



Meadowlark

MAY/JUNE 2024
VOL 53 ISSUE 3

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May field trip and member program explore hidden treasures

By Anne Maguire

Join us May 4 for a guided tour of Heron Haven, a spring-fed wetland and wildlife sanctuary. The sanctuary features one of the last oxbow wetlands of the Big Papillion Creek within Omaha's city limits. Grab your binoculars and meet at the Heron Haven Nature Building, 11809 Old Maple Road, at 8 a.m. Keep your eyes peeled for Green Heron, Kingfishers and Great Blue Heron as we hike the Boardwalk and Upland trails. This field trip is free and open to the public. Please register at Audubon-Omaha.org, events calendar.

Join us Thursday, May 9, to see *The Last Prairie*, a documentary film exploring the Nebraska Sandhills, a vast wetland, fed by the Ogallala Aquifer, which bubbles up throughout grass-covered dunes. Its 20,000 square miles comprise the largest area of stabilized sand dunes in the Western Hemisphere and it has been recently described as the most intact temperate grassland on earth.

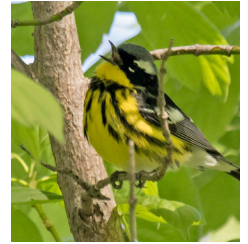
John O'Keefe, Ph.D., will join us to introduce the documentary he produced and directed. Dr. O'Keefe served more than 30 years on the faculty of Creighton University.

See you at DJ's Dugout, 114th and Dodge. Social hour begins at 6 p.m., and the program starts at 7 p.m. Free and open to the public. Please register at Audubon-Omaha.org, events calendar.

Migration, then breeding: birds to look and listen for in May and June

by Conor Gearin

May's flood of migratory songbirds is a brief and beautiful glimpse into the diversity of North American birdlife. Species on their way to the boreal forest and the Arctic pass through Omaha, often for just a week or two. Keep watch for an influx of warblers and vireos, including Magnolia Warblers, Tennessee Warblers, Black-and-white Warblers, Blue-headed Vireos, and more. Rarer finds are always a possibility – sign up for Rare Bird Alerts on eBird to get news of unusual species when they're reported nearby. Urban parks, cemeteries, and bike paths often concentrate migratory birds in a small, convenient location, as they offer birds the best places for food and shelter as they move through the cityscape.



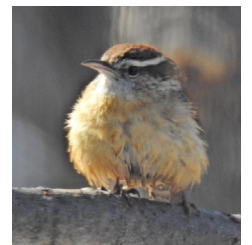
Magnolia Warbler
photo by Phil Swanson



Dickcissel
photo by Larry Frame

Then suddenly June arrives, and the flood of migrants tapers to a trickle. It can be discouraging, especially if you missed the peak of migration — but, in fact, it's an opportunity to focus on the species that spend the summer breeding in Nebraska. While May offers a breadth of species, June offers depth: the chance to spend time with our breeding birds and get to know them better, particularly our native grassland species. Dickcissels appear in grassy, weedy spots all over the state. Just beyond the metro area in rural landscapes, listen for the jazzy burbling of Bobolinks, the plaintive whistling of meadowlarks, and the cricket-like buzzing of Grasshopper Sparrows. In city neighborhoods, watch for Carolina Wrens finding quirky places to build a nest, Northern Cardinals setting up shop in bushes and holly trees, and Song Sparrows tucking their eggs deep in weedy edges.

Returning to the same site multiple times or observing birds close to home throughout the spring and summer offers a window into the full cycle of the breeding season. Watch for the arrival of male birds and contests between neighbors as they strive to establish their territories. Birds singing for potential mates and rivals alike makes late spring dawn choruses rich and varied. Then, after establishing pair bonds and beginning the hard work of caring for eggs and raising young, many songbirds don't sing as much. But there is still plenty to see, because the birds are busy foraging for their hungry chicks' next meal. Keep an eye out for fledglings hopping on the ground — for early nesters such as American Robins, it can be quite early in the year. At all times, maintaining a respectful distance from the birds lets them do what they do best. Enjoy the show — and see how the habitats we provide in backyards and parks become homes for a new generation of birds.



Carolina Wren
photo by Jennifer Doherty

ON THE HORIZON

May

FIELD TRIP

SATURDAY, MAY 4

What: Heron Haven Tour

Take a guided tour of Heron Haven and learn about this amazing heron habitat and rookery.

When: 8-11 a.m.

Where: Heron Haven
11809 Old Maple Road

How: Register at Audubon-Omaha.org
Meet in Heron Haven Nature Building

Who: Members and the public (free)

MEMBER PROGRAM

THURSDAY, MAY 9

What: The Last Prairie

John O'Keefe, Ph.D., will join us to introduce the documentary he produced and directed titled *The Last Prairie*

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)

JUNE – AUGUST PROGRAMS

While Audubon Omaha doesn't offer summer programs, you can continue your birding and conservation education with Wachiska Audubon Society (Lincoln, NE) which offers educational programs on the second Thursday of the month. Information at: WachiskaAudubon.org.

President's Letter: Audubon Society of Omaha celebrates passage of bipartisan bill supporting migratory birds

by Christine Prescott, President, Audubon Society of Omaha

In a significant step toward protecting migratory bird populations, the U.S. House of Representatives recently passed a bipartisan bill aimed at reauthorizing and enhancing funding for partnerships benefiting migratory birds and their habitats. This crucial legislation, known as the Migratory Birds of the Americas Conservation Enhancements Act, comes at a time when migratory birds are facing alarming population declines due to habitat loss and climate change threats.

Spearheaded by Representatives María Elvira Salazar (R-FL), Rick Larsen (D-WA), Dave Joyce (R-OH), and Mary Peltola (D-AK), the bill received widespread support and was passed by voice vote. A similar version of the bill has also been introduced in the Senate, co-sponsored by Senators Ben Cardin (D-Md.) and John Boozman (R-Ark.).

Marshall Johnson, the chief conservation officer at the National Audubon Society, emphasized the critical importance of this legislation in addressing the challenges faced by migratory birds. "We have lost three billion birds since 1970 – a staggering number – and this legislation is critically important to help communities and partners meet the challenges of the moment so we can conserve migratory birds for years to come," said Johnson. He highlighted the economic significance of birdwatching, with 96 million Americans engaged in the activity, contributing \$100 billion to the U.S. economy annually.

The Audubon Society of Omaha commends the House and the bill's co-sponsors for their leadership in advancing this vital legislation and urges swift passage of the companion bill in the Senate.

Since its inception in 2002, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) has played a pivotal role in funding over 700 projects in 35 countries across the Western Hemisphere. These projects have benefited more than 5 million acres of habitat crucial for over 350 species of migratory birds that journey between the U.S. and Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

Examples of the NMBCA's impact include conserving key forested landscapes for Cerulean Warblers from the Appalachian Mountains in West Virginia to the Andes Mountains in Colombia, improving grassland habitat for Bobolinks on working lands spanning from New York to Argentina, and supporting shorebirds such as Hudsonian Godwits along their migration routes from Alaska to Chile.

The Audubon Society of Omaha applauds the ongoing efforts to safeguard migratory birds and their habitats and looks forward to continued collaboration in conservation initiatives across the Americas.

The eyes have it – your photos



House Finch, photo by Albert Rhea



Indigo Bunting, photo by Bob Tooley



Baltimore Orioles, photo by Claire Wiltse

How do I know a flower is an invasive plant!?!

By: Kayla Johnson

While fostering a new outdoor area, consider utilizing native plants. Be very sure to double-check that new additions are not listed as invasive species.

Invasive species are species that are not native to an area, and are able to easily survive and spread so aggressively that they become detrimental to the native ecology and often the economy as well.

In contrast, naturalized species are species not native to an area, that are able to survive and reproduce, but are successfully competed against by native species or environmental conditions, which keeps their spread in check.

A surprising number of invasive species are readily sold at garden supply centers. Many costly invaders were once marketed as “great groundcover” or “establishes quickly.” Occasionally, common invasive plants may even be mislabeled as “native.” Dame’s Rocket, is one such example. The four-petaled invasive *Hesperis matronalis* flower is often confused with the similarly looking five-petaled native flower, *Phlox divartica*. Other times, well-meaning commercial horticulturalists are so accustomed to seeing an invader that they may falsely assume it is native. Finally, several nationally sold “native” seed mix bags have been discovered to include invasive species listed among their “native pollinator” contents.

A best practice for buying a new plant or seed mix is to look each plant up by its scientific name. While several differing plants may use the same common name, a search utilizing the scientific name should get you to the exact plant of interest.

There are several great resources to help an individual determine the invasive or native status of a species, so they can be confident that their planting project is ecologically friendly. A great resource for this investigation is the **USDA plant database**, found at plants.usda.gov. Paid for by your taxes, this excellent database provides copious

information about a huge variety of plants. The resource details everything from a species’ native or invasive status, to its tolerance to salt and fire. One especially valuable aspect of the USDA plant database is the range map, which displays where an invasive species has spread, or the native range of where a species indigenous to the United States is known to occur. Data for many species will detail its range occurrence all the way down to the county-by-county level.

Another resource that is specific to our area is **Fontenelle Forest’s Nature Search database**, found at ffnaturesearch.org. While you may not find every species endemic or invasive to our area there, you will find information and images that will help you identify hundreds of native and many invasive plants.

Finally, those who are interested in a deep dive into plant identification and its range status may make good use of our state’s flora book, the second edition of **“Flora of Nebraska,”** by Kaul, Sutherland, and Rolfsmeier. The text asks a series of “yes” or “no” questions to lead the reader to an accurate identification. While a magnifying glass or better may be required for identifying some of the plants, the information for each plant makes it a valuable purchase without one. Provided for each species are Nebraska range maps, identification, and fascinating anecdotal information about the characteristics, history, or prevalence of each plant dating back to the mid-1800s.

Planting natives is a powerful act. By creating space for our local ecosystem within the city, we maintain the authentic character of our area, while allowing our non-human brethren a place by our side. There are many great reasons to plant natives, but to name just a few:

- Native plants provide cover for extreme weather for many species, helping them get through bitter cold

blizzards or scorching hot days.

- Native grasses and flowers serve as irreplaceable food staples for birds, butterflies, insects, deer, and countless other members of our community. Evolution has honed these creatures’ abilities to find and utilize these plants. Some native species even share a symbiotic relationship with one specific plant species, making the presence of both species critical for mutual survival. You can see more diversity at your bird feeder when it sits adjacent to beautiful, showy native flowers.

- The wide diversity of root depth found in the plants local to our area will provide improved soil drainage, precipitation capture and ground water recharge, and slow or prevent erosion.
- Finally, native plants in our area need much less water! In an average year, you only need to regularly water the plants during the first month of plant establishment. Once well-rooted, just an occasional sprinkling should be plenty.

Most garden centers in Omaha have at least a few native plants, but other Omaha garden centers, such as Mulhall’s, Earl May, and Cirian’s Farmers Market have robust native plant sections. In Lincoln area The Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, Great Plains Nursery and Midwest Natives Nursery all focus heavily on providing mostly native plants, and are great resources for this endeavor. No source is foolproof, so always be sure to research before you let it root!

AVOID NOTORIOUS NON-NATIVES:

- Callery, Cleveland or Bradford Pear
- Amur Maple
- Amur Honeysuckle
- Burning Bush
- Vinca Vine or Periwinkle
- Plumeless, Scotch and Musk Thistle
- Common Mullein
- Houndstongue
- Birdweed
- Japanese, Giant and Bohemian Knotweed

2024 Student Art Show and Awards

by Virginia Stauffer

“Amazing, amusing and creative” were just some of the comments overhead at this year’s Student Art Show held at Creighton University’s Harper Center on April 20th.

640+ students entered their artwork in the contest in four categories: Realism, Graphic Design, Cartooning and Recycled. Due to the numerous entries, judges had a difficult time selecting the winners of excellence and merit awards from so many creative works of art.

During the awards ceremony, held in the auditorium, winners of excellence and merit awards received ribbons and prizes, consisting of art supplies and books about birds. It was great to see all of the art AND all of the students who attended.

Shown here are the winners of Best of Show – a small representation of the entries. Best of Show winners received \$20 gift cards donated by Blick Art Materials. Thanks, Blick!

BIG thanks to all who volunteered during the different phases of organizing and putting on this event: Sue Brusnahan, Andrew Callison, Charlie Callison, Olivia DeWitt, Mark Harberg, Wayne Fithian, Lindsay Hueftle, Suzie Kingery, Elle Laddusaw, Sarah Laddusaw, Anne Maguire, Lin McGloins, Bailey Placzek, Christine Prescott and Jaye Welch. And special thanks to the Art Show Committee: Steve Geddes, Julia Rawnsley, Jackie Scholar and co-chair Katy Simmons.

Most of all, thanks to the students, teachers and parents who made the art happen. We LOVE seeing your artwork and hope to see more in 2025.

Congratulations 2024



Anela B., 2nd grade
BEST OF SHOW K-4: Realism



Eliana B., 3rd grade
BEST OF SHOW K-4: Graphic Design



Kiersten H., 7th grade
BEST OF SHOW 5-8: Realism



Atley H., 5th grade
BEST OF SHOW 5-8: Recycled



Elle O., 10th grade
BEST OF SHOW 9-12: Realism



Lorelai K., 11th grade
BEST OF SHOW 9-12: Graphic Design

Student Art Show best of show winners



Clare F., 4th grade
BEST OF SHOW K-4: Realism



Lennon M., 4th grade
BEST OF SHOW K-4: Recycled



Elaiana B., 3rd grade
BEST OF SHOW K-4: Realism



8: Recycled



Matilda D-B., 6th grade
BEST OF SHOW 5-8: Graphic Design



Simone J., 7th grade
BEST OF SHOW 5-8: Cartooning



Design



Quenby S., 12th grade
BEST OF SHOW 9-12: Recycled



Ella J., 12th grade, MEADOWLARK AWARD

Bring on the bugs and the birds will follow! *by Anne Maguire*

Looking for ways to attract more birds to your yard? Bird feeders filled with a variety of seed are a good start, but don't forget about bugs!

While many bird species eat mainly seeds, 95% of birds feed protein-rich bugs to their nestlings and fledglings. Incredibly, baby birds go from the size of an egg to nearly the size of an adult bird in a mere three weeks. They must eat large quantities of protein-rich insects to meet their nutritional needs, keeping their parents busy from dawn to dusk catching bugs to feed their growing offspring. Until the fledglings have learned to get their own food, you may notice a drop-off of visitors to your feeders.

MAKE YOUR YARD A BUG BUFFET

for birds by planting native! Native plants and trees are hosts for a wide variety of delectable insects, while non-natives are food-barren wastelands. An oak tree can support 534 insect species while the non-native Callery Pear, commonly known as a Bradford Pear, is an invasive tree from China and supports zero.

In addition to providing habitat for pollinators and other insects, native plants are drought resistant and can better survive our increasingly dry climate.

To keep your backyard busy with birds, delay clearing out your garden areas of leaves and dead foliage until planting season. Insects spend the winters under cozy ground cover, and become tasty treats for bug-eating birds.

WHAT'S ON THE MENU for some of our favorite bug-eaters?

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES:

Chickadees forage mostly by hopping among twigs and branches, sometimes hanging upside down to reach the underside of branches. They are also known to catch insects while hovering and may catch insects in mid-air. They help control aphids, whiteflies, caterpillars, leafhoppers, earwigs, moths, and beetles.

WOODPECKERS: Yards with lots of trees will find that Woodpeckers are frequent visitors, even if they do tend to nest in more heavily wooded areas. With more than 20 species in the U.S. alone, they make short work of moth larvae, beetles, borers, weevils, caterpillars, wasps, ants and millipedes. Woodpeckers' chisel-like beaks are paired with unique cranial anatomy, letting them use their heads to hammer holes in trees without any ill effects.

BLUEBIRDS: Bluebirds love insects and can spot insect prey over 60 feet away. Bluebirds can consume up to 2,000 insects in a single day (and they love mosquitoes). A brightly colored bird with a sweet song, the Bluebird is particularly effective at keeping grasshoppers under control. These prolific insect hunters also feed on a wide variety of additional insects, including crickets, beetles, larvae and moths; also spiders, earthworms and spider snails.

NUTHATCHES: Moving up and down the trees headfirst, Nuthatches search for insects, insect eggs, and cocoons hidden in tree bark and branches. They also forage for borers, caterpillars, ants,

and earwigs. During the winter months, they seek out and forage on hibernating insects and their eggs.

WARBLERS: These small, colorful birds, known for their sweet songs, are extremely active insectivores, searching brushy areas, orchards, parklands, and forest edges for caterpillars, larvae, aphids, leafhoppers, whiteflies, and spiders.

WRENS: Wrens have a great appetite for insects, snails, and slugs. Minimizing insecticides and pesticides in the yard will ensure a healthy, abundant food source for Wrens. They will also pluck spiders from webs and glean ants, gnats, and other insects from foliage and tree bark.

CARDINALS: In addition to being a backyard favorite, Cardinals live in a variety of habitats where they help farmers and gardeners by eating plant-harming pests including aphids, grasshoppers, slugs, snails, cotton cutworms, and bollworms. They also eat beetles, leafhoppers, cicadas, moths, and stink bugs.

MORE BIRDS, MORE BUGS

- **Grosbeaks:** larvae, caterpillars, beetles
- **Orioles:** caterpillars, larvae, beetles, grasshoppers
- **Swallows:** mosquitoes, moths, beetles, grasshoppers
- **Titmice:** aphids, leafhoppers, caterpillars, beetles

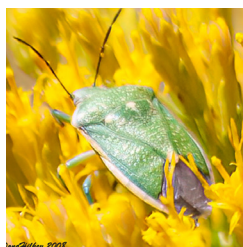
Want to learn more about landscaping with natives to attract bugs and birds? See our story on page 3.



Whitefly



Cutworm



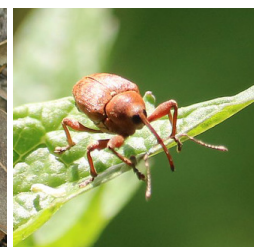
Stinkbug



Leafhopper



Millipede



Weevil

Winter bird seed sale report

by Betty and John Fullerton

Thanks to all who ordered bird seed during Audubon Omaha's winter sale. 24,470 pounds of products were distributed to 176 loyal customer-supporters who, in turn, distributed them to appreciative birds in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa. Your additional donations totalled \$991.

Your orders support ASO's local educational programs and conservation activities. Our twice yearly bird seed sales (mid-October and mid-February) are ASO's largest fundraisers of the year, netting a record **\$27,000** for this fiscal year.

This endeavor couldn't be accomplished without our dedicated volunteers who worked in the warehouse, made deliveries, or brought refreshments. Volunteers, listed in alphabetical order, included Andrew Callison, Roger Carroll, Mark Cave, Jim Commers, Kyle Finley, Conor Gearin, Steve Geddes, Joe Jacobsen and Joe's friend Michael, Marilou Jasnoch, Kayla Johnson, Tim Kautzman, Anne and Jim Maguire, P.J. McDonnell, Andy Miller and Melissa Sitze, Trevor Pellilor, Virginia Stauffer and Bob Wells.

Thanks again to all who ordered this winter. Be on the lookout in early September for information on our fall 2024 bird seed sale.



Top row: Marilou Jasnoch, Jim Commers, Virginia Stauffer, Betty Fullerton Bottom row: Andrew Callison, P.J. McDonnell, Bob Wells, Trevor Pellerite

Book review: Birding for a Better World

by Conor Gearin

In their book, *Birding for a Better World: A Guide to Finding Joy and Community in Nature*, coauthors Molly Adams and Sydney Golden Anderson share insights into how to best welcome newcomers to birding and bust some myths that might scare off some people hoping to give birding a try. For example, "birding isn't inherently competitive" and "you don't have to have fancy or expensive equipment to begin birding." The coauthors, who are leaders of the Feminist Bird Club, offer suggestions on how to make birding events more welcoming, inclusive, and accessible by drawing on their own experiences and those of organizers all over. The book also provides ideas for ways that birders can take action to help birds and make their relationship with the outdoors reciprocal and restorative,

rather than just recreational. They write that birding "has the capacity to enhance your experience of the world by encouraging you to mindfully experience the everyday places you inhabit."

Many different artists contributed illustrations to the book, creating the sense of the project as a communal effort. Journal pages invite readers to make the book their own and reflect on their experiences with birds. Through birding, the authors suggest, we can find peace within ourselves, community with others, and the chance to improve the environment we all share.



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 our local chapter, 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

Opt in for news at audubon-omaha.org under "Get Involved" to subscribe to the Meadowlark email edition, and more!

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:

Have you ever been told you're a leader? Or do you want to be a leader? How about leading a birding field trip to the destination of your choice? Please contact us audubonomaha@audubonomaha.org and let us know you're interested in getting involved with your local Audubon chapter.

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?

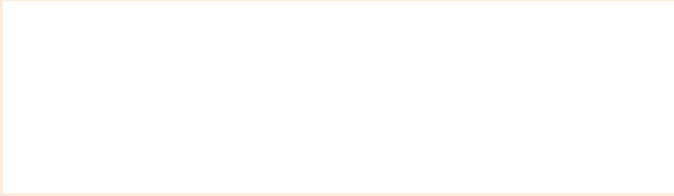
Raptors: Call 866-888-7261 to speak to a Raptor Conservation Alliance volunteer. Non-raptor: Call Nebraska Wildlife Rehab at 402-234-2473.

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STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH AND ITS CREATURES

Artwork by Ella J. 12th grade

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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