
The Meadowlark

February 2009

Volume 38 Issue 2

ASO is a Chapter

*of the National Audubon
Society*

*Serving Eastern Nebraska
and Western Iowa*

Grassland Birds of the Platte River Valley

Some of the best-loved birds in our state are those found in grasslands. At times difficult to find because of the cover provided by the grasses, they are rewarding when they pop up and sit upon the waving stalks. Bobolinks, sparrows, Lark Buntings, Eastern and Western Meadowlarks, Dickcissels and Red-wing Blackbirds are some species that favor grassy habitats.

Our presenter at the February 12 general meeting, Dr. Daniel Kim, will talk about his research of grassland birds, specifically the effects of burning and grazing upon avian occurrence and nesting.

Currently Dr. Kim is examining the effects of grassland management on breeding bird communities in the Platte River Valley. Of particular focus is the breeding ecology of Brown-headed Cowbirds in a grassland system.

In the past Dr. Kim researched the community ecology of wintering birds of prey and the potential effects of climate change to birds nesting in the southern Appalachian mountains. He has also worked with the Whooping Crane Trust and banded Saw-whet Owls.

Finding Birds in Omaha Cemeteries - Feb. 21 Field Trip

In the winter we often hear reports of unusual birds such as crossbills in a local cemetery. To for these and others, Jerry Toll will lead us Saturday, February 21, to a few sites in Omaha.

We will meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Westlawn Hillcrest Cemetery entrance parking lot, 5701 Center Street. Two other cemeteries nearby will be our next destinations.

From there we will proceed north to Prospect Hill Cemetery at 33rd and Parker Streets (known as the final resting place for

Originally from Portland, Oregon, Dr. Kim is a faculty member at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He has degrees from the Colorado and Utah State Universities and Texas A&M and has performed post-doctorate work at the University of Tennessee.

Join us on Thursday, February 12, for our regular monthly meeting and to learn about the grassland birds in our state.

The meeting will be held at 7:30 P.M. at the Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances Street (one block south of 45th & Center). The program will be followed by a brief business meeting.

A social hour with coffee and cookies will conclude the evening. Visitors are always welcome at these monthly meetings—bring friends or family members.

many early prominent Omaha citizens).

Our last stop will be Forest Lawn Cemetery in Florence, 7909 Mormon Bridge Road.

Be sure to dress for the weather and bring something hot to drink as well as snacks if you wish. Visitors are welcome. For information, call Jerry Toll, 453-9239.

Birds of Prey and Lead Poisoning: Part II

By Clem Klaphake

In the January issue of *The Meadowlark*, I pointed out how birds of prey are often indicators of environmental problems by using Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, California Condors, and Asian vultures as examples.

The causes of the declines in these species and others have been attributed to agricultural chemicals and lead poisoning. In the case of the California Condor, the lead source is coming from the remains of animals contaminated with fragments of lead bullets. These results are based on years of intensive study that produced a large dataset of information of condor foraging behavior, hunter activity and other lines of study.

the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said, "Until the supply of lead ammunition is completely choked off, it will be really hard to ensure the safety of condors. That is because lead will continue to come in as people hunt around the edges of their territory."

Another example of birds of prey dying of lead poisoning is the Steller's Sea Eagle that primarily lives along the eastern shore of Russia in the Kamchatka Peninsula and migrates south over Sakhalin Island to Hokkaido, the northern island of Japan. This is a huge eagle that ranks with Harpy and Philippine Eagles in size (15_20 pounds and wingspans of 6_8 feet).

The solution to the lead problem is not a complicated or expensive one: the use of non-lead bullets. These bullets are manufactured and readily available as solid, non-fragmenting copper bullets. They are produced and sold in the most common and popular calibers. In California Condor country, hunters are needed to help regulate deer populations as well as to help make food available for the condors. They usually find and consume the remains where hunters have gutted their deer carcasses.

California currently has a ban on the use of lead bullets for killing big game (deer, bighorn sheep, bear, and pronghorns as well as feral pigs and coyotes) in the 2,000 plus square mile condor range. At the end of 2008, the Natural Resources Defense Council, Center for Biological Diversity, and the California Department of Fish and Game came to an agreement to include the prohibition of lead bullets to kill small nuisance animals (rabbits, squirrels, gophers, skunks, opossums, etc). Thus banning lead bullets anywhere in condor country.

This is a good start at eliminating this source of lead. It remains to be seen as to what happens if and when the condors wander outside this designated area. It is not unusual for these birds to travel long distances. In the summer of 2007, I saw 5 California Condors north of Big Sur, California. At that time that particular population of condors had never been seen that far north. Noel Snyder, a retired field biologist for

It just so happens that the Japanese were also having an overpopulation of the sitka deer on Hokkaido Island. In the late 1990's, the Japanese government had encouraged hunters to shoot as many deer as possible. As a result, the hunters took just the choicest parts of the carcasses and left the rest to rot.

There also happened to be a shortage of fish (prime food of the Steller's Sea Eagle) along the coast of Hokkaido. The eagles began to move inland and feed on the deer carcasses. At least 55 of the eagles died of lead poisoning between 1994 and 1999. That is significant because this is a species that doesn't have large numbers to begin with, have a low reproductive rate, and their young take 4_5 years to mature.

In 2001 Japan's Environmental Protection Agency banned the use of lead bullets in firearms. However, lead shot is still used for hunting waterfowl and continues to be an issue. It doesn't take much lead to kill even a big bird like the Steller's Sea Eagle—two lead shotgun pellets, or a shard from a bullet is enough to kill an adult eagle.

I'm not singling out lead or hunting as being the most serious or only threat to birds of prey. There are many others I may write about another time. However, the source of this lead (bullets) can be solved so easily and inexpensively compared to some of the other sources of harm to these birds—namely habitat loss, agricultural chemicals, oil and gas drilling or food source loss.

Art Contest - April 4

By Jackie Scholar

The 2009 Audubon Society of Omaha Student Art Contest is underway. Students from K-12 grades will have the

Introductory Bird

Identification Class

Saturdays: March 14, April 11 and May 2

opportunity to submit hand-drawn artwork focusing on Midwestern or endangered birds. All artwork must be submitted by Saturday, February 28. Awards for excellence and merit will be given for realism, graphic design, or cartooning. All artwork will be hung and on display Saturday, April 4, from 11:00 A.M._4:00 P.M. at the Bellevue University Gordon Lozier Center, 1000 Galvin Road South, Bellevue NE. An awards ceremony will take place at 2:00 P.M.

Rules and other details are posted on the website www.audubon-omaha.org. Questions? Contact Jackie Scholar at 551-5045.

We need help for the following:

1. Receiving the art work at the ASO office on

Friday, February 27: 4:00_6:00 P.M.

Saturday, February 28: 10:00 A.M._4:00 P.M.

2. Hanging of art work at Bellevue University

Friday, April 3: 9:00 A.M._noon.

3. Greeting the public and helping with the ceremony

Saturday, April 4: 10:30 A.M._4:00 P.M.

January 24 Local Feeder

Watch a Success

By Clem Klaphake

The January 24 feeder watch field trip was attended by 15 ASO members. A total of 28 species were tallied. The feeders visited were at Fontenelle Forest and the homes of Kathleen & Bob Rose and Duane & Kathy Schwery. Everyone got good long looks at numerous Pine Siskins, Hairy Woodpeckers, Brown Creepers, Purple Finches, and a single Carolina Wren.

8:00 A.M._Noon — At Fontenelle Forest Nature Center

Admission \$20.00 for all three sessions

Ages 12 and up. This class is limited to 15 participants

With over 50 million `birders' in the U.S, birdwatching is the fastest-growing outdoor activity today.

Led by Clem Klaphake, President of the Audubon Society of Omaha, this class includes local field trips designed to teach you how to identify the birds in your back yard or places you go on vacation.

No prior knowledge of bird identification is needed. To sign up, contact Clem Klaphake at 292-2276 or at ckavian@cox.net

Backyard Bird Count Feb. 13_16

The Great Backyard Bird Count will be held February 13-16, sponsored by the National Audubon Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Participants are to count birds for at least 15 minutes (longer if they wish) in as many places and on as many days—one, two, three or all four) of the count. They are to count the greatest number of individuals of each species seen together at any one time. The location may be the back yard, a park, or another site. A separate list is to be kept for each new day and more than one if the day's counts are in separate locations.

The complete rules are available at www.birdsource.org/gbbc. Instructions are included for reporting one's statistics. Results need to be reported by March 1. Print the form out ahead of time to help in gathering the information.

You can check the web site above for answers to questions you may have, such as "How do I know if I'm counting the same birds over and over?"

Audubon members are asked to recruit

The hosts were very gracious serving us hot coffee, cider, and tea along with snacks on a cold Saturday morning.

In addition to the above locations, several of us stopped at the Plattsmouth cemetery on the way back where we saw 2 Great Horned Owls and a flock of 15 Cedar Waxwings.

others, nonmembers as well as fellow members, to take up this enjoyable activity. We can spread the word and make the 2009 Count bigger than ever. Flyers are available at www.birdsource.org/gbbc. The information submitted is valuable for tracking the species visiting our area in the winter.

"Environment Omaha" and Threats to the Niobrara River

Conservation Committee Report

Environment Omaha

This report will focus on two issues: the first, an effort to enhance the conservation priorities of the City of Omaha. This is called Environment Omaha and is a partnership between the city and the organization Omaha By Design. Some of you may have attended the first open meeting held at the Scott Conference Center on the University of Nebraska-Omaha campus December 4, 2008.

At this meeting, the City Planning Director, Steve Jensen, introduced the concept, goals, and time line for meeting the goals. The intent is to improve the quality of life for Omaha and area citizens by protecting existing natural resources and adding new environmental elements to Omaha's master development plan, and to bring different elements of environmental improvement together in a coordinated effort. Another aim is to make Omaha more attractive to young professionals with strong environmental values.

The five major goals areas of Environment Omaha will be addressed

By Bob Fuchs

Michael Kinsley, a consultant for this project from the Rocky Mountain Institute, gave a keynote speech emphasizing the importance of the Environment Omaha effort, especially to the business community. Sustainability, he said, means using green concepts to reduce business costs to increase profits. Smart growth means limiting unnecessary business expansion and minimizing resource use when expansion is required. Natural capital means recognition of all the value and services local natural areas provide. For example, urban forests reduce urban heat load, retain water, and calm traffic.

After the formal presentations, representatives from all five goal area committees were on hand to take public comment and contact information from those present who wanted to be involved. Several members of ASO were present and talked to committee members. At this time, we do not know how effective this effort will be or how much consideration the committees will give to public input. If you are interested in following the progress of

in this order:

- Natural Environment (to preserve and enhance existing natural areas)
- Urban Form/Transportation (to address sprawl issues and transportation efficiency)
- Building Construction (to address issues of energy efficiency and materials conservation)
- Resource Conservation (to address water, soil and related conservation issues)
- Community Health (to enhance physical and emotional health by encouraging better neighborhood design, pedestrian and bicycle access, and reduction of exposure to environmental toxins).

The process for each goal area begins with information gathering and solicitation of public input, followed by distillation of that input, publication of preliminary objectives, seeding advice from core goal area committee members regarding the objectives, seeking more public input, and submission of a final plan. An 18_ to 24-month time frame is envisioned, with the Natural Environment Committee being first to develop a plan.

Environment Omaha, visit the project website at www.environmentomaha.com.

Threats to the Niobrara River

To discuss the second issue in this report, we revisit the past. There is a new threat to the ecological integrity of the Niobrara River ecosystem in North Central Nebraska. In the 1970's, it took a major effort by conservationists to prevent the flooding of part of the Niobrara Valley east of Valentine by construction of the Norden dam. As you may know, six ecosystems meet in the Niobrara Valley, and it is a treasure of species diversity.

Recently, the Department of Water Resources declared a large section of the Niobrara River fully appropriated for irrigation, meaning that no more wells could be drilled for groundwater near the River and no more water withdrawn directly from the River. The intent was to maintain a certain amount of flow for

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Threats to Niobrara

existing irrigation, drinking water, wildlife and other uses.

The River flows through the Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge, and a portion is a National Wild and Scenic River. When that designation was

instream flow rights to fully or over-appropriated river basins, which effectively would prevent the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission from obtaining flow rights for wildlife conservation.

The overall intent of these two bills is to put the control of Niobrara water resources in the hands of large irrigating landowners.

Please consider contacting these state

approved by Congress, the Niobrara Council was formed to manage the River corridor. This included many more local landowners and other representatives than any other wild and scenic river management entity had at the time.

Now, two bills have been introduced in the Nebraska Legislature that could severely affect the ability to protect the Niobrara. One, LB 666, sponsored by Senators Chris Langemeier (clangemeier@leg.ne.gov) and Deb Fischer (dfischer@leg.ne.gov), would strip away the authority of the Niobrara Council, making it exclusively an advisory group, and would cut funding in half.

The other, LB 438, would prohibit the granting of

Rivers and Wildlife Celebration March 20-22

What could be better than combining the excitement of the Sandhill Cranes' stopover with the Rivers & Wildlife Celebration Friday - Sunday, March 20-22, in Kearney at the Holiday Inn.

For many this is a rite of spring, seeing the vast numbers of cranes in the skies and fields and hearing their wild and exhilarating cries.

The Rivers & Wildlife Celebration is sponsored by Audubon Nebraska, Rowe Sanctuary and the Nebraska Partnership for All-Bird Conservation. The attractions include field trips to the blinds for crane viewing, the Rainwater Basin, and Prairie Chickens' booming grounds.

Renowned speakers will be Pete Dunne, author and birding expert from Cape May Bird Observatory; Joel Sartore, National Geographic photographer from Nebraska; and Felipe Chavez-Ramirez, Director of the Platte River Whooping Crane Maintenance Trust.

A pre-conference full-day birding trip will be held Thursday, March 19, led by

senators, your own senator, and Governor Heineman (gov.heineman@gov.ne.gov) to tell them why you and all Nebraskans have a personal stake in maintaining the ecological integrity of the Niobrara Valley and the water flows for wildlife and recreation.

ducted by Joel Sartore and Randy Hampton.

Don't delay registering for lodging: rooms in Kearney fill up early. The Holiday Inn (308/237-5971) guarantees rooms at special prices for conference participants until February 19. To receive the discounted rate, tell them you are attending Audubon's Rivers & Wildlife Celebration.

Early registration for the Celebration is also advised; costs go up after February 28

Overflow accommodations are available at the nearby Hampton Inn (800-HAMPTON) and Wingate Motel (800-228-1000). Or see the Kearney Visitors Bureau at www.visitkearney.org for most listings. Rivers & Wildlife Celebration.

For crane viewing information, contact Rowe Sanctuary, 308/468-5282; www.rowesanctuary.org. Trips to blinds are arranged for Thursday & Friday nights 6_9 P.M. (none Saturday night); Friday, Saturday & Sunday mornings 6_9 A.M.

For a complete brochure or to register, contact Audubon Nebraska, P.O. Box

DeSoto/Boyer Chute Xmas Count

Eighteen counters spent the day Saturday, December 27, walking icy trails under cold and blustery weather conditions, but produced a surprising count: 61 species plus 2 week species were seen. A little above average. There were 13,435 individuals counted, and one new species for the count, a Mockingbird. Prairie Falcon was seen for only the second time since the count circle was moved in 1997.

Record highest individual counts

Species Account

Ross' Goose 1

Canada Goose 64

Mallard 152

Common Goldeneye 49

Common Merganser 28

Duck species 7

Ring-necked Pheasant
38

Wild Turkey 204

Great Blue Heron 1

By Jerry Toll

were recorded for American Robin, Blue Jay, Cedar Waxwing, and Rusty Blackbird. All are fruit or tree bud eaters. There were an amazing 4,018 American Robins! Lowest individual counts were for waterfowl. No Snow Geese were seen, and it was the lowest count for Canada Geese and Mallard. Screech Owl was missed for the first time.

Horned Lark 66

Black-capped
Chickadee 208

Tufted Titmouse 17

Red-breasted
Nuthatch 1

White-breasted
Nuthatch 98

Brown Creeper 8

Carolina Wren 1
Eastern Bluebird 176

Hermit Thrush 2

Omaha Area Xmas Count

Betty Grenon, Omaha Area Count Coordinator, reports on a pretty average count on Sunday, Dec. 28 —postponed because of bad weather on the scheduled date of Saturday, December 20.

The day was sunny and calm compared to the previous day when DeSoto counted. However, there were no unusual birds to document, and the species count was 60, plus 1 additional bird for count week. Individuals counted were 9,702.

Because of the late date, most of the waterfowl were gone and the still water all frozen. Only the rivers were open.

We had two high count birds from 46 years of counting: these were Eastern Bluebirds, with 130 and the 3 Pileated Woodpeckers in Fontenelle Forest.

**Representatives
Needed on State
Boards**

Bald Eagle 38	American Robin 4,018	<p>Representatives are needed to fill vacancies on the Environmental Trust from each of the Congressional Districts. District 2, Omaha and surrounding areas, needs one of us! Openings also exist on the environmental Quality Council (EQC) to for the following seats:</p> <p>Ag Crop Production</p> <p>Auto/Petroleum Industry</p> <p>Biologist</p> <p>Food Products Manufacturing</p> <p>Labor</p> <p>Livestock Industry</p> <p>Minority Populations</p> <p>Municipal Government</p> <p>Power Generating Industry</p>
Northern Harrier 5	Mockingbird 1	
Sharp-shinned Hawk 5;	European Starling 3,807	
Cooper's Hawk 2	Cedar Waxwing 301	
Red-tailed Hawk 75	Yellow-rumped Warbler 3	
Rough-legged Hawk 6	Spotted Towhee 1	
American Kestrel 9	Eastern Towhee 2	
Prairie Falcon 1	American Tree Sparrow 626	
Hawk species 1	Song Sparrow 4	
Rock Pigeon 145	White-throated Sparrow 22	
Eurasian Collared Dove 2	Slate-colored Junco 1,028	
Mourning Dove 10	Oregon Junco 2	
Great-horned Owl 1	Pink-sided Junco 1	
Barred Owl 3	Lapland Longspur 4	
Belted Kingfisher CW (count week)	Northern Cardinal 83	
Red-headed Woodpecker 8	Red-winged Blackbird 805	
Red-bellied Woodpecker 8;	Meadowlark species 39	
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 1	Rusty Blackbird 92	
Downy Woodpecker 73	Brown-headed Cowbird 1	
Hairy Woodpecker 7	Purple Finch 32	
Yellow-shafted Flicker 117	House Finch 31	
Blue Jay 166	Common Redpoll CW	
American Crow 127	Pine Siskin 4	
	American Goldfinch 256	
	House Sparrow 243	

Cont. on page 7

Addresses to Remember

President Barack Obama

The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania
Ave NW

Washington D.C. 20500-0001

Comments: 202 456-1111

Senator Ben Nelson

U.S. Senate, Washington DC 20510;
202-224-6551; fax 202-228-0012;
Lincoln: 402-437-5246; Omaha 391-
3411; Omaha address: 7602 Pacific
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Senator Michael Johanns

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224-4224

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Lincoln Address:

Governor Dave Heineman

Capitol Bldg, Box 94848 Lincoln,
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6031

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PO 3

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Memorials

The Audubon Society of Omaha greatly appreciates the
memorials it receives.

When sending your gift, please identify the person you wish
to memorialize and the name and address of the person to
be notified.

Mail to Audubon Society of Omaha, P. O. Box 3542
, Omaha NE 68103-0542

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Phone: 444-5000 Hot Line: 444-5555

Lincoln Capitol Switchboard: 402
471-2311

Washington Capitol Switchboard

Senate: 202 224-3121; House: 202
225-3121

Cont. from page 6, Representatives Needed

Informed voices are needed! You are urged to consider serving on one of these boards to make your opinions known on issues of vital consequences.

To apply, go online to www.governor.nebraska.gov and click on "Contact us, " then "Board/commission appointment application form."

You need to apply soon. The Governor will submit the nominations to the Natural Resources Committee in the next month or so.

Bequests

A bequest to Audubon is a gift to those who will succeed us; a gift to secure our natural heritage.

If you find an injured bird of prey, please contact a Raptor Recovery Center volunteer at 402-731-9869.

**Audubon Society of Omaha, Mailing Address: P. O. Box 3542, Omaha
68103-0542**

Phone: 451-3647 - <http://audubon-omaha.org>

Office: 1941 So. 42nd Street, Omaha NE 68105

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3888**

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292-9687

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**Recording Sec'y Urban Lehner.....
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**Corresponding Sec'y Kathleen Rose....
292-8912**

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**Jackie Scholar.....551-5045 Eric
Scholar..... 551-5045**

Nancy Williams.....291-8580

Jerry Toll..... 453-9239

David Crawford....884-1660

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Field Trip Elliott Bedows.....292-5017

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**Natural Areas Mgt. Eric Scholar.....
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Publication Laurine Blankenau. 451-3647

Publicity Jackie Scholar..... 551-5045

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