



Meadowlark

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Second molt solves mystery of 'disappearing' Goldfinches

by Amy Campagna,
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In 1933, the American Goldfinch, *Spinus tristis*, was named Iowa's state bird. Easy to identify with its bright yellow body and contrasting black and white wing markings, this little seed-eating bird is many a birdwatcher's favorite visitor to backyard feeders. Around this time of year, however, people begin asking, "Where did all my Goldfinches go?"

Chances are, they are still here, although you may not recognize them disguised in their winter garb.

For many bird species, including the American Goldfinch, it is the male that sports the bright plumage to attract the attention of females. Females, on the other hand, are usually a more drab, gray or brown color to make them inconspicuous to predators while spending large amounts of time incubating eggs and brooding young. All birds undergo a yearly molt where they shed their old, worn feathers and grow fresh new ones. For many bird species, this molt occurs in the fall, after the breeding season. Because there is no need to draw the attention of females in the fall and winter, male Goldfinches lose their bright breeding plumage for more practical gray-brown winter attire. Come spring, the male Goldfinch will undergo a second molt and begin donning the brilliant gold color for

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Bundle up for winter birding adventures with ASO *by Amy Campagna*

Although the weather outside can be frightful, bird-watching with your Audubon Society of Omaha buddies this January and February promises to be cozily delightful!

VISIT THE STEMPEL BIRD MUSEUM JANUARY 14 Along Main Street in the quiet town of Macedonia in southwestern Iowa sits a curious little museum that houses one of Iowa's finest collections. The Stempel Bird Museum maintains the preserved specimens of more than 300 birds collected by Dr. Guido Stempel in the latter part of the 1800s. Stempel, the town doctor and a self-taught ornithologist and entomologist, was passionate about nature. He recognized the threats to our native species and collected the birds, some now considered rare or endangered, for future generations to see. Although there has been some restoration work on the collection, the fact that the mounts are of display quality after more than 100 years is a testament to Dr. Stempel's medical skills and workmanship.

We have the opportunity to see this amazing collection by private appointment on January 14. If you are interested in joining us, you can find more information on the calendar page at audubon-omaha.org or by calling the Audubon Omaha office at 402-445-4138. While the event is free, you must register to participate. We will carpool from the Omaha area.

VISIT DESOTO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE FEBRUARY 25 Even though ice often covers most Omaha-area ponds and lakes in February, the open water you can observe from the viewing area inside the Visitors' Center at the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge typically offers a welcome "ice-breaker" to intrepid birders.

Please join us at 9 a.m. on February 25 to see who is hanging out and around one of the area's premier bird-watching venues. You must register to participate, and we will carpool from Omaha to Missouri Valley, where we'll pay a \$3-per-vehicle entry fee at the refuge. So don't let the winter weather leave you out in the cold. Sign up today, and let it snow!

GREEN CORNER: HOW YOU CAN COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE

Conservation begins at home; each of us can help restore our unique ecosystem.

Plastic free in January '23?

Micro-plastics taking over the world are a BIG problem. Even when plastic gets recycled, byproducts are often harmful.

Take a "no plastic challenge" this month to eliminate or minimize single-use plastics, such as shopping bags, bottles and packaging. Then re-use or repurpose plastic you can't avoid.

Feather Friendly February

Plan a bird-friendly landscape by ordering trees and shrubs that provide cover and small fruits for your feathered friends. Species such as crabapple and hawthorn can help lure hungry birds away from cultivated fruits, if planted on the opposite side of the yard.

ON THE HORIZON

January

FIELD TRIP

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14

What: The Stempel Bird Museum

Where: Macedonia, Iowa

When: 1 p.m.

How: Register for this field trip at audubon-omaha.org on the calendar page. The meeting place and time for carpooling will be emailed to you

Who: Members and the public (free)

BONUS DIY FIELD TRIP

JANUARY OR FEBRUARY

What: Feeder Watch from Cornell Lab

Where: Inside your home

When: Whenever you want

How: Register at Feederwatch.org to participate in this national citizen science project.

Who: Members and the public (free)

STUDENT ART CONTEST BEGINS

MONDAY, JANUARY 2

How: Find rules, entry forms and more information at audubon-omaha.org on the Special Events page.

Who: Students in grades K-12

February

BIRDSEED ORDERS DUE

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9

Who: Members and the public

See details on page 4 of this issue.

STUDENT ART ENTRIES DUE

FEBRUARY 23-25

Where: Drop off artwork at Audubon Society of Omaha office located at 4339 S. 90th Street, Omaha NE

FIELD TRIP

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25

What: DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge

Where: Missouri Valley, Iowa

When: 9 a.m.

How: Register for this field trip at audubon-omaha.org on the calendar page. The meeting place and time for carpooling will be emailed to you.

Who: Members and the public (free)

Meet Julia Rawnsley!

My name is Julia Rawnsley, and I am writing to introduce myself as Audubon Society of Omaha's newest administrative support assistant.

My background includes experience in the cemetery and funeral industry, and I am curious about the connection between green burial and land conservation. Like many others, I began my involvement with ASO by volunteering. In 2022, I helped out with the virtual Student Art Show, and then with Earth Day at a very windy Elmwood Park.

One of the first things that surprised me about this organization was how important its volunteers are. Nothing would be accomplished without the help of volunteers — there would be no newsletters, no prairies, no events, and no bird seed. That's why my goal is to help support, build and organize our volunteer base, the bread and butter of Audubon Society of Omaha.

The more I learn about our organization's history and meet its members, the more excited I am for the future of Audubon Society of Omaha. If you ever have questions or concerns, just email me at jrawnsley@audubonomaha.org.

Let's make a difference together!

The eyes have it – your photos

We need your bird photos! Please email them to Meadow Lark at asopublisher@gmail.com



American Redstart, photo by Larry Frame



Carolina Wren, photo by Jennifer Dobby



Northern Cardinal, photo by Brandon Hanusek



Cormorants, photo by Alex Wiles

Prairies in progress: protect habitat to protect birds by Kayla Johnson

Audubon Society of Omaha is committed to the vision of actively protecting our native ecosystems and restoring nature-friendly environments in the greater Omaha area.

With the support of our board, our natural resource committee is investing in the earth to further the goal of conserving habitat for native birds. We believe the best way we can do this is to focus on acquiring more land around our two prairies, Audubon Society of Omaha Prairie and Cuming City Cemetery Prairie, and by working to reconstruct and maintain habitat in those spaces.

By acquiring land and then reconstructing native habitat around our two remnants, we will make each prairie astronomically more ecologically valuable. The carrying capacity for native species and the biodiversity of our prairies depend heavily on how conducive the adjacent or nearby land is to habitat. The quality and size of those bordering properties also play a significant role. By owning

and managing more conservation land, we can directly support the existence of more birds and the community they depend on. Likewise, reducing or stopping development in the surrounding areas can enable best land management practices. Vital management actions, such as rotational grazing or prescribed fire, are more realistic in large preserves. Larger preserves are also more adept at competing with invasive species, because the frequency of invasive species introductions increases with the level of development in the area. Additionally, negative impacts by humans to soils and watersheds correlate directly to development. Development around prairies will inevitably lead to their slow demise. The most compassionate action we can take for our two prairies is to expand them.

We would like to further specify that we are looking at acquiring only connected or very nearly connected land parcels. While the idea of buying up scattered remnants all around is

compelling, it is not conducive to quality habitat management. The conditions of our modern world require consistent management actions to maintain a balance in the system that is no longer present. Management logistics involve the transportation of equipment and supplies, which increases costs as the distance between parcels increases.

As urban sprawl continues to swallow up space, less and less land is available to native inhabitants. Once nature and humans were one and the same, but we are slowly becoming increasingly disconnected. As Omaha expands, it is more important than ever that conservation organizations hold on to spaces for the community to reconnect with a quality, native ecological community. Because our north Omaha prairie is accessible to our community, we are well-positioned to become a primary destination where everyone can learn about and learn to love our local native habitat. Audubon Society of Omaha can be a beacon of conservation for generations to come.

Goldfinch mystery

Continued from page 1

which these little birds are named. The Goldfinch is the only one in the Finch family to perform this biannual molt.

If you want to attract Goldfinches this winter, here are a few things to consider: Sunflower, Nyjer, and thistle seeds are Goldfinch favorites. Although they are not particular about the kind of feeder used, Goldfinches are wary of larger birds. Using tube feeders with small perches where larger, more aggressive birds can't feed will increase the likelihood of drawing Goldfinches. Sock feeders work well for Nyjer and thistle seed. Place Goldfinch feeders a good distance away from other feeders, keep seeds dry, replace uneaten food every three to four weeks, and clean up spillage from the ground. Goldfinches



won't feed on dried-out seed, so buy smaller amounts more often or store your seed in the freezer to keep it fresh.

While experts agree it's not a good idea to provide supplemental food to wildlife in general, song birds are the exception. If good practices are followed, research shows that feeding songbirds benefits our wild, feathered friends. It benefits us as well. The company of birds brings a lot of joy during the long winter months, and maintaining feeders engages people in our natural world, fostering a sense of

purpose and belonging.

If you enjoy watching birds at a feeder, you can contribute to the scientific study of birds through Project FeederWatch, a winter-long citizen science project where participants periodically count the birds they see at their feeders and report their observations. You can count birds as often or as infrequently as you like. The information helps scientists track long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. Interested? Check it out at feederwatch.org.



Artwork by Noah S., Kindergarten

Calling student artists, grades K-12: Art Contest & Show go LIVE in 2023

“I felt an intimacy with [birds] bordering on frenzy [that] must accompany my steps through life,” wrote John James Audubon. Memorialized in his detailed portraits of birds in their natural habitats, Audubon’s passion still inspires birders today. To advance his legacy and fulfill our mission, Audubon Society of Omaha proudly invites student artists to submit entries for ASO’s annual Student Art Contest. This year, we are returning to our popular in-person, LIVE event, the way we conducted it pre-Covid.

WHO All K-12 students, even if their school does not participate

WHAT Original student artwork featuring birds. Many prizes will be awarded in these categories: Realism, Graphic Design, Cartooning, and Recycled.

HOW AND WHERE Starting January 2, look for rules, entry forms and more at audubon-omaha.org on the Special Events page.

ENTRY DEADLINE Submit entries in person at the Audubon Society of Omaha office, 4339 S. 90th Street, during these dates and times:

- Thursday, Feb. 23, from 3 - 6 p.m.
- Friday, Feb. 24, from 3 - 6 p.m.
- Saturday, Feb. 25, from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

WHY Because studies show that children learn by doing or creating artwork focused on a specific subject,

we think this is a win-win. A focus on birds provides teachers, parents and students an opportunity to discuss the conservation and protection of our environment, thereby helping birds and all wildlife.

ART SHOW AND AWARDS

CEREMONIES Saturday, April 15, from noon until 3 p.m. Attend the Art Show at Creighton University’s Mike and Josie Harper Center at 602 N 20th Street in Omaha to view every work of art submitted. Awards ceremony for grades K-8 starts at 1 p.m. and awards for grades 9-12 awards begin at 2:30 p.m.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Please consider volunteering to:

- Collect and organize art at the ASO office on Thursday, February 23, from 3 - 6 p.m., Friday, February 24, from 3 - 6 p.m., and Saturday, February 25, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Hang artwork at Creighton University’s Mike and Josie Harper Center on Saturday, April 15, from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30.
- Help host the Art Show and take down the art on Saturday, April 15, from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Please contact Julia Rawnsley at jrawnsley@audubonomaha.org if you would like to volunteer for this important and popular event. If you have questions, please contact Virginia at vstauffer@audubonomaha.org.

Winter 2023 Bird Seed Sale — better get clicking!

by Betty Fullerton

Running low on bird seed? Want to help your feathered friends through spring migration?

Starting January 5, you can order seed online during Audubon Society of Omaha’s Winter Bird Seed Sale. Here’s the scoop: If you have purchased bird seed in the past — and have given us your email address — we will email you an order form. (As usual, we don’t send a mailing with order forms for the Winter Sale.)

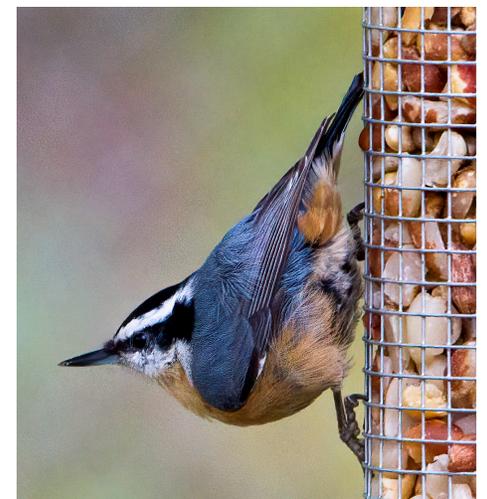
YOU CAN ORDER TWO WAYS

1. Mail your completed order form (available on the website) with a check.
2. Order online at audubon-omaha.org using a credit or debit card.

All orders are due February 9.

Your order will be ready for pickup on Saturday, Feb. 18, from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. at ASO’s office and warehouse at 4339 South 90th Street in Omaha.

If you have questions, OR would like to volunteer for this important fundraiser, we could really use the help. Call John or Betty Fullerton at 402-493-4362 or 402-957-5901. If you need us to email an order form to you, please email efullerton00@gmail.com.



Red-breasted Nuthatch,
photo by Mary Clausen

Board of Directors update

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

The evening of September 13 was a night to remember when scores of bird lovers flocked together to celebrate Audubon Society of Omaha's 50th Anniversary at Lauritzen Gardens.

The evening began with private tours of the gardens and the conservatory, followed by an enlightening look at "The Birds of Lewis and Clark" by longtime member and former ASO president, Neal Ratzlaff. Neal opened his talk by welcoming Loren Padelford, and his wife, Babs. Loren served as our chapter's first elected president after the former Bird Club, led by Dick Russell, joined the National Audubon Society. Neal is also a co-founder of ASO's Bird Seed Sale, our club's major fundraiser, along with Marlene Weber and John Upchurch.

Attendees enjoyed delicious bird's nest cupcakes donated by Katie's Cakery and shared memories of the past 50 years. They also received the book, "Birds of the Untamed West," published and donated by Jim Ducey, another former ASO president.

The event brought together more than 150 people who, over the years, have helped promote environmental awareness to our community through education, conservation and the enjoyment of our natural heritage — especially birds.



Saw-whet Owl, photo by Amy Campagna

an opportunity to study the secretive little bird, and that's what Jerry Toll and his team have been doing, with permits from the state and federal government, at Hitchcock Nature Center for 16 seasons now. Using a recording of the incessant "toot, toot, toot" of a male Saw-whet, the birds are captured in nets, weighed, measured, sexed, aged, banded, and released. The data help conservationists understand species distribution, movement, population, and annual production.

ASO FIELD-TRIPPERS GIVE A HOOT AND HEAR A TOOT

On a chilly November evening, a group of 23 cold-hardy folks gathered in the barn at Pottawattamie Conservation's Hitchcock Nature Center to see one of North America's smallest owls, the Northern Saw-whet Owl.

These diminutive and unbelievably adorable nocturnal hunters measure just eight inches long and weigh only three ounces. Saw-whet Owls breed in forested areas across northern North America and southern Canada but migrate through our area in the fall to wintering sites in the southern United States. This behavior provides an

RESOURCES & INFO:

HOW TO JOIN/RENEW/UPDATE

Join or renew your membership online at auduon-omaha.org and select "Get Involved." Save paper and avoid confusion. 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

Join our email list 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.

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS:

- We need volunteers for our 2023 Student Art Contest and Show. There are a wide variety of dates and times available for helping with this popular community event. Learn more on page 3 of this issue. Contact Julia Rawnsley at jrawnsley@audubonomaha.org
- Feeling strong? We need volunteers to help with our winter bird seed sale. Please contact John Fullerton at fullertonj@cox.net

TAKE ACTION Big things are happening, so communicate with your elected officials. Go to audubon-omaha.org for links to contact info for each.

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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Photo by Mike Benkis

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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   Find us on Facebook,
Twitter and Instagram.

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2nd Vice President: Open
Treasurer: Michelle Foss
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Kyle Finley
Grace Gaard
Nick Romero
Katy Simmons
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Heidi Walz

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