



# Meadowlark

MAR/APRIL 2020  
VOL 49 ISSUE 2

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## ‘Spring’ into birding at upcoming member meetings

**IN MARCH** Discover the secrets of snapping stunning bird photos.

Whether you’re a photographer or you simply enjoy looking at amazing pictures of birds, ASO’s March 12 member meeting promises a feast for the eyes.

Photographer Mike Benkis will share tips for capturing memorable, meaningful photos of birds. His lifelong connection to birds and falconry, and his more recent passion for photography, combine to bring us a close-up look at hundreds of birds. In 2017 alone, Benkis captured detailed images of 163 species. He currently teaches wildlife photography at the Henry Doorly Zoo and contributes many pictures to our Audubon publications.

**IN APRIL** Cultivate your interest in creating a healthy habitat for birds.

Fighting invasive species, restoring land after major floods, conducting prescribed burns, and devising a forward-looking plan of attack keeps our speaker, Michelle Foss, on the front lines of regional conservation efforts. As the manager for Stewardship and Research at Fontenelle Forest, Foss knows how important a healthy habitat is for birds.

Join us for a briefing on habitat restoration efforts at Fontenelle Forest and properties managed by Audubon Omaha. Best of all, learn how you can make your own backyard more inviting for our feathered friends.

See page 2 for times and locations.

## Migrating species make early spring the months birders dream about

by Clem Klaphake

March and April often mark the beginning of the spring migration for a variety of bird species. Depending on the weather, which can run the gamut from spring-like temperatures to sub-zero snowstorms, initial waves of many migrating birds make their way back to our area.

Sandhill Cranes start sweeping into central Nebraska in late February, and their numbers crescendo to more than half a million by mid-to-late March. If you have never been out to the Grand Island/Kearney area during peak Sandhill Crane migration season, and you would like to go – put it on your bucket list. Opportunities abound to go on your own or with a group of friends or sponsoring organizations. The Audubon Nebraska Crane Festival – the nation’s oldest birding festival – celebrates its 50th anniversary March 20-22 of this year in Kearney. Every year a couple of Whooping Cranes show up as well, and large flocks of American White Pelicans like to spend a few days on some of the large reservoirs and lakes in Nebraska (e.g., Calamus, Harlan, Wanahoo, Branched Oak, Wehrspann, and a few other assorted larger bodies of water).

March and April also are the months when several million Snow Geese migrate through eastern Nebraska on their way to nesting grounds on the Canadian tundra. With the geese come great varieties of northbound migrating duck species.

Passerines are more likely to start showing up in large numbers in April and May. Some early migrants to watch for are Eastern Phoebes, Brown Thrashers, Tree Swallows, Eastern Towhees, and by mid-April such neo-tropical warblers as the Northern Parula, Yellow-throated Warbler and Yellow-rumped Warbler (the latter often winters in the southern U.S.). By the last week of April, you may note an influx of a whole variety of Vireos, Warblers, Flycatchers, Wrens, Tanagers and the like. By late March, Turkey Vultures will also be drifting north.

March, April and May are a local birder’s dreamtime — the months birders dream about the rest of the year!

### RIGHT HERE, RIGHT HOW: YOU CAN COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE

Wrap  
up plans for  
your garden in  
**March**

Grow your own fruits and vegetables organically, or plant a tree that will help shade your home.

Recycle  
your yard and  
food waste this  
**April**

Start a compost bin at home – just skip meat, fish, dairy and grease.  
Or join a local compost club.

## ON THE HORIZON

# March:

### MEMBER MEETING

THURSDAY, MARCH 12

**Speaker:** Wildlife photographer Mike Benkis

**Topic:** Secrets of Snapping Bird Photos.

**When:** 7 - 9 p.m.

**Where:** Weitz Community Engagement Center on the UNO Campus.

**Park:** FREE in Lot E, north of the building; tell the attendant, "Audubon."

**Who:** Members and the public (free).

### FIELD DAY: CUMING CITY CEMETERY AND PRAIRIE WORK

SATURDAY, MARCH 7

**What:** Join restoration biologists to create brush piles while exploring the diverse flora and fauna of this ASO property.

**When:** 10 a.m.

**Meet:** Cuming City Cemetery located three miles north of Blair (see map online)

**Who:** Conservationists who want to learn more about our virgin, Loess Hills-type prairie while helping maintain it.

# April:

### MEMBER MEETING

THURSDAY, APRIL 9

**Speaker:** Michelle Foss, Manager for Stewardship & Research, Fontenelle Forest

**Topic:** Creating Healthy Habitats for Birds

**When:** 7 - 9 p.m.

**Where:** Weitz Community Engagement Center on the UNO Campus.

**Park:** FREE in Lot E, north of the building; tell the attendant, "Audubon".

**Who:** Members and the public (free).

### FIELD TRIP: MUST-SEE MIGRANTS

SATURDAY, APRIL 4

**What:** Seek early spring migrants, including Kinglets, Sparrows, Hermit Thrushes, raptors, waterfowl and gulls.

**When:** 8:30 a.m. – noon

**Where:** Chalco Hills Recreation Area. Meet in the parking lot in front of 8901 S 154th St., Omaha. We'll drive to Recreation Road #3 to walk the nature trail. If time allows, we'll scan the lake for waterfowl, or explore the trails at the pond across Highway 370.

**Who:** Birders interested in observing early spring migrants. Trails can be muddy, so please plan accordingly.

# Field notes from the President

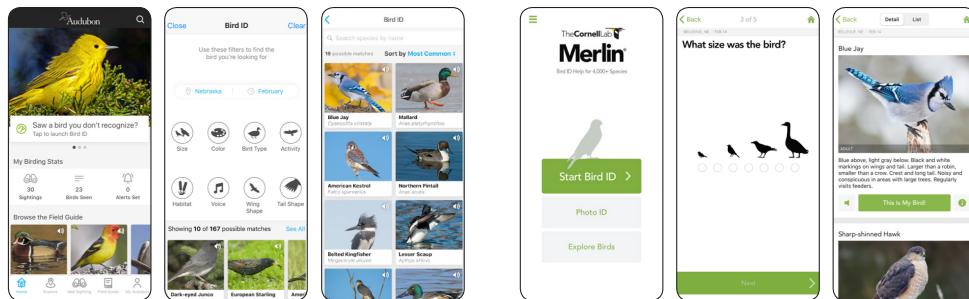
by Bob Wells, President, Audubon Society of Omaha

Birding is something just about anyone can experience, regardless of age or ability. Avid birders know that seasonal birding requires using resources that describe where birds are being seen. The last 10 years have seen a proliferation of smart phone apps that enable users to search near and far to see where bird species are being reported. In fact, most hard copy field guides have introduced digital apps.

Although many are not free, they provide a variety of robust features with exceptional portability and easy-to-use search features to quickly identify birds you see. All things considered, most birders I know use one (or both) of these excellent FREE apps available for both iOS and Android platforms: The Audubon Bird Guide app and the Merlin Bird ID app. Cornell Lab, a prominent scientific resource in the birding world, created Merlin, which is the most widely used app in this category. The Merlin and Audubon apps both enable you to pack all of the information in a paper field guide in your smart phone.

Using the date and geographic data collected from your smartphone, the apps ask you a short list of questions about the birds you see to help you identify species based on the criteria you provide.

- **What size was the bird?** The app provides a scale from wren to robin to crow to goose or larger, including a size in between each.
- **What are the bird's three most prominent colors?**
- **Where did you see the bird?** At a feeder? Swimming or wading? On the ground? In trees or bushes? On a fence or wire? Flying or soaring?



*Audubon app: The home page gives options for bird ID, checking your stats, browsing the field guide and seeing the latest from audubon.org*

*Merlin app: The home page is simply about bird identification. Each subsequent step asks questions until possible matches are displayed.*

Based on your observations, the apps generate a short list of species and photos to help you make a match. Each app provides several photos of each species, as well as their songs and ranges. And each app offers a unique plus. Merlin allows you to enter a picture of your bird, which it will then analyze and identify, while Audubon includes information about your bird's conservation status, as well as its feeding behavior, diet, nesting and eggs. It also helps you create a record of your sightings.

Digital birding apps may not be right for everyone in every situation, however. They require a smartphone with enough memory to store the entire app. Birding field guides and identification apps use very large files that must be stored for access on the phone and not from the Cloud. The Audubon Bird Guide app stores bird photos and data on over 800 species. Merlin demands similar storage capacity. ANY bird ID app needs to be downloaded when you have good connectivity and time. In other words, it can be difficult to download these apps while you're in the field.

Online guides offer an additional option. One popular reference guide for our area, Birds of Nebraska, is now out of print but is available online at [birds.outdoornebraska.gov](http://birds.outdoornebraska.gov). Although this guide is not available as an app, it is FREE and is a very detailed and accurate tool that can be used on any home computer, phone or tablet with Wi-Fi or internet access.



# ASO annual banquet ‘sounds like’ fun

by Anne Maguire, Chair, Marketing and Outreach Committee

Mark your calendars for May 14, 2020. Join us for an evening of casual fun, friendship and lively entertainment at DJ’s Dugout, 777 No. 114th Street, in Omaha. Enjoy heavy hors d’oeuvres and a cash bar from 6 - 7 p.m. as you greet old friends, meet new ones and share your latest birding tales. There will be plenty of seating.

At 7 p.m., guest speaker Jason “the Bird Nerd” St. Sauver will entertain us with his presentation, “Birding by Ear.” Jason is Director of Education and Outreach for Audubon Nebraska. For the past five years, he has been sharing his love of nature with visitors to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center in Denton, Nebraska. Register by May 1 at [audubon-omaha.org](http://audubon-omaha.org) Special Event \$20 per person.

## Board of Directors recap

**2019 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT** A weather-related change of date brought out fewer counters this year. Here are a few highlights from the intrepid band that braved the cold for our 2019 count:

- Our counters identified 69 species, several more than the historical median of 61.
- However, our count of 8,857 individual birds fell below the median of 12,604.
- And, our total of 24 counters is about 33% below our median of 35.
- We tallied an all-time species high count at Manawa for the Long-tailed Duck.
- We also hit all-time high counts for the Northern Shoveler, American Robin, Western Meadowlark and Red Crossbill.
- But we witnessed all-time low counts for the Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse and House Sparrow.

Most likely, inaccessibility or damage to natural habitats from last year’s flooding negatively impacted the number of birds found, as did the lower number of people counting. Special thanks to Rick Schmid for organizing the event, Neal Ratzlaff for leading the count and Candy Gorton for cleaning the ASO office and rounding up a pizza dinner for the participants.



Long-tailed Duck  
Photo by L. Paddleford



Patty Albright and Jasmine  
Photo by Anne Maguire

**JANUARY MEMBERS’ MEETING** Cold weather didn’t stop many members from attending our January program meeting featuring Bethany Thornton. Bethany spoke about the the significance of Hitchcock Nature Center as the designated reporting center in the Missouri River migratory corridor. Patty Albright from Raptor Recovery brought live, rescued raptors to the meeting, increasing attendance by three.

## FEBRUARY MEMBERS’ MEETING

The premiere screening of Alex Wiles’ short documentary on lead poisoning in raptors, **FRAGMENTS**, held at Fontenelle Forest was well received and attended by over 150 people. Kay Nueman and Thora the Bald Eagle, from SOAR then gave a presentation that included X-rays showing lead fragments in raptors and venison. The panel discussion that followed provided opportunities to address concerns from hunters and birders alike about lead ammunition and how it can be phased out. Special thanks to Alex Wiles, Denise Lewis, Betsy Finch, Kay Nueman, Doug Finch and Kent Walton.



Left: Alex Wiles,  
director of Fragments.  
Below: Kay Nueman  
from Save Our Avian  
Resources (SOAR)  
with Thora the Bald  
Eagle.  
Photos by Lauren  
Robinson



## Picture this – we need your help with our Student Art Show

Do it for the kids! The annual Audubon Society of Omaha Student Art Show will be held on Saturday, April 18, 2020, at the Harper Center, 602 N. 20th Street, on the Creighton University campus. This high-profile event draws a large number of attendees, and we need your help to make this event special for all student artists and their families. Artwork from every K-12 student entering the contest will be on display the day of the show. Here’s how you can help:

- **Hang artwork.** 8:30 a.m. - noon  
We will need to hang all artwork that students submit for the show.
- **Host the art show.** 11 a.m. - 4 p.m.  
Represent Audubon Society of Omaha by greeting and interacting with attendees. This is a great way for our organization to connect with the community.
- **Take down and pack.** 3:30 - 4 p.m.  
One of the easiest jobs! Recover leftover artwork and pack up any art and prizes not yet claimed. Pack up signs and supplies ... including many stickpins.

Candy Gorton is our volunteer boss for this event. Please contact her at [audubonomaha@gmail.com](mailto:audubonomaha@gmail.com) if you would like to be part of this popular event or if you have questions. We deeply appreciate every volunteer!



# Meet your ASO officer and director nominees for 2020

Audubon Society of Omaha will hold its annual election of officers and directors at the April Board of Directors' meeting. Last September, the board approved a nominating committee formed by Second Vice President Virginia Stauffer, in accordance with our bylaws. Helen Bartee, Shannon Engberg, Jackie Scholar and Kathy Schwery served on the nominating committee.

## OFFICER NOMINEES FOR 2020-21

After defining ASO's short- and long-term needs, the committee recommends re-electing:

- **President: Bob Wells**
- **Treasurer: Betty Fullerton**
- **Secretary: Shannon Engberg**

Jackie Scholar and Virginia Stauffer will step down from the board, but will continue to chair/serve on committees.

### First Vice President, Christine Jacobsen

Current position: Director of Education at Lauritzen Gardens

In their own words: *I have worked in the natural resources/environmental education field for 20+ years and am skilled in Renewable Energy, Business Development, Budgeting, Volunteer Management, Natural Resources, Contract Negotiations, and Fundraising. With a Master of Public Administration (MPA) degree focused on Non-Profit Administration, I am a strong business development professional. My favorite activities include bird feeding and watching, hiking, reading, and exploring state and national parks.*

### Second Vice President, Meagan Deichert

Current position: President and CEO at Keep Nebraska Beautiful

In their own words: *I am passionate about ASO's mission to promote environmental awareness in our community. Now more than ever I believe people want good information from reputable organizations about our environment, and I have spent most of my career staying abreast of environmental law and the obstacles we face in preserving our natural environment. I have a love of the outdoors and travel, and I try to make it to at least one place I've never been every year. On the weekends you can usually find me walking my dog around a lake.*

## DIRECTOR NOMINEES FOR FALL 2020 TO SPRING 2022

### Scott Bradley

Current position: IT Auditor at Great Western Bank

In their own words: *Since I was very young, I have loved the outdoors. I always enjoyed learning about the natural environment and identifying what was in it. I was active in scouting and achieved Eagle Scout. Many years later, I was fortunate to discover the world of birds. It was about four years ago when my youngest brother invited me to a MAPS bird banding session with Rick Schmid. I honestly wasn't sure what to think about waking up so early to see birds, but somewhere between the expectations of hiking several miles, sweating and learning something new, my interest was piqued. Once there I was hooked, and I continued returning each week to band birds. A year later, I bought my first pair of binoculars, found eBird and have not been able to get enough! An opportunity to serve with the ASO would be an honor.*

### Michelle Foss

Current Position: Manager of Stewardship and Research, Fontenelle Forest

In their own words: *I possess a skillset combining project management and leadership principles with habitat restoration and outreach in non-profit environments. In addition to my job, where I serve as an advisory member of the Nebraska Prescribed Fire Council, I serve as vice president on the Green Bellevue Board, where my specialty is native habitat management. When I'm not working on various projects for those organizations, I'm an assistant scoutmaster for my daughter's Scouts BSA troop. I've had the privilege of working at Rocky Mountain National Park as an intern, and spending time in the outdoors in the many places I've lived.*

### Heidi Walz

Current Position: Family Manager; Senior Project Manager, Vic Gutman & Assoc. · Realtor, Nebraska Realty

In their own words: *Since joining Vic Gutman & Associates in 2003, I have served as Project Manager or Operations Manager for dozens of events, including the Omaha Farmers Market, Omaha's Holiday Lights Festival, the World's Championship Chili Cookoff, Omaha Summer Arts Festival, Omaha 150, Detroit / Windsor CarTunes on Parade Public Art Project, Cook-off and Mutual of Omaha's Wild About Omaha Weekend. Semi-retired, I now work part-time and contribute to special projects while serving as a resource for facility and logistics planning. Most recently, I managed the Omaha Celebrates America concert and fireworks show at Memorial Park after it was brought back from cancellation in 2019. Some of my favorite activities include reading, traveling, organizing (anything!) and enjoying the outdoors with my husband and two sons. Our oldest is an "avid birder" who has introduced our family to a whole new world in the last two years!*

**SPECIAL THANKS** to the Nominating Committee for its time and hard work. If you have feedback regarding nominees you would like to share with the board, please contact Virginia at [vstauffer1@yahoo.com](mailto:vstauffer1@yahoo.com).

## THE SLATE FOR 2020-2021

PRESIDENT: BOB WELLS

1ST VP: CHRISTINE JACOBSEN

2ND VP: MEAGAN DEICHERT

TREASURER: BETTY FULLERTON

SECRETARY: SHANNON ENGBERG

DIRECTOR: SCOTT BRADLEY

DIRECTOR: MICHELLE FOSS

DIRECTOR: HEIDI WALZ

# Pasque flowers and prairie lilies dot early spring landscapes

by Glenn Pollock, [pollockg@cox.net](mailto:pollockg@cox.net)

Recently, I saw my first sign of spring – a seed catalog! And that reminded me that somewhere under our frigid, snowy blanket, prairie flowers are resting patiently. They're a little like me: prairie plants don't like to wake up too early. The best time to see them doesn't start until late in May. However, there are a couple of early birds.

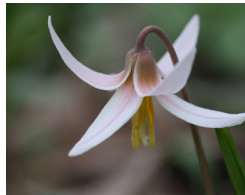
Pasque flowers, *Pulsatilla* are the first. Although I've seen them in bloom as early as February 28, they typically



*Pasque Flower*

available for purchase around here are of Russian heritage. There are about 33 Pasque flower cousins around the world.

The other early bird, which appears around mid-April, is the prairie trout lily, *erythronium mesochoreum*, not to be confused with its close cousin, the woodland trout lily, *erythronium albidum*. At one time, these two plants were



*Prairie Trout Lily*

thought to be the same species. But, with the advent of DNA sequencing, scientists learned that the two species possess

different sets of chromosomes. They look alike but act very differently. Prairie lilies like the sun, for example, while woodland lilies prefer shade, which is just one of many differences. Prairie lilies are not as common because much of their habitat is disappearing. I have found a few in prairie pioneer cemeteries in Iowa and on the Bauermeister Prairie in Omaha. They are easy to grow from seed in the right habitat. Good soil in the backyard works well; in fact, I have over 100 in my backyard. However, they live only a short time, appearing in April and going dormant by June 1.

## The eyes have it – your photos

We need your bird photos! Please email them to [Meadowlark at asopublisher@gmail.com](mailto:Meadowlark@asopublisher@gmail.com)



*Lewis's Woodpecker*  
Photo by Ron Hiatt



*Barred Owl*  
Photo by Ron Hiatt



*Dickcissel*  
Photo by Larry Frame

## RESOURCES & INFO:

### HOW TO JOIN/RENEW/UPDATE

Join or renew your membership online at [auduon-omaha.org](http://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](mailto:audubon@emailcustomerservice.com)

### STAY CONNECTED

Sign up to get our email at [audubon-omaha.org](http://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 2020 Student Art Contest and Show. There are a wide variety of tasks available. Contact Candy Gorton at [audubonomaha@gmail.com](mailto:audubonomaha@gmail.com)
- Help with our annual banquet on May 14. Contact Anne Maguire at [annebrunermaguire@gmail.com](mailto:annebrunermaguire@gmail.com) - she might even buy you a drink!

### TAKE ACTION

Big things are happening, so communicate with your elected officials. Go to [audubon-omaha.org](http://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.



Audubon  
Society of Omaha  
P.O. Box 3542  
Omaha, NE 68103  
audubon-omaha.org

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STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH AND ITS CREATURES

# the Meadowlark

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

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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.*

### CONTACT US AT:

P.O. Box 3542  
Omaha, NE 68103-3542  
402-445-4138  
website: audubon-omaha.org  
email: audubonomaha@gmail.com

### ELECTED OFFICERS

President: Bob Wells  
Past President: Matt Miller  
1st Vice President: Jackie Scholar  
2nd Vice President: Virginia Stauffer  
Treasurer: Betty Fullerton  
Secretary: Shannon Engberg

### ELECTED DIRECTORS

Ruth Bentzinger  
Mark Cave  
Elizabeth Chalen  
Grace Gaard  
Meagan Deichert  
Christine Jacobsen  
Michaela Johnson  
Anne Maguire

### COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

Art Contest: Virginia Stauffer  
Education: Elizabeth Chalen  
Finance: Betty Fullerton  
Fundraising: Anne Maguire  
Grant Review: Shannon Engberg  
Legislative Affairs: Bob Fuchs  
Marketing and Outreach: Anne Maguire  
Membership: Kathy Schwery  
Natural Areas Management:  
Glenn Pollock  
Nominating: Virginia Stauffer  
Program: Bob Wells  
Bird Seed Sale: John & Betty Fullerton  
ASO Administrator: Candace Gorton  
Executive Director, Audubon Nebraska:  
Kristal Stoner