
The Meadowlark

*September
2004
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**ASO is a Chapter
of the National
Audubon Society
Serving Eastern
Nebraska
and Western Iowa**

**The
Word
on
West
Nile
Virus**

By Nancy Leonard

Mosquitoes seem as much a part of summer as picnics, ants, and fireflies. They buzz in your ears and raise angry welts on bare skin. But they are far more than just a seasonal annoyance. From earliest times, mosquitoes have been linked to deadly viruses. West Nile virus is just the most recent example. The last few years have seen West Nile virus move westward across the United States. Some experts say it peaked in the Midwest last year and has now moved all the way to the West Coast.

More than 30 species of mammals, 200 species of birds, and at least two kinds of reptiles are susceptible to West Nile virus. Nearly 600 people have died from the virus, and there are confirmed cases in 48 states. The response to WNV in North America has been more lethal and wide-ranging than in other parts of the world.

What does West Nile virus mean to you? Don Helmuth, State Director of Audubon Nebraska, has a long history with mosquitos and mosquito-borne disease. He earned his Ph.D. in

**Dragonflies,
Birds, and
Butterflies**

By Clem
Klaphake

ASO will be taking a field trip to Schramm State Recreation Area along the Platte River in southern Sarpy County on Sunday, September 12. Loren and Babs Padelford will lead the trip in search of migrating passerines, dragonflies, and butterflies. September is a month when these three types of fauna overlap. In addition to Schramm

Entomology from the University of Delaware and spent nearly 20 years supervising research at Northeastern University and at UNL.

Don's love of nature is revealed on his farm on Little Salt Creek near Lincoln. He has established a nature preserve including river habitat, saline wetlands, and native prairie, providing a home for diverse species of birds and other wildlife. He is working with federal and state agencies on a variety of issues including restoration of the saline wetlands.

His research of West Nile is wide-ranging, from how the virus is transmitted to what new species it affects.

If you wonder about its causes, the future implications for people and birds, and how you can remain safe, come to our general meeting Thursday, September 9, 7:30 P.M., Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances (one block south of 45th & Center). There will be time for questions and answers.

A short business meeting will follow the program, concluding with coffee, cookies, and conversation. Nonmembers are welcome.

SRA, we may wander over to Louisville SRA and/or Platte River State Park on the other side of the Platte in Cass County.

For those unfamiliar with dragonfly or butterfly species, this will be an opportunity to learn about the natural history and identification of some of the Nebraska species from two knowledgeable odonata and lepidoptera observers.

These areas also have a good mixture of habitat for migrating birds. These three areas require a state park permit for each vehicle. We will meet at 8:00 a.m. at the southeast end of the Southroads Shopping Center parking lot in Bellevue.

Whether an expert or novice, everyone is welcome. You can bring a lunch or eat in a local

Heads Up For October Field Trips

By Clem Klaphake

There are two ASO field trips planned for the month of October. On Saturday, October 2, we will again journey to the Hitchcock HawkWatch just north of Crescent, Iowa. For several years this HawkWatch has been counting

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Bird Seed Sale: Oct. 23-24

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By Nelli Falzgraf

Nelli's Notes

How We Functioned

From the start of our arrangement with the NRD to manage the property at Heron Haven, ASO has incurred heavy costs developing and maintaining the site and the Rookery building, both in monetary resources and valuable volunteer time.

When summer 2003 brought plumbing problems and a break-in, the NRD rescued us with reimbursements, and insurance paid for losses. However, unforeseen costs continue to be a concern. The bright spot in all of this is a board with the background and experience to make decisions about needed changes in our operation and direction. Spending has decreased and

Don Helmuth, Executive Director of Audubon Nebraska, told of future Audubon centers in Scottsbluff, Columbus, and Omaha that would preserve important wildlife habitats and offer families and other visitors opportunities to explore and learn about the state's natural history. Centers such as Spring Creek Prairie and Rowe Sanctuary conserve varied habitats, accommodate large groups, and provide expertise for intensive programs. If requested, their professional educators could advise, thus helping local efforts. Please see Dr. Helmuth's column, page 2.

Linda Garbina, Director of Major Gifts

new priorities set. We are fortunate to have the benefit of the board's strength and judgment.

Off-site meetings at Gifford Farms (on Corps dredging), Neale Woods, and Fontenelle Forest were arranged by Linda Dennis. The retreat-like setting of Neale Woods was conducive to discussions of how the ASO wishes to manage the NRD's Heron Haven and building. Elliott Bedows structured and presided at a meeting at Fontenelle Forest that stated our mission, evaluated directions, and determined priorities for the chapter as a whole. Thank you all for helping to redirect ASO.

What's Ahead

We have set priorities to strengthen birding interests, encourage research at Heron Haven rather than costly development, and promote environmental awareness through education. We hope these aspirations will prove fruitful in the years ahead. We need your suggestions and talents to sustain successful programs and develop new ones that keep us connected to nature. It truly requires dedicated volunteers to make a difference.

Potential Partners

Kevin Poague, Audubon Nebraska Important Bird Area Coordinator, told of a statewide program to help birds and their habitats by identifying sites critical for the birds' survival and promoting conservation of these key sites. It encourages local efforts to survey bird populations and nominate the best places for birds in need. See Page 4, Column by Don Helmuth.) Also refer to the Summer *Meadowlark* for information: www.Nebraska.audubon.org to download the criteria list and nominating form; or Kevin for questions: KPoague@audubon.org, 402/466-1220. Thank you to Loren and Babs Padelford and other birders for helping with the Nebraska IBA Technical Review Committee.

for the State Office, confirmed that they want to revitalize now-defunct chapters and increase memberships statewide, thereby helping chapters expand their support base. The State Office will contribute ideas for fundraising, such as partnering to maximize state and local efforts.

Cooperation

Last summer National Audubon asked chapters for suggestions to address priority NAS-Chapter issues that would strengthen Audubon nationwide. Issues include communication with NAS, financial support for chapters, responsibility for recruitment, diversity in leadership and constituency, and administration.

Last fall NAS surveyed opinions regarding conservation issues that chapters want National to pursue. High priority issues expressed by chapters across the nation include public lands protection, bird conservation, Endangered Species Act, wetlands and estuary protection, Clean Water Act, and others.

The safety net amount from NAS-recruited and locally generated memberships will continue another year. This favors chapters such as ASO because more than 93% of our new memberships are from NAS efforts and at their expense, rather than ours.

With positive news from National, opportunities at the state level, and changes in ASO, I am hopeful of renewed interest in birds, the environment, and Audubon.

September Events

Wed 9/ 1 Board Meeting

Thur 9/ 9 General Meeting

Sun 9/12 Field Trip to Schramm Park

Mon 9/13 Conservation Meeting

October Field Trip,

Continued from
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hawks, eagles, falcons, kites and vultures between August 15 and December 20. At least 19 species have been identified, and approximately 8,500 to 9,500 total raptors have been counted each year.

The HawkWatch is located at the lodge in the Hitchcock Nature Area, which is about 5 miles north of Crescent on Hwy 183. To reach Crescent, go north on I-29 or east on I-680 to Exit 61 onto Hwy 988 east into Crescent.

We will meet at the lodge at 9:00 a.m. Rolls and doughnuts will be provided. Bring your choice of drink. Depending on weather conditions and bird flights, you are welcome to stay as long or briefly as you want. You may also wish to explore some of the numerous hiking trails in the park.

Information on a second birding field trip in October will be provided in the next *Meadowlark* issue. That trip will focus on fall migrating sparrows.

Thanks for Summer Fun

By Nelli Falzgraf

Jackie Scholar organized the July 25 Garden Walk with seven wildlife-friendly gardens on view. Valuable volunteers helped staff the event, and many members, families, and friends enjoyed the gorgeous gardens. Garden hosts Ed and Linda

Autumn in the Bluffs

A "celebration of our community, nature, art and culture," known as Autumn in the Bluffs, will be held Saturday, Sept. 25, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday, Sept. 26, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Bayliss Park Town Square, 100 Pearl St, downtown Council Bluffs. Featured will be indoor and outdoor art shows, continual musical performances and entertainment, children's activities, Victorian home tour, museum openings, nature hikes, river cruise, carriage rides and more.

ASO will be staffing a booth on Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 25 and 26, offering chapter information and merchandise for sale.

Our chapter includes Western Iowa, so our presence at this event seems most appropriate, although we have not previously pursued opportunities such as this. The fall season often being our finest, these late September dates should be most pleasant.

We are asking for volunteers to help staff the booth. If you find you can help, please phone Patti Albright, 323-1966, or Nelli Falzgraf, 292-9687.

Of course, if you cannot help, you are invited to stop by and enjoy this event just across the River!

Remembering Ed Higgins

By Laurine Blankenau

On July 16 life ended for one of Audubon's faithful members.

Cummings invited other volunteers to join them afterwards near the Greenfields Nature Sanctuary for supper. Thank you to volunteers and visitors for supporting a fun event that helped the Chapter's education and conservation efforts.

Laurine Blankenau organized the August 7 summer social that featured congenial company, air-conditioned comfort, a super summer supper, and leisurely visits to the beautiful Butterfly Garden at the chapter headquarters. Thank you, Laurine, for gathering and hosting our members for a sociable summer event.

Ione Werthman organized a Heron Haven Summer Theater at our headquarters and showed videos of the Platte River and *Winged Migration*. We appreciate her efforts to encourage the use of the building and promote visitation of the



wetland.

I first knew and worked with Ed Higgins when he served ASO as President and when I came to know his patience and consideration of others. His interest in wildlife and nature was deep and heartfelt, led by his love for butterflies and birds.

An able writer, for a time Ed contributed a column for the newsletter. In an easy and engaging style, he combined humor with his views and observations about conservation issues.

Besides that of President, Ed held the offices of 2nd Vice-President and Director. Recently, in spite of health problems, he served as Program Chair, arranging speakers for our general meetings.

In the name of ASO and Ed's many friends, I extend our sympathy to his family for his passing. His absence is deeply felt.

Conservation/Legislative Action

Platte River DEIS Comments are Due!

Have you written your letter on the

By Ione Werthman

Built for irrigation but now also a popular recreation site, the lake holds less than one-third the water today that it had when last full in 1999. We now have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to

Platte River to the Interior Department yet? The deadline has been extended to September 20, 2004. Meetings for the past eight years between representatives of the three-state, basin-wide negotiation team to create a conservation plan for the central Platte River in Nebraska have finally come to a critical stage, and now it is our turn to speak.

There are those in the state who are opposed to any environmental changes - the water should not be used for wildlife or recreation. **Please send your comments now to:**

Gail Norton, Secretary of the Interior

c/o Platte River EIS Office

P. O. Box 25007

Denver, CO 80225-0007

More information can be found on <http://savetheplatte.org> if you wish to do more research. The plan as presented in the "GC 2" scenario of the DEIS will provide 130,000 to 150,000 acre-feet of water for wildlife, reduce the impact of future water development, restore 10,000 acres of habitat in the Central Platte River area for wildlife, and serve as a baseline for Platte River Protection for decades to come. Support Scenario GC #2 in you letter.

When Lewis & Clark discovered the Platte 200 years ago, Clark wrote in his diary, "This great river (the Platte) being much more rapid than the Missouri, forces its (the Missouri's) current against the opposite (eastern) shore. The Platte flows rapidly?"

I also remember reading that in the early 1850's when the Catholic Church divided Nebraska into three dioceses, they drew the line between Lincoln and Omaha at the Platte because it was "too treacherous to cross."

But that was then - this is now! Our Nebraska Platte River is not only sick, it's dying. Just yesterday I read that Lake McConaughy is so low, the remnants of the town of LeMoyne, which was

help provide a long-term protection plan for the river.

The monthly work of the Cooperative Agreement committee members from the three states—Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska—these past eight years will be for naught if we don't speak out. We urgently need your help now.

Other Water Issues:

MUD vs. Conservation

According to a U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), in the year 2000, Americans used 408 billion gallons of water per day. The chief water users were power generation 48%, agriculture and irrigation 34%, and public water supply 11%, while self-supplied industrial users, livestock, mining, aquaculture and domestic wells together accounted for about 7% of the daily usage.

In Nebraska, however, the USGS says the ratio is much different. Irrigation and livestock users take about 96% of the water consumed each year while domestic and commercial users consume less than 3 percent.

Because of the increasing demand for water and the recurring drought in Nebraska, the value of conservation should have been brought to the forefront in a recent *Omaha World-Herald* editorial, but it wasn't. I was disappointed with the June 25 "Turn on the Tap,"

which broadcast that the tumult of the MUD Platte West Water treatment plant was now over because MUD had received the go-ahead for developing their new well fields in the aquifer under the Platte in western Douglas and Eastern Saunders Counties.

No mention was made that maybe just 25 years down the road, our Lower Platte River may look like the Central Platte looks today - very little water, thanks to aquifer tapping. (We can now almost walk across the river without

inundated in the lake when the dam was built, are showing.

getting our feet wet.) MUD claims that using the aquifer

Continued on page 5

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Conservation and Legislation,

Cont. from Page 4

"Turn on the Tap" means free flowing water for urban sprawl growth in western Douglas County. It means all the water we want for our lawns, no need to create a culture of conservation in Omaha and Douglas County. And no need to concern ourselves about the possibility of depleting or drying up the Two Rivers State Recreation Area. MUD paid off the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission with \$1,000,000 of our water fees to have them look the other way.

The editorial concludes, "Now that this dust devil has subsided, MUD business and residential ratepayers can anticipate that metro area growth will be supported by an ample, stable supply of water. Let's get on with it. Turn on the Tap!" We say, "Get ready to open your pocketbooks."

More Taxes for Dam Construction

The final vote at the Papio-Missouri NRD meeting last week was for a one-cent increase to the tax levy for building 10 more dams in Washington, Douglas and Sarpy Counties. The \$186 million project would be in the Papillion Creek watershed that flows through the heart of Omaha. The location of the dams and the timing of the construction would rely on

From the State Office

By Don Helmuth

This summer has been eventful—here are a few highlights.

We are rapidly approaching the groundbreaking of the Spring Creek Prairie Center, probably in October. If all goes well, construction will start early this winter with a completion target of October 2005.

The Spring Creek Prairie motocross issue may be resolved in part with the County deciding last week that the race track was not allowed on land that is agricultural. We continue to work with the motocross advocates to find an acceptable site. Several are currently being considered.

The staff at Rowe Sanctuary are continuing their habitat management work. The river is now dry at our location. Paul Tebbel, the Sanctuary Manager, has been taking the lead in getting public comments to the Department of the Interior's Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the Platte River, and our written response



public/private partnerships.

Twenty years ago, when I was president of ASO, plans for 21 dams were proposed and drawn. Seven were built as public recreation areas—Cunningham, Wehrspann, Standing Bear, Zorinsky, and Walnut Creek, as were two private lakes, Candlewood and Newport Landing.

Building of the other dams was blocked. The town of Washington, Nebraska, with the public's help, successfully defeated plans for a flood-control lake on the Big Papio Creek in Washington County because their town would have been sacrificed and placed under 20 feet of water. The question now is, will the town of Washington again fight a new dam?

This major project, stretching four miles from Washington to Kennard, would be a 1,900-acre lake northeast of Bennington, four times larger than Cunningham Lake, similar in size to Branched Oak Lake near Lincoln. Thirty-two properties would have to be bought or moved. Get ready to open your pocketbooks!

Join us for our conservation meeting the first Monday of each month, 7:30, Audubon Office at Heron Haven. An exception will be this month because of Labor Day.

will go in shortly. Our first art auction will be held at Rowe on September 25, starting at 5:00 p.m. At least three artists will be represented. Tickets are \$35 and include dinner.

Our new Important Bird Areas program, led by Kevin Poague, is part of an international effort to identify and help conserve the best areas around the world for birds. In Nebraska, we are currently accepting nominations from the public. Visit our State Office website, www.nebraska.audubon.org <<http://www.nebraska.audubon.org>>, and read more about how you can help us find the best places in the state for birds.

We continue to explore two possible center locations in Omaha. One is the NRD property in Papillion known as Rumsey Station, and the second is Allwine Prairie, owned by the University of Nebraska at Omaha. I would like to establish a working group of ASO members to help in the evaluation and potential development of one of these or other sites as our Omaha education center.

We are planning an all-chapter retreat early this winter to address mutual concerns and operational details including membership, fundraising, communication, etc.

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Nebraska birds are available to bird lovers everywhere with a few keystrokes and mouse clicks, thanks to a new link at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries' Web site.

"Birds of Nebraska: Newspaper Accounts, 1854-1923" can be reached at http://libr.unl.edu:2000/birds_of_nebraska/index.html. This web site, developed in time for the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the territory of Nebraska, presents many delightful and informative newspaper columns about Nebraska birds, including those by two early nature writers, Sandy Griswold and Miles Greenleaf.

UNL Libraries worked with donor James E. Ducey to convert his research into an online resource of interest to environmentalists, students of ecological literature,

and teachers. Project team advisors included Sharon Stephan of the Audubon Nebraska Board and the University of Nebraska, Marian Langan of the Spring Creek

Prairie Audubon Center, John Janovy of the UNL School of Biological Sciences, and Barbara DiBernard of the UNL English Department.

Ducey, an independent researcher, located and transcribed articles from microfilm produced by the Nebraska State Historical Society and the Nebraska newspaper Project, which was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities from 1992-2000.

In creating a database of Nebraska birds, Ducey noted that historical information about birds from Nebraska's territorial years helps researchers determine changes in species, habitat and population.

For more information, call Brian Pytilik Zillig, digital initiatives librarian at UNL Libraries, (402) 472-4547; or Katherine L. Walter, Chair, UNL Libraries, Digital Initiatives and Special Collections - bzilligl@unl.edu (402) 472-3939.

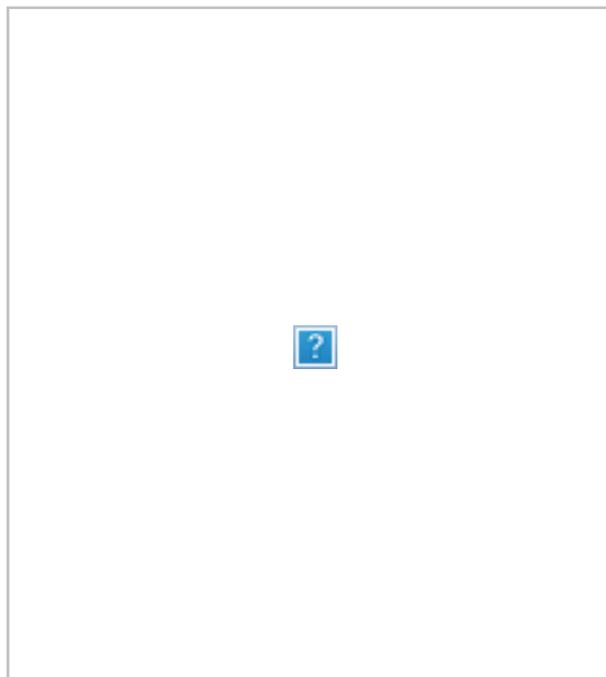
Wildlife Art Exhibit

DeSoto NWR announces a Wildlife Art Exhibit to be held November 20 and 21.

The exhibit is titled "Wildlife of the Missouri River and Great Plains." To obtain an entry form, please call DeSoto at 712-642-2772.

State Office, Continued from page 5

In closing—Lou Christiansen, a longtime Conservation and State Board member, died on April 26. Lou was a timeless advocate for the environment; a founder of Save the Niobrara, Inc, a grassroots effort that helped stop the



Norden Dam project; and with his wife, Jan, a volunteer every year at Rowe during the Sandhill Crane migration.

We will honor him with the annual Lou Christiansen Conservationist Award during the Rivers and Wildlife Celebration beginning this coming March. Nominations are welcome at any time. Lou, you are missed by all of us.

Addresses to Remember

President George W. Bush

The White House, 1600
Pennsylvania Ave NW

Washington D.C. 20500-0001

Comments: 202-456-1111;
fax: 202-456-2993

Senator Ben Nelson

U.S. Senate, Washington DC
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437-5246; Omaha 391-3411;
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Senator Chuck Hagel

U.S. Senate, Washington,
D.C. 20510-2705

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68183

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444-5555

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The Audubon Society of
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appreciates the memorials
it receives.

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



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

Bequests

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

Let a man decide upon his favorite animal and make a study of it, learning its innocent ways. Let him learn to understand its sounds and motions. The animals want to communicate with man, but. . . man must do the greater part in securing an understanding.

Frances Densmore

Teton Sioux Music

**Audubon Society of Omaha, 11809 Old Maple Road,
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Phone: 445-4138 - <http://audubon-omaha.org>

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2nd Vice President Laurine Blankenau, 3808 Grebe, Omaha 68112 451-3647

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Carol Rasmussen, 4503 So. 16th St, Omaha 68107 731-3939

Historian Kathleen Rose, 123 Bellevue Blvd So, Bellevue 68005 292-8912

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