
- American Redstart
- Cape May Warbler
- Cerulean Warbler
- Northern Parula
- Magnolia Warbler
- Bay-breasted Warbler
- Blackburnian Warbler
- Yellow Warbler
- Chestnut-sided Warbler
- Blackpoll Warbler
- Black-throated Blue Warbler
- Palm Warbler
- Yellow-rumped Warbler
- Yellow-throated Warbler
- Black-throated Green Warbler
- Canada Warbler
- Wilson’s Warbler
- Yellow-breasted Chat
- Spotted Towhee
- Eastern Towhee
- American Tree Sparrow
- Chipping Sparrow
- Clay-colored Sparrow
- Field Sparrow
- Vesper Sparrow
- Lark Sparrow
- Savannah Sparrow
- Grasshopper Sparrow
- Henslow’s Sparrow
- Le Conte’s Sparrow
- Nelson’s Sparrow
- Fox Sparrow
- Song Sparrow
- Lincoln’s Sparrow
- Swamp Sparrow
- White-throated Sparrow
- Harris’s Sparrow
- White-crowned Sparrow
- Dark-eyed Junco
- Summer Tanager
- Scarlet Tanager
- Northern Cardinal
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak
- Blue Grosbeak
- Indigo Bunting
- Dickcissel
- Bobolink
- Red-winged Blackbird
- Eastern Meadowlark
- Western Meadowlark
- Yellow-headed Blackbird
- Rusty Blackbird
- Brewer’s Blackbird
- Common Grackle
- Great-tailed Grackle
- Brown-headed Cowbird
- Orchard Oriole
- Baltimore Oriole
- Purple Finch
- House Finch
- Red Crossbill
- Common Redpoll
- Pine Siskin
- American Goldfinch
- House Sparrow

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Monona & Harrison Counties

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