



Meadowlark

MAY/JUNE 2021
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New officers and directors for 2021-2022 term

Each year Audubon Society of Omaha elects or re-elects officers and directors. Here are the results for the term that starts July 1, 2021:



PRESIDENT:

Current 1st Vice President Christine Jacobsen will be taking over as president with guidance from Robert Wells, who

will serve as past president. Christine is the Director of Education at Lauritzen Gardens.

1ST VICE PRESIDENT:

Former board member and Student Art Contest Chair Virginia Stauffer, will serve as 1st VP.

2ND VICE PRESIDENT:

Current ASO board member, and Chairman of the Education Committee Elizabeth Chalen is taking over the duties of 2nd VP. She will want to hear from you in the future about nominees for the leadership team for 2022-23.

TREASURER:

Michelle Foss, currently an ASO director, was nominated as Treasurer by Betty Fullerton. Michelle holds a Master of Project Management degree from Colorado State University and a Bachelor of Science, Environmental Science, degree from SUNY Albany. Director of Resource Stewardship, at Fontenelle Forest, Michelle is also Scoutmaster for her daughter's BSA troop.

The birds of summer – colorful and lyrical

by Scott Bradley

Neotropical migrants pass through in May, and are considered favorites by many for the vivid varieties of color in their plumage. Popular migrants include Warblers, Vireos, Tanagers, and Orioles. Migrating flocks of Warblers and Vireos often mix with local flocks of Chickadees, so keep an eye out for visitors when you see or hear Chickadees in May. Local hotspots for migrants include Walnut Grove Park, Towl Park, Elmwood Park, Heron Haven, and the areas near Fontenelle Forest's Nature Center and Wetlands, near Gifford Farm. Be sure to check your local hotspot regularly. These birds are most active in the morning.

Local breeding birds return in May and stick around all summer, departing in the fall at various times. It can be fun to learn the songs of local birds, as they tend to fill our neighborhoods, parks and woodlands with their melodies. Look in mature forests and recreation areas for breeding species, including Vireos, Tanagers, and Orioles. Indigo Bunting, American Redstart and Yellow-billed Cuckoo may be found near the Fontenelle Forest Nature Center and Wetlands areas. To help with identification and bird songs, download the Audubon Bird Guide app to your smartphone. Developed by the National Audubon Society, it has a find-a-bird feature and it's FREE.



From left: Baltimore Oriole, Indigo Bunting and American Redstart, photos by Mike Benkis

RIGHT HERE, RIGHT HOW: YOU CAN COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE

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

Join the movement in May

There are many ways to get involved in the climate movement. Support an advocacy group, such as The Nature Conservancy or Citizens' Climate Lobby, and write your legislators, urging them to take action.

Workplace Re-June-ventation

Still working remote? Shift your desk into a position that capitalizes on natural light in your home. Keeping fewer lights turned on for long hours helps lower your electricity usage.

Continued on page 2

New officers and directors *(cont. from page 1)*

SECRETARY:

Anne Maguire, Chairman of the Fundraising Committee and Publisher of the Meadowlark, will be taking over from Shannon Engberg as secretary.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Because the new officers vacated director positions, three new board members have been elected:

Amy Campagna, nominated by Elizabeth Chalen, has spent much of her long career working with students ages 5-18. Amy is the Environmental Education Coordinator for Pottawattamie County Conservation. Previously she was an Educator at Fontenelle Forest. She is also a Nebraska Master Naturalist and a Master Gardener. Amy holds a Master of Science, Family Life Education, degree from University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Lauren Robinson began volunteering with ASO last year. Fascinated by the intersection of birding, conservation, and science communications, Lauren draws upon her communications expertise to help manage ASO's social media pages. She has made it her mission to encourage the non-bird-indoctrinated to stop and appreciate the abundance of wildlife around them. Lauren holds a Master's degree in Journalism, Science Reporting Specialization, Northwestern University. She is currently Communications Director at the Mid-America Mental Health Technology Transfer Center at UNMC

Katy Simmons holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Creighton University and will soon have a Master of Science degree in Conservation Biology. With experience in operations at The Nature Conservancy, Katy knows how to get things done. She is also certified by Harvard EdEx in Energy With Environmental Constraints.

Field notes from the President

by Bob Wells, President, Audubon Society of Omaha

I am writing this column on March 21, the second official day of spring 2021. In Eastern Nebraska, we have survived a winter with the second coldest day in modern recorded history – 23 degrees Fahrenheit below zero. Nonetheless, Sandhill Cranes are making their annual epic migration along the Platte River, with approximately 500,000 birds (+/- 50,000) passing through just last week. A small, requisite number of Whooping Cranes dropped in, as well, including my namesake, “Bob,” who has graced the central Platte River for several years now. A true rarity reported this year was a photo-documented Common Crane. Common in Eurasia, Common Cranes rarely traverse the Bering Strait into North America to hook up with Sandhill Cranes while on the Eastern Siberian leg of their migration.

Migrating Sandhill Cranes foreshadow our spring passerine migration, which usually transpires in mid-April and reaches its peak the first week of May. As the pandemic allows, make sure you get out to see the glorious movement of color and the stunning variety of species that mark the spring migration in our area. Grape jelly and oranges for arriving Orioles and nectar for Hummingbirds should go up the last week of April.

During my time on the leadership team, Audubon Society of Omaha has worked strategically to actively promote environmental awareness to our community through education, conservation and enjoyment of our natural heritage, with a special focus on birds.

Several UNO students teamed up with ASO and Dr. John McCarty, head of the school's Environmental Science department, to establish the first University Student Audubon Chapter in Nebraska at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Despite the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, this chapter has been active in educational programming and field work. And, we were able to continue our monthly member meetings on the Zoom platform.

We also developed a custom education program for area students conducted by professional conservation educators and funded the production of a short film, *Fragments*, about lead poisoning in raptors, directed by former ASO board member Alex Wiles. ASO members — and the general public — can now view (and share) *Fragments* through our own YouTube page, as well as enjoy videos of our monthly Zoom member meetings. Several birding “superstars,” including Steve Shunk, Woodpecker specialist, and “super-birder” Noah Stryker, have presented well-received programs for audiences inside and outside our organization.

My years on the ASO board have coincided with continuing federal and state rollbacks that have negatively affected conservation and environmental protection. With help from many other conservation groups, we drove discussions of these critical issues with our members and communicated key concerns to elected officials in writing and in person to amplify your voice and maximize your impact.

One of our most significant initiatives involved planning and executing ASO's facilities upgrade, which relocated our office from the Center Mall to a new home that includes an office and a medium-sized warehouse that has enabled us to streamline our major fundraiser, the semi-annual birdseed sale. Combined with expanded marketing to increase sales, the new office has proved to be a great success so far.

In 2018, through a generous offer from The Nature Conservancy, we acquired Cuming City Prairie, north of Blair. We also purchased 20 additional acres to expand our existing Omaha Prairie Preserve.

Finally, I am extremely grateful to all of the wonderful people of the Audubon Society of Omaha — members of the board and general members — who have made my stint as president both enjoyable and productive. This is my last president's column. In August, Christine Jacobsen will take over as ASO's new president. Christine is the lead educator at Lauritzen Gardens and will be a wonderful asset to ASO as president.

Thank you again for making ASO such a great organization to serve.

Keep cats safe and save birds' lives — Part 2 by Anne Maguire

See Part 1 of this article in the March/April 2021 issue. Find it at audubon-omaha.org and click on the Who We Are tab and select Newsletter.

CATS KILL AN ESTIMATED 2.7 BILLION BIRDS A YEAR IN THE US.

They are the greatest threat to birds in North America — killing more birds than loss of habitat, climate change, wind energy and building strikes. Unfortunately, most people are unaware of the magnitude of the problem.

Audubon Society of Omaha (ASO) is determined to make a difference in our community by educating our members and the public. Both cat lovers and bird lovers can work together to keep cats safe and save birds' lives.

Over the next two months, look for social media posts on the Audubon Omaha Facebook page highlighting facts about the dangers of letting pet cats roam outside. They will emphasize the danger cats pose to birds. Be sure to “Like” these posts and, more importantly, hit the “Share” arrow to spread the word!

ASO is developing informational material about the effects of cat predation on our local wildlife, which will be provided to the Nebraska Humane Society and other local rescue groups.

Keeping a cat indoors at all times is the surest way for it to live a long, healthy life. It's much easier to keep a cat indoors when it's never been allowed to roam. Transitioning an “indoor/outdoor” cat to an “inside only” cat can be challenging, but there are many ways to keep a cat entertained indoors. If a cat is



Colorful Birdsbesafe Collars typically reduce the number of birds killed by cats by 87 percent.

simply unmanageable when confined in the home, Birdsbesafe® collars can dramatically reduce bird hunting success. Developed by conservationist Nancy Brennan and bird biologist Susan Willson, these brightly colored collars have been proven to reduce bird kills by 87 percent. For more information, visit birdsbesafe.com.

Unfortunately, Birdsbesafe collars are not recommended for feral cats. The collars should be kept dry and regularly checked for fit. Many feral cats cannot be handled, making the collars difficult to maintain.

THE FERAL CAT DILEMMA

What can we do about the thousands of feral cats that survive in our neighborhoods and parks? These colonies can reproduce at a staggering rate. One female kitty can produce an average of 12 kittens a year. Most conservationists take a hard line on feral cats, suggesting the only solution is to find indoor homes or humanely euthanize them. They point to the devastation of native wildlife as well as the spread of diseases, including rabies and toxoplasmosis. But public opinion and our local animal laws find mass euthanasia of the feral cat population an impossible pill to swallow.

Several local nonprofit groups advocate Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR) programs aimed at reducing and eventually eliminating feral cat colonies. Feline Friendz of Nebraska and Community Cats of Omaha have volunteers who help property owners trap feral cats. They work with Animal Spay Neuter Clinic at 50th Street and NW Radial Hwy in Omaha to spay/neuter, vaccinate and apply flea and tick medication. The cats are then returned to the place they were trapped. The cat rescues are nonprofits and donations are welcomed to help cover the veterinary cost.

Sheryl Spain, of Community Cats,

began a TNR program 16 years ago. She noticed a colony of 50-60 cats outside a local bar. Her efforts to provide food, shelter and spay/neutering have allowed the cats to live out their lives while reducing the population to about a dozen elderly cats. No kittens have been born in the colony over the past 10 years. Spain has become a community advocate for TNR, especially in areas of South Omaha where the feral cat problem is exploding. When she sees a home with multiple cats outside, she knocks on doors and hands out literature explaining how TNR works. She usually gets a thankful response from the residents when they learn Community Cats of Omaha can help.

Sharon Hofmann has been trapping cats for Feline Friendz for 10 years. She made it her full-time mission six years ago after retiring as a middle school special education teacher. She will lend live traps to local residents and give instructions for successfully trapping a feral cat — a process that usually takes several days. She also has designed and built large drop traps that enable her to trap up to 10 or more cats at one time. Feline Friendz traps and spays/neuters about 900 cats each year. In 2020 it found permanent indoor homes for 218 cats.

Both of these organizations try to place feral cats in loving indoor homes whenever possible. Volunteers will foster feral cats and kittens to socialize them for permanent homes. It's difficult to determine the impact of TNR efforts in the Omaha area. Pam Wiese of Nebraska Humane Society reports they have seen a steady decline in the number of cats being surrendered over the past five years. NHS took in 10,136 cats in 2016. In 2020 the number was down to 6,534.

Education is key to keeping cats safe and saving birds' lives. You can play a part by helping to get the word out.

Student artists transcend the times to capture the beauty of birds

by Virginia Stauffer,

Chair, Student Art Contest and Show

They are, virtually, Best of Show. Don't wait another minute to mosey through the galleries on display during the 2021 Audubon Society of Omaha Student Art Show at audubon-omaha.org. Posted April 5, the more than 300 entries have amazed and delighted site visitors and judges, who awarded more than 200 prizes for Excellence and Merit. The Art Show has proved so popular that ASO has extended its gallery dates through August 31, 2021.

Special thanks to the Art Show committee: Jackie Scholar, Grace Gaard, Lauren Robinson and Heidi Walz, and our website partners at Firespring for their patient guidance while we built the galleries. Thanks, too, to our judges, Anne Maguire, Jaye Welch, Kit Murrin, Grace Gaard, Jackie Scholar, Jason St. Sauver, and Marlene McCann. Of course, thanks to our Audubon members whose support makes this areawide student event possible.

Most of all, thanks to the students, teachers and parents who made the art happen and then uploaded it.

It was an extra step, and we couldn't have done it without you. Teachers and parents also picked up prizes at our new office, following Audubon health and safety measures. Due to these precautions, we were not able to visit with many of our favorite teachers and schools this year; we hope they will enter again next year. And we especially missed seeing YOU — students with their families and friends, live and in-person.



Daniel R., *Mountain Bluebird*
BEST OF SHOW K-4: Realism



Willa S., *Meadowlark*
BEST OF SHOW K-4: Realism



McKaylee H., *Hooded Crane*
BEST OF SHOW 5-8: Realism



Gabriel A., *Ruby-throated Hummingbird*
BEST OF SHOW 9-12: Realism



Cameron R., *Eastern Meadowlark*
MEADOWLARK AWARD



Ella J., *Painted Bunting*
BEST OF SHOW 9-12: Realism



Caitlyn S., Western Meadowlark
BEST OF SHOW K-4: Graphic Design



Jane R., Barn Owl
BEST OF SHOW 5-8: Graphic Design



Alaster D., Blue Bird
BEST OF SHOW 5-8: Graphic Design



Vivian E., Gold Finch
BEST OF SHOW 9-12: Graphic Design



Darius D., Ancient Murrelet
BEST OF SHOW K-4: Recycled



Sydney H., Mute Swan
BEST OF SHOW 5-8: Recycled



Hannab S., White Peacock
BEST OF SHOW 9-12: Recycled



Rylee K., American Gold Finch
BEST OF SHOW K-4: Cartooning



Wyatt N., Pizza Gamer
BEST OF SHOW K-4: Cartooning



Taj S., Red-tailed Hawk (playing basketball)
BEST OF SHOW 5-8: Cartooning



Makenzie E., Osprey
BEST OF SHOW 9-12: Cartooning

Coming to Cuming City Prairie: Program on a Page

by Michelle Foss, Director

PLEASE JOIN ME ON A JOURNEY TO OUR CUMING CITY PRAIRIE

Through my work at Fontenelle Forest and as an ASO volunteer, I have visited this prairie several times and would love to take you there in person. But until we can do so safely, let's gather on the page! And let's make our sojourn more about experience than analysis.

We are traveling just north of Blair to the last remaining virgin prairie in the Loess Hills. Untouched by the plow, this 10-acre preserve is home to at least 95 native plant species and serves as the final resting place for a small number of people from the late 1800s.

As we emerge from our car, we climb up and over the metal staircase onto the property. Let's take a moment to read the sign detailing the history of the area, from its use as the town cemetery to its days as a preserve for native vegetation owned by the former Dana College. Audubon Society of Omaha acquired the land recently to use for educational purposes, like this program, and as a habitat for native organisms. Volunteers and partner organizations conduct habitat management, both by mechanical removal of prairie invaders and through the use of prescribed burns.

Before meandering up the hill, take a look around. Do you see the tree just to the left as you're looking at the sign? Head around back. If you look closely, you'll see a gooseberry bush growing out of a space where a branch attaches to the tree. How do you think that got all the way up there?

You'll see a mowed path along the fence on the other side of the sign, heading up the hill. Let's begin our hike there. We'll make some observations and get extremely close to the native prairie. There will be time for wandering, as well. Here we go ...

1. TAKE THE FIRST STEP

As we start walking, with the prairie on the left and the fence on the right, look for deer trails. You'll see animal runways through the prairie. You'll also see exposed soil, where slight erosion has occurred from animals using the same paths. Now, depending on when you go, you'll see varying amounts of exposed soil due to vegetation cover. Do you see more green plants, or do you see the spaces between them? The earlier you get out there, the more soil you'll see. As the season lengthens, so do the plants.

2. GET CLOSER

We'll keep walking. Notice the variety of plants. Get closer. Even closer. Go ahead and get right down on the ground and take a look. How many different colors do you see? How many different plants? Are there different shades of green? What do the blades of grasses and sedges look like — rough, smooth, hairy? How do the flower petals interact with each other? Can you see the insects hovering around flowers, or crawling on the ground? If you brought field guides for plants or insects, now is an excellent time to thumb through them to see what you've found.

3. BREATHE AND LISTEN

Once you're ready, get up, and walk a bit further up the hill. Then pause. Slow your breathing ... in, then out. Listen. Close your eyes and really listen. What do you hear? Road noise? Wind? Farm equipment? People? Birds? Insects? Listen while the myriad sounds separate to reveal distinct, natural voices. Where is each syllable coming from?

4. BE CURIOUS

Slowly open your eyes, and move on. Instead of getting up close, now we're going to compare and contrast the land on each side of the fence. What's the same on both sides? What's different? How do you think the land is used on

each side of the fence? Why? Do you think there was a similar fence back in the mid-1800s? How might today's landscape differ from yesterday's?

5. EXPLORE THE HISTORY

Keep going, to the top of the hill. We are now at the cemetery. How do the plants differ from where we started? Are the sounds different? What do you smell?

Part of nature is history, and here, at the cemetery, are actual, set-in-stone, historical facts. If you're comfortable, wander around and study some of the stones outlining lives lived. Some were very short, others very long.

6. LOOK UP

We've spent much of our time looking down and around. Now let's take a few moments to look up. Is it a bright sunny day? Are there fluffy white clouds? Or are the skies slate-grey? How far can you see?

From here, take your time heading back, whether you retrace your steps or blaze a new trail. Watch your step among clumps of grass punctuated by pockmarks of subterranean animal activity.

7. GET THE BIG PICTURE

We haven't talked much about birds, and that's OK. Birds, insects, plants, microbes, fungi, mammals, reptiles and amphibians invoke a complex web of interconnections, which can distract us from seeing the beauty of the whole — leading us to, quite literally, not see the forest for the trees, and miss the macro in favor of the micro. Today's program has asked you to experience the prairie holistically.

If you yearn for more specificity, grab a field guide or a smartphone with an identification app and trek back to Cuming City, remembering that prairie plants and animals can be very picky about when they appear.

Happy hiking!
(P.S. Send us your prairie photos.)

The eyes have it – your photos

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

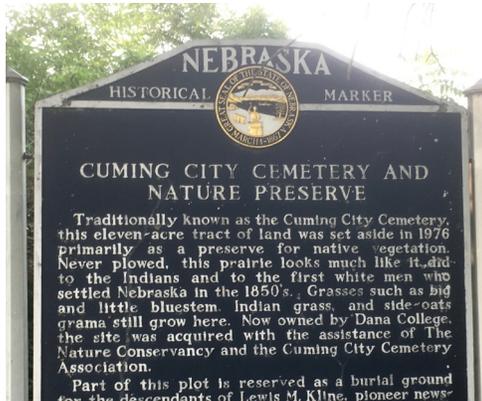


Photo by Virginia Stauffer



Belted Kingfisher photo by Ron Hiatt



Photo by Virginia Stauffer



Common Nighthawk photo by Bobby Walz



Photo by Virginia Stauffer



Vermillion Flycatcher photo by Ron Hiatt



Photo by Glenn Pollock



Scissor-tailed Flycatcher photo by Bobby Walz

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.

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.

SPECIAL THANKS

Members of the board of directors and committee chairpersons wish to thank Bob Wells, Shannon Engberg, Betty Fullerton and their families for their many years of service to Audubon Society of Omaha. They have done a great job supporting our mission through many changes and challenges our organization has seen. THANKS!

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**INSIDE THIS ISSUE OF
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STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH AND ITS CREATURES

the **Meadowlark**

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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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ELECTED OFFICERS

President: Bob Wells
Past President: Matt Miller
1st Vice President: Christine Jacobsen
2nd Vice President: Meagan Deichert
Treasurer: Betty Fullerton
Secretary: Shannon Engberg

ELECTED DIRECTORS

Scott Bradley	Mark Cave
Elizabeth Chalen	Michelle Foss
Grace Gaard	Michaela Johnson
Anne Maguire	Heidi Walz

Photo by Alice Lauritzen