



Meadowlark

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‘Seed’ money from fall and winter sales funds ASO programs



Pictured from left: Thanks to volunteers Heidi Walz, Bobby Walz and Mark Cave, shown loading the birdseed order for customer Ken Czyc at the winter sale.

Together, Audubon Society of Omaha’s fall and winter birdseed sales netted \$8,000, which will enable ASO to continue to sponsor education and conservation programs over the coming year. Program delivery may prove to be particularly challenging in 2020, making the support generated from these two major fundraisers even more vital.

Sale Co-chair Betty Fullerton says, “Thanks to all of the customers who made our 10th Audubon Omaha winter birdseed sale on February 22 a great success.” Co-chair John Fullerton adds, “Thanks also to Scott Bradley, who helped those pictured load birdseed, and to Chapter Administrator Candy Gorton for maintaining the website.”

Mark your calendars: The fall 2020 birdseed sale is tentatively scheduled for October 17 and 18. Watch for the order blank and updates in the Sep/Oct edition of the Meadowlark newsletter and on our audubon-omaha.org website after Labor Day.

Late spring birding brings Sparrows and Warblers and more ... oh, my!

by Clem Klaphake

And what is so rare as a day in June? A Northern Parula Warbler in Western Nebraska, for one thing (with apologies to James Russell Lowell). The species you’ll spot in late spring vary by location and month.

Birding in May is generally very different from birding in June. Early in May a wide array of species will wing their way north from sunnier climes. By month’s end, most will either be nesting here or floating farther north toward the Dakotas, Minnesota or Canada. As the calendar eases into June, our Midlands migrants will have settled down to breed, build nests, and defend their fledglings, in or out of the nest.

So, which birds might you catch on the fly as they push north toward their summer homes? Warblers are one species of May migrant you may glimpse overhead or capture with your camera. Among these potential visitors are: the Palm Warbler, the Chestnut-sided Warbler, the Black-throated Green Warbler, the Blackpoll Warbler, and the Bay-breasted Warbler. Additional species that do not nest here but that may tease you with a fast fly-by include the Thrushes (Swainson’s Thrush, the Gray-cheeked Thrush, the Veery, the Northern Waterthrush) and the Sparrows (Harris’s Sparrow, the White-throated Sparrow, the White-crowned Sparrow, LeConte’s Sparrow), although some Sparrows do winter in Eastern Nebraska. Birds in the Shorebird family and some members of the Flycatcher family pass through our area but don’t generally nest here.



*Bay-breasted Warbler
by Phil Swanson*



*Wood Thrush
by Mike Benkis*



*Northern Parula Warbler
by Phil Swanson*

Among the species that do migrate and nest in Eastern Nebraska are: the Redstart Warbler, the Wood Thrush, Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, Great Crested Flycatchers, the Common Yellowthroat Warbler, and the Northern Parula Warbler. You may have noted that I’ve referred to “Eastern Nebraska” several times. That’s because you may

not see the migrants I’ve mentioned above in Western Nebraska; if they do turn up, it won’t be until late in the May-June time frame.

If you spot a species you don’t recognize over the next two months, be sure to ask one of our many experienced birders in the Metro area — or check your field guide or birding app. And always consult the range map for whichever species you think you may have seen.

Although you’ll find many of these species anywhere there are trees, you may have the best luck at familiar birding haunts, such as Fontenelle Forest, Neale Woods, Lauritzen Gardens, Walnut Grove Park, Towl Park, Heron Haven, and Platte River State Park. Remember: Park hours may vary due to COVID-19 regulations.

Field notes from the President *by Bob Wells, President, Audubon Society of Omaha*

YIMBY — YOUR GUIDE TO SETTING UP BACKYARD FEEDING STATIONS

Now is the time to proclaim, “YIMBY, or ‘Yes, in my backyard!’” In this brave new world of social distancing, feeding birds in your backyard creates vistas you’ll never see on-screen and a connection with the natural world that doesn’t rely on bandwidth or gigabytes. Once you say, “Yes,” begin by organizing your backyard to be bird-friendly and then select the appropriate feeders and seed.

WHO’S LIKELY TO BOOK YOUR AIRBNB?

In the middle of the country, Nebraska hosts approximately 400 species of birds (a medium number) winging their way across the state. Knowing which species you’re likely to see in any given season can help you dress your yard for success.

PLAN YOUR WORK AND WORK YOUR PLAN

Assessing the layout of your yard is the first step to successful bird feeding. The kinds of plants you have and where they’re located can draw birds to your yard and afford them protection while they’re feeding. It’s especially important to provide plants that allow birds to retreat from feeding areas when they feel threatened. Also, is a water source nearby? A ready water source, especially in the winter months, can prove even more important than food.

Place feeders at least 5 feet away from windows to avoid collisions, which kill millions of birds annually. Consider applying preventive window strike decals or other decorations in front of any windows that pose a threat to birds.

Discourage squirrels by mounting tube feeders on poles that are at least 5 feet tall. Hang the feeders away from adjacent shrubs and trees. Place cone-shaped baffles measuring a minimum of 17 inches in length on the poles below your feeders. Providing squirrels with a separate feeder — away from your

bird feeders — filled with cheaper mixes for squirrels may prevent them from pilfering the more expensive seed mixes you prefer for birds.

And, please, please keep cats indoors. Cats kill hundreds of millions of birds yearly, often hunting ground-feeding birds or birds dazed by window strikes. Cats are especially dangerous to birds in the spring breeding season, when fledglings are on the ground.

WHAT’S ON THE MENU?

Different species of birds feed in different ways. Providing both flat and elevated tube feeders will create opportunities for you to see the greatest possible variety of bird species in our area. When it comes to seed, hulled sunflower seeds are the most popular item on the menu for the largest number of species. Remember that small birds prefer a mix of whole and smaller pieces because it can be difficult for them to eat large, whole sunflower kernels. Remember, too, that even though they are cheaper, sunflower seeds in shells will leave a residue of hulls below the feeders. Hulled sunflowers will leave only scattered seeds, which are eaten quickly by ground-feeding birds. If you choose to feed black nyger or thistle seed, which is often recommended for finches, the finches will continue to eat hulled sunflower seeds first, because that’s what they prefer. And if you choose safflower, which is sometimes recommended because squirrels won’t eat it, remember that birds won’t eat it either if they find hulled sunflower seeds nearby. Also, avoid inexpensive seed mixtures that contain milo, wheat and oats because birds will pick out the sunflower seeds and ignore the cheap fillers.

Limit suet feeding to the fall and winter months because suet becomes rancid quickly and will melt and drip out of feeders in the warmer months. Mixing equal parts cornmeal and peanut butter

is a good alternative for warmer weather; it will last longer in a feeder and remain solid without melting. In addition to attracting Woodpeckers and Chickadees, this mixture will also draw migrating Warblers to your table in the spring.

Fruit eaters, such as Robins, Waxwings, Bluebirds, Orioles and Tanagers, rarely eat seed and can be attracted with currants and raisins rehydrated and placed on flat feeders. Baltimore Orioles, in particular, love grape jelly and orange halves to supplement their insect diets. Try providing Tanagers with orange halves, too. Fill Hummingbird feeders with nectar in early May, along with grape jelly for the Orioles. Avoid commercial nectar mixes — make your own without red dye by adding one part sugar to four parts water. Wash nectar and grape jelly feeders every couple of days to combat mold growth in warm weather.

KEEP IT CLEAN

Store your seed in a cool, dry area in metal containers lined with clean plastic bags. Fifty pounds of seed fit perfectly in a 30-gallon galvanized trashcan. However, do not store the same seed for more than one winter, because mold may grow.

Buy only feeders that you can take apart easily and clean frequently and thoroughly. Use dish detergent and a bottlebrush to clean vigorously. After cleaning, soak in a bucket filled with a 10 percent solution of non-chlorine bleach. Rinse, and then dry in the sun.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Visit audubon.org to discover more about The National Audubon Society’s guide to bird feeders, birdseed and bird feeding. Of course, you’ll also find great general birding tips, too. Find links to this information on our website, audubon-omaha.com in the NEWS section on the home page.

2020 Student Art Contest Best in Show Winners

More than 480 creative entries this year made judging the student artwork a challenge. Although we had to cancel the Art Show and Awards Ceremony, we are still awarding prizes and ribbons, which will be distributed to the winners when we get a chance to return the artwork. For a little taste, here are the Best in Show winners for 2020. Thanks to students, teachers and volunteers!



Monish G., 2nd grade



Quenby S., 8th grade



Leela Nagaraj D., 2nd grade



Claire H., 10th grade



Grace J., 4th grade



Krystin H., 2nd grade



Jasmina K., 5th grade



Shante B., 11th grade



Kennedy B., 12th grade



Julia M., 2nd grade



Ella J., 8th grade



Grace B., 2nd grade



Sydney F., 10th grade



Kason S., 2nd grade



Natalie M., 9th grade



Bailey D., 12th grade



Hank K., 1st grade



Hailey B., 10th grade



Zachary M., 5th grade



Addyson M., Kindergarten



Quyen D., 11th grade

ON THE HORIZON

May & June:

MEMBER MEETING & BANQUET
CANCELED AT THIS TIME

FIELD TRIPS
CANCELED AT THIS TIME

The eyes have it — your photos

We would LOVE to see your bird photos and share them with our members! Please email them to Meadow Lark at asopublisher@gmail.com



Red-winged Blackbird. Photo by Ron Hiatt



Great Horned Owl and Owlet. Photo by L. Larsen



Red-breasted Grosbeak Photo by Larry Frame

Board of Directors Recap

Many recent and upcoming ASO events have been canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the March Member Meeting with photographer Mike Benkis was postponed. But please keep an eye on our calendar for the latest updates. In the meantime, here's a brief look back at two recent events.

FIELD DAY AT CUMING CITY CEMETERY

Several volunteers spent the morning of March 7 building brush piles during our Field Day at Cuming City Cemetery. The crew helped remove woody plant material from a degraded hillside, where restoration biologists are working to maintain the remnant prairie surrounding the historical cemetery. In 2018, ASO purchased the 10-acre tract from The Nature Conservancy with the public in mind — so we encourage others to visit and appreciate the preserve for its diverse flora and fauna.



WINTER FIELD TRIP TO CAMP WAKONDA

The sun bestowed a welcome reprieve upon birders joining ASO's Winter Birding Field Trip at Camp Wakonda in mid-February. Matt Miller, a restoration biologist for Fontenelle Forest, shared his expertise with about 12 visitors who accompanied him for a hike through the property. Along the way, the hikers spotted Red-headed, Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers, Bald Eagles, Northern Flickers, Black-capped Chickadees, Eastern Towhees, Dark-eyed Juncos, White-throated Sparrows and more.



Omaha Gives! How about YOU?

by Lauren Robinson

On Wednesday, May 20, the Audubon Society of Omaha will participate in the Omaha Gives! online fundraiser, a 24-hour, community-wide event to raise money for nonprofits in Douglas, Sarpy, and Pottawattamie counties. As a nonprofit organization run almost entirely by volunteers, we depend on donors like you to help support our local conservation efforts.

We encourage you to take part if you support our mission. The Omaha Gives! platform also allows you to:

- 1) Schedule advance donations starting May 1.
- 2) Set up recurring donations.
- 3) Launch a cheer page to raise funds on our behalf.

If you are interested in creating a page to support ASO and need guidance, please shoot us an email so we can help!

If you were a donor to Omaha Gives! in past years, we sincerely thank you for your contribution and hope that you will consider giving again this year. Visit <https://www.omahagives.org/aso> to learn more.

Controlled prairie fires spark burning questions about our ecosystem by Glenn Pollock



Across our region, spring is often viewed as the burning season, as crews draft burn plans, prepare equipment, train new workers and create firebreaks. You may wonder how this came about. After all, North America's indigenous peoples often set the prairie ablaze after the first frost of autumn, when dry biomass is at its peak, adding nutrients to the soil and revitalizing the earth. Remember that prescribed burns, started by humans, evolved largely out of necessity. Unlike in our Western forests, lightning rarely ignites prairie fires. How many times have you seen lightning without rain around here?

Okay, so why did we humans make the switch from fall to spring "cleaning"? One reason: Ring-necked Pheasants, a non-native species that



Ring-necked Pheasant

requires special care, including tall grasses in which to winter and hide. Many prairie land managers succumbed to pressure from local hunters, whose hunting licenses often paid their wages. But there's more to the story, and it revolves around another "migrant" from Eastern Europe — *bromus inermis*, or smooth brome, which is one heck of a plant.

In the early part of the 20th century, smooth brome found its way to the Midwest and managed to put down roots in every native prairie I've visited. Those roots typically strangle most neighboring plants. In fact, allelopathic species, such as smooth brome, inhibit the growth of all nearby plants. Nevertheless, they have their use. My grandfather planted brome in areas where weeds were a concern. The brome choked out the weeds, and his well-fed cattle were able to graze on the brome in a virtuous cycle that was both cost-effective and clever.

Now let's get back to our question: Why burn prairie lands in the spring? Well, brome is a cool season grass, meaning that it greens up early, in cool weather, and does not do nearly as well in warm weather. The trick is to let the brome green up a bit — usually when it has grown three leaves — and then begin your controlled burn. This sets the brome back and encourages native, warm-weather-loving prairie plants to thrive and overtake the brome. Although these carefully managed fires don't kill the brome, they do put a hurt on it.



Smooth brome

That being said, many land managers, including the Pottawattamie County Conservation Natural Areas management team, still prefer prescribed burns in the fall, especially in woodlands and savannas.

So, now you know a little more about why we burn agricultural and prairie lands in the spring. But, if you put fire ecologists and entomologists in the same room and ask them to debate the advantages of spring and fall burns, the discussion will get pretty interesting pretty quickly.

RESOURCES & INFO:

HOW TO JOIN/RENEW/UPDATE

Join or renew your membership online at audubon-omaha.org and select "Get Involved." Save paper and postage.

Your membership with National Audubon automatically makes you a member of Audubon Society of Omaha.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS?

Please call National Audubon toll-free at 1-844-428-3826, or send an email to audubon@emailcustomerservice.com

STAY CONNECTED

Sign up to get our email at audubon-omaha.org under "Get Involved."

BEQUESTS & GIFTS

A bequest to Audubon Society of Omaha is a gift to those who will succeed us and secure our natural heritage.

Want to send a gift on behalf of someone? Mail your check along with the name and address of the person to be notified to:

Audubon Society of Omaha
P.O. Box 3542, Omaha, NE 68103
We'll send them a thank-you note letting them know of your gift.

PUT IN A WORD FOR THE BIRDS

Help inform, influence and shape how local officials impact the environment with a letter, phone call, Facebook post or, of course, Tweet that advocates for birds and other wild creatures in our unique ecosystem.

Look for information about time-sensitive issues you can support on ASO's home page at audubon-omaha.org. You'll also find contact information for your elected officials on the home page. Just click on the "Conservation" tab and then select "Advocacy" to pull up the names you need. When should you take action? Write now!

INJURED BIRD?

Raptors: Call 866-888-7261 to speak to a Raptor Recovery volunteer.

Non-raptor: Call Nebraska Wildlife Rehab at 402-234-2473.

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STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH AND ITS CREATURES

the Meadowlark

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Best in Show

*Artwork by William C., 8th grade
Meadowlark Award, Student Art Contest*



The Audubon Society of Omaha is dedicated to the active promotion of environmental awareness to our community through education, conservation, and enjoyment of our natural heritage, especially birds.

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