



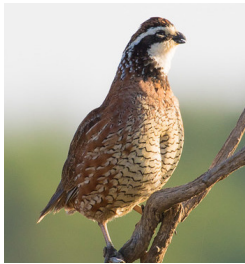
Meadowlark

MAR/APR 2024
VOL 53 ISSUE 2

Birds to look and listen for as the days lengthen in March and April

by *Conor Gearin*

Migration begins in March and April for many shorebirds, songbirds, waterfowl and raptors. But keep an eye out for behavior changing in year-round species, too. Species that spent the winter together in flocks, such as Northern Flickers and Meadowlarks, become more solitary as they seek out breeding habitats. Woodpeckers drum on resonant surfaces — including vinyl house siding and metal drain pipes — making themselves known to rivals. Wild Turkeys fan their feathers for



mates. Northern Bobwhites depart their winter coveys, form pairs, and might even lay their first clutch of eggs by April.



Red-winged Blackbird
by *Ron Hiatt*

In the Omaha metro area, early arrivals, such as male Red-winged Blackbirds, sing out in marshes even while we feel like we haven't

quite shaken off winter. You might find a recently returned Killdeer leading around precocious chicks before most songbirds have even thought about building a nest! Migratory species to watch for in March and April include sparrows such as Lincoln's Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, and Vesper Sparrow. Listen especially for the unique warbling song of Fox Sparrows that have stopped in a thicket on their way north. In

March, quirky American Woodcocks perform display flights and sound their "peent" calls in the evening.



Look for flocks of Franklin's Gulls with their signature pink bellies feeding on agricultural fields and roosting in and around lakes.



Yellow-rumped Warbler
by *Phil Swanson*

In April, the arrival of Yellow-rumped Warblers is the prelude to the flood of warblers and vireos to come later in the spring.

You might spot Caspian Terns and Forster's Terns over water bodies beginning in April, too.

If you're able to travel beyond Omaha, consider a trip to the Sandhill Crane migration stopover sites along the Platte River. You'll be rewarded with the sights



and sounds of thousands of cranes — and the company of many enthusiastic birders. Be prepared to dress warmly. Crane numbers typically reach their peak in the second half of March. Prime spots for crane watching include the Rowe Sanctuary east of Kearney and the Alda Sandhill Crane Viewing Deck southwest of Grand Island.

Rainy weather can make early spring birding difficult, but those storm systems can also hold up migratory birds in town for another day or two before they head north! So don't be discouraged by April showers — when there's a break in the rain, venture out and see which birds emerge from hiding.

GREEN CORNER: HOW YOU CAN COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE

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

Monitor March

Automatic adjustments made by programmable or smart thermostats can really add up! OPPD offers a Smart Thermometer Program that can lower your energy usage by up to 25%. Keeping an eye on home electricity use both conserves energy and reduces bills.

Appetizing April

Trap heat while cooking and use it to your advantage. By putting a lid or cover on pots and pans, energy is saved by decreasing the amount of time spent cooking. The same goes for the microwave, but you should already have been doing that to prevent splatters!

ON THE HORIZON

March

FIELD TRIP

SATURDAY, MARCH 16

What: Bald Eagle Nest Watch

Join us for a driving tour to view (from a distance) Bald Eagle nests in progress.

When: 9-11 a.m.

Where: Schram Educational Center
Schram State Park, Gretna NE

How: Register at audubon-omaha.org
for exact meeting location

Who: Members and the public (free)

MEMBERS PROGRAM

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

What: Pocket Prairies

After a tour of Glacier Creek, Trevor Pellerite will talk about changing the landscape of Omaha's medians and roadsides into nature-friendly habitats.

When: 6 p.m. tour, 7 p.m. program

Where: Glacier Creek Preserve
14810 State Street, Bennington, NE

How: Register at Audubon-Omaha.org

Who: Members and the public (free)

April

MEMBERS PROGRAM

THURSDAY, APRIL 11

What: Storytelling for Conservation

Conor Gearin, managing producer of BirdNote Daily, will discuss how science media can contribute to conservation.

When: 6 p.m. social, 7 p.m. program

Where: DJ's Dugout meeting room,
777 N. 114th Street, Omaha

How: Register at Audubon-Omaha.org

Who: Members and the public (free)

FIELD TRIP

SATURDAY, APRIL 13

What: EZ Does it Urban Birding

New birder? Too busy for an all-day excursion? Virginia Stauffer will lead a birding walk at a leisurely pace.

When: 9-11 a.m.

Where: Towl Park
9310 W. Center Rd., Omaha

How: Meet in the parking lot

Who: Members and the public (free)

The crucial role of education in conservation

By Christine Prescott, President, Audubon Society of Omaha



In the realm of conservation, education stands as a cornerstone, a beacon guiding individuals and communities toward a future where humanity and nature thrive in harmony. For the Audubon Society of Omaha, fostering a deep understanding of ecological principles and promoting environmental stewardship through education is paramount.

Education in the conservation field serves multifaceted purposes, starting with raising awareness about the intricate interdependence between all living beings and their habitats. Through targeted educational initiatives, individuals gain insight into the delicate balance that sustains ecosystems, realizing the profound impact of human activities on the natural world.

Moreover, education empowers individuals to become agents of positive change. By equipping members of the community with a working knowledge of conservation practices and environmental issues, Audubon Society of Omaha cultivates a cohort of passionate advocates dedicated to preserving biodiversity and safeguarding natural resources.

Education also plays a pivotal role in fostering a sense of responsibility and empathy toward the environment. By instilling values of conservation and sustainability from a young age, educational programs offered by Audubon Society of Omaha nurture a generation of environmentally conscious citizens who recognize their duty to protect and preserve the Earth for future generations.

Furthermore, education serves as a catalyst for innovation and collaboration within the conservation field. By facilitating learning opportunities and knowledge exchange among scientists, policymakers, and the public, Audubon Society of Omaha drives forward-thinking solutions to complex environmental challenges.

In conclusion, education is not just a tool; it is the cornerstone of effective conservation efforts. Through its educational initiatives, Audubon Society of Omaha inspires individuals to become advocates for nature, fostering a community committed to safeguarding our planet for generations to come.

The eyes have it – your photos

We love to see your bird photos! Please email them to photos@audubonomaha.org



Orchard Oriole, by Bob Tooley



Great-horned Owl by Haley McTee

Your Audubon chapter in action

BRAVE BIRDERS attended our January 20 field trip to view waterfowl at DeSoto NWR's visitor center. Ranger Rea gave a great update on the fall and winter bird numbers along with Christmas Bird Count results. The birds on the lake were pretty well hunkered down in the -15 degree weather, but we saw around 200 Swans, lots of Canada Geese, some Goldeneyes, and Mallards. The feeders were busy with: Hairy, Downy, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers; House Finches, Gold Finches, Nuthatches; White-crowned Sparrows and Tree Sparrows – until a Sharp-Shinned hawk came and scared them away.



WINTER WEATHER WARNINGS prompted ASO leadership to postpone our members' program for January 18 and EZ Birding at Towl Park on January 13. We apologize for any inconvenience and appreciate your understanding. On the bright side, the experts say heavy winter snows are necessary for healthy prairie ecosystems.

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS Trevor Pellerite and Conor Gearin were elected to fill vacant positions on our board of directors on February 6.



Trevor has earned a writing degree at Michigan University, a law degree from the University of Colorado and is currently completing his Master's degree in biology at the University of Nebraska – Omaha. He is the founder and President of Grasslands Unlimited, which is dedicated to the restoration of and advocacy for grassland ecosystems throughout Nebraska and the Great Plains. Trevor is looking forward to helping ASO with land stewardship and presenting our March program.



Conor Gearin earned Bachelor of Arts degrees from Truman State University in writing and biology. He holds a Master of Science degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in science writing, and a Master of Science degree in biology from the University of Nebraska – Omaha. He is managing producer of BirdNote. Conor is already active with ASO, leading our February field trip and presenting our April program.



Blue Jay by Richard Thies



American Bald Eagle by Ann Murphy

March and April programs open to the public

THURSDAY, MARCH 21 Enjoy an early spring prairie walk at Glacier Creek Preserve at 6 p.m. Then head to the historic Barn at Glacier Creek to hear Trevor Pellerite's program on Pocket Prairies at 7 p.m. Learn how his nonprofit foundation, Grasslands Unlimited, is changing the landscape of Omaha's medians and roadsides into low-maintenance, nature-friendly habitats. Trevor's program was originally scheduled in January, but Mother Nature put a stop to that!

Glacier Creek Preserve is a 525-acre preserve located northwest of Omaha at 14810 State Street. It features the 140-acre Allwine Prairie Tract, a restored tall-grass prairie, which sustains a wide variety of plants, birds, animals and invertebrates. Please register at Audubon-Omaha.org

THURSDAY, APRIL 11 Storytelling has the power to reach new audiences and inspire more people to take action for birds. Conor Gearin, the managing producer of the BirdNote Daily public radio program and podcast, will discuss how compelling stories about birds and birders can help contribute to conservation. He'll also share insights into designing soundscapes that immerse listeners in the lives of birds. Join us at DJs Dugout, 114th and Dodge. Social hour begins at 6 p.m. and program at 7 p.m. Please register at Audubon-Omaha.org

SATURDAY, APRIL 20 See all the artwork featuring birds during Audubon Society of Omaha's 2024 Student Art Show. The show opens at noon, and the awards ceremony starts at 1 p.m. and will be held at Creighton University's Harper Center. No registration is necessary for this event

Some bird names just won't fly *By Dan Murphy*

To paraphrase The Bard (or was it The Bird) ... "What's in a name? That which we call Bewick's Wren or Bullock's Oriole by any other name would tweet and tweet." That may be true, but some of our feathered friends are carrying a lot of symbolic baggage in names that reflect a racist and colonial past.

Look to the east, and you'll observe Audubon's Shearwater, honoring the naturalist slave owner John James Audubon. Turn west, and you may spot Scott's Oriole, recognizing General Winfield Scott who drove the Cherokee Nation down the Trail of Tears.

"Names have power and power can be for the good or it can be for the bad," said Colleen Handel, president of the American Ornithological Society, which standardizes English-language bird names throughout the Americas. "We want these names to be powerful in a really good way."

WHY CHANGE NOW?

For nearly 140 years, the American Ornithological Society has curated the definitive list of English-language bird names in North America. Occasionally, the society has updated names, primarily to acknowledge scientific advances. Now it's adopting a more inclusive, expansive approach to diversify birding and make it more welcoming to all.

On the same day in 2020, two events shocked many Americans into confronting the fact that Black Lives Matter: Police officers in Minneapolis killed George Floyd, and a white woman walking her unleashed dog in New York City's Central Park called police, falsely claiming that a Black birder, Christian Cooper, had threatened her.

"Don't bird in a hoodie. Ever." It's easy to think that J. Drew Lanham, a 2022 MacArthur Fellow, poet, and wildlife ecologist, made that observation recently. But he didn't. It

appeared in his essay, "9 Rules for the Black Birdwatcher," in 2013. The quote appears in Margaret Renkl's "North American Birds Will No Longer Be Named for Racists – or Anybody Else," her insightful guest essay in the November 13, 2023, New York Times.

The Central Park incident helped inspire concerned birders to organize the Bird Names for Birds initiative less than a month later. The group wrote to the American Ornithological Society, contending that many common names for birds are "isolating and demeaning reminders of oppression, slavery and genocide." Petitioners called offensive bird names "verbal statues," likening them to the scores of Confederate monuments erected across the American South after the Civil War.

Spring Creek Audubon Center is searching for new names for these birds:

1. Harris's Sparrow
2. Henslow's Sparrow
3. Sprague's Pipit
4. Bell's Vireo

And they want to hear your name suggestions for these 4 species! Share your name suggestions on their FaceBook page.

A SIMPLE, ELEGANT SOLUTION

After careful study and reflection, the society announced in November of last year that it would embark this year on a project to assess the names of 70-80 bird species, mainly in the U.S. and Canada – about 6-7 percent of the region's total bird species. "We've come to understand that there are certain names that have offensive or derogatory connotations that cause pain to people, and that it is important to change those, to remove those barriers to their participation in the world of birds,"

said Handel the society president. Approximately 10 species will be evaluated in the 2024 pilot program.

It's important to note the parameters of these efforts:

- The society will change the names of all birds named for human beings. That means every person, not just those associated with slavery, genocide or other reprehensible behaviors. Debating whether individuals were or were not worthy of having birds named after them would be divisive and unproductive.
- Scientific names of birds will remain the same. Strict rules govern those naming protocols, which exist to enshrine scientific accuracy and preserve evolutionary relationships among different species.
- Public engagement will be key to the project. The society recognizes the emotional and practical investments birders make over time.
- New names will reflect characteristics of the birds themselves, including their habitats, which could make them easier to identify.

PARTING THOUGHTS

Margaret Renkl reminds us that, "Naming birds for their identifying characteristics instead of for the people who 'discovered' them may be little more than symbolic, with hardly any pragmatic effect on the birds' prospects for survival in a burning world. But symbols have always mattered to our species. Like names themselves, they tell us something about who we are, what we value, how we belong to the world. If renaming the birds becomes part of a broad reorientation toward nature itself, it's a symbolic gesture that could be the start of saving it all. The birds and us."

Content for this story came from National Public Radio (story by Nell Greenfieldboyce), the New York Times (article by Katrina Miller, essay by Margaret Renkl), and the Indianapolis Star (article by Sarah Bowman).

Avian flu outbreak continues through another winter by Conor Gearin

The outbreak of highly pathogenic avian flu (HPAI) that began in January 2022 has continued into another year. In polar regions, biologists have observed mammals with HPAI, including a polar bear, elephant seals, and fur seals. In the U.S., HPAI has spread to foxes, raccoons, mountain lions, seals, and other mammals. Infections among mammals raise concerns that the virus could eventually spread to humans, although the risk of the current strains infecting people is low and cases of human infection are rare. However, people such as pet owners and veterinary care workers should be aware of the signs of HPAI in mammals and take precautions when handling a potentially infected animal, particularly if the animal has contacted or eaten a bird with HPAI. Keeping pets and domestic birds away from wild birds can help reduce the risk.

According to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), at

the time of writing (late January 2024), there were several recent cases of wild bird mortality from HPAI in the U.S. in California, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, and New York. While the number of reported cases is low relative to peaks of infection in previous years, these cases indicate that HPAI is still circulating among wild birds. The report from Iowa on Dec. 27, 2023, was from Monona, in the eastern part of the state, of a Canada Goose that died of HPAI.

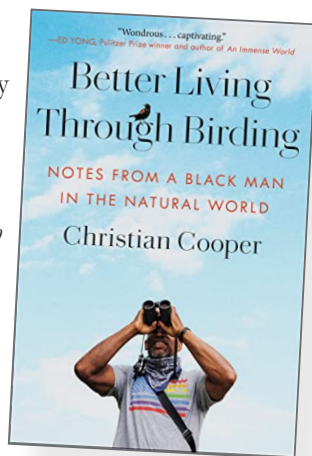
If HPAI is detected in the Omaha area, taking down bird feeders and bird baths temporarily can help slow the spread of HPAI. People living with or near domestic birds should take particular care, because HPAI can spread between wild and domestic birds. Even in the absence of recent HPAI reports in our area, cleaning bird feeders weekly with a diluted bleach solution while using protective gloves can help lower the risk of numerous diseases among frequent feeder visitors.

Book review: Better Living Through Birding by Julia Rawnsley

In the recently published memoir, *Better Living Through Birding: Notes From a Black Man in the Natural World*, author Christian Cooper reminds us through his life experiences to imagine others complexly.

Before he was an activist, before he knew he was gay, before he graduated Harvard, and before he worked as an editor at Marvel Comics, Christian Cooper was a birder. Cooper's passion for his lifelong hobby led him to travel extensively in pursuit of what he terms, "The Seven Pleasures of Birding." Birders worldwide can relate to these pleasures, which include "the joy of collecting," "the joy of puzzle solving," and my personal favorite, "the joy of being in a natural setting."

ASO members may recognize Cooper for his involvement with NYC Audubon, and his 2023 National Geographic series *Extraordinary Birder*. *Better Living Through Birding* is available in physical, digital, and audio formats through Omaha, Bellevue, Papillion, Council Bluffs, and La Vista Public Libraries. Especially recommended is the audiobook, as listeners get the added bonus of bird songs in every chapter.



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 honor a loved one and help ASO's local conservation and education efforts? You can make a donation anytime at Audubon-Omaha.org OR you can 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 WANT YOU - TO VOLUNTEER

We're searching for volunteers to help us with the 2024 Student Art Contest and Show - It's kind of a big deal! There are a wide variety of tasks, dates and times available for helping with this popular community event. If you can help out, even for a couple of hours, please contact Julia Rawnsley at jrawnsley@audubonomaha.org

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

Audubon
Society of Omaha
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STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH AND ITS CREATURES

the Meadowlark

MAR/APR 2024
VOL 53 ISSUE 2





*Wilson's Warbler (for now)
photo by Mike Benkis*

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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