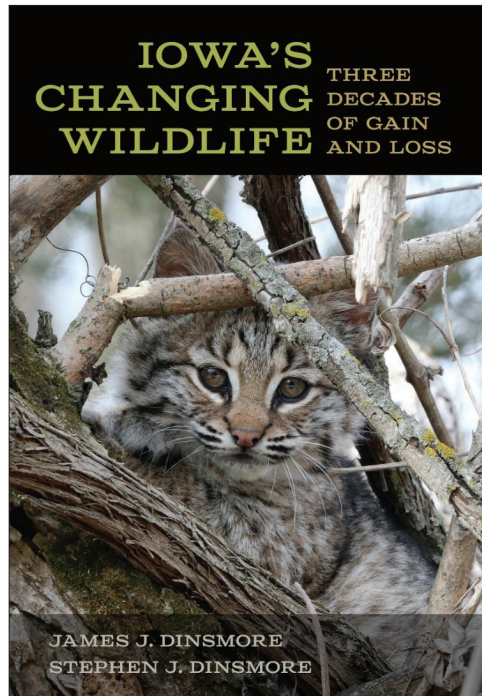


**Iowa's Changing Wildlife: Three Decades of Gain and Loss**, by James J. Dinsmore and Stephen J. Dinsmore. 2023. University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, Iowa, USA. 274 pages. \$30.00 (paperback and eBook). ISBN: 978-1-60938-925-3 (paperback), 978-1-60938-926-0 (eBook).

In *Iowa's Changing Wildlife: Three Decades of Gain and Loss*, the father-son authors provide a thoroughly researched and refreshingly optimistic account of wildlife trends in Iowa from 1990 to 2020. Positioned as a complement to the senior author's 1994 publication, *A Country So Full of Game*, this work is both a scientific resource and a general guide to understanding the history of and recent shifts in Iowa's wildlife populations. While narrowing its focus to 60 species of birds and mammals—primarily those with a history of being hunted or trapped—it achieves a broader narrative of conservation successes and ongoing challenges within the state.



The book's structure closely mirrors its predecessor, systematically examining many of the same species. The addition of groups of recent conservation concern (raptors and bats) and hunting interest (*Zenaida macroura* Linnaeus [Mourning Dove]) expands the focal species list compared to *A Country So Full of Game*, but the parallel between the two books remains strong. Familiarity with the earlier work is not required, as the opening chapter provides a concise summary of Iowa's wildlife before 1990, providing context and setting the stage for the species accounts that follow. As the authors make clear, the book's 1990–2020 focus is particularly fitting, not only because it picks up where the earlier volume left off, but also because it covers a transformative era. The 1980s were a pivotal decade marked by significant challenges and losses that reshaped Iowans' relationships with the land and wildlife. This period also spurred key conservation legislation at both national and state levels—initiatives that laid the groundwork for the stabilization and recovery of Iowa's wildlife populations in the following decades. While *A Country So Full of Game* was a story of loss, with maps marking the last sightings of species extirpated from the state, this book offers a story of recovery, with its maps documenting confirmed sightings, reintroductions, and recent breeding successes. Although not all species have fared well, the authors affectionately describe the past three decades as “very special years for Iowa's wildlife.”

The 20 chapters focused on individual species or species groups provide background information on characteristics such as classification, distribution, and habits, followed by a synthesis of decades of data—sightings reports, harvest records, reintroduction histories, and survey results—to assess their current status and future outlook. The level of detail varies across chapters, reflecting differences in data availability across species. One of the book's key strengths is its thorough synthesis of diverse sources, including scientific stud-

ies, government reports, personal communications, and news releases. The comprehensive documentation of specifics like release sites, harvest trends, and breeding locations makes the work an important resource for biologists. However, the dense presentation of numerical details—dates, population estimates, harvest figures, nesting attempts—can occasionally overwhelm readers. Personal anecdotes sprinkled throughout add warmth and humanity to the data-driven narrative, and these glimpses into the authors' firsthand observations inspire readers to explore Iowa's wildlife for themselves.

The concluding chapters examine the human influences shaping Iowa's wildlife, including demographic shifts, land-use changes, and the role of government agencies, programs, and nonprofit organizations. By connecting these factors to wildlife trends, the authors provide a cohesive overview of Iowa's conservation history while addressing future challenges and opportunities. Their assessment reveals that half of the species featured in the book have stable or increasing populations. This includes some of Iowa's greatest conservation success stories and iconic species, such as *Branta canadensis* Linnaeus (Canada Goose), *Odocoileus virginianus* Zimmermann (White-tailed Deer), *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* Linnaeus (Bald Eagle), *Meleagris gallopavo* Linnaeus (Wild Turkey), and *Lynx rufus* Schreber (Bobcat). However, it would be misleading to focus solely on these gains. The authors report that 20% of the species (12 of the 60) show evidence of population declines, with birds of prey and bats being particularly concerning. Additionally, wildlife species not covered—such as amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates, and other non-game birds and mammals—face additional threats that remain unaddressed here. While acknowledging ongoing and emerging challenges, the book's hopeful tone offers a welcome reprieve from the often bleak narrative of environmental stories. The authors highlight how concerted efforts—by individuals, agencies, and organizations—have made measurable progress in wildlife restoration. Their message of resilience and recovery offers readers a sense of optimism about conservation's potential.

*Iowa's Changing Wildlife: Three Decades of Gain and Loss* is essential reading for anyone interested in wildlife conservation or Iowa's natural history. While occasionally dense with data, the passion and expertise of the authors shine through and offer an engaging and insightful narrative. For readers in Iowa and beyond, this book is a celebration of past conservation successes, a call to action for future stewardship, and an invitation to get outdoors and experience, appreciate, and contribute to the ongoing story of Iowa's wildlife for generations to come.

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#### Literature Cited

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