
A Bird's Eye View



Audubon Society of Omaha

A Chapter of National Audubon Society

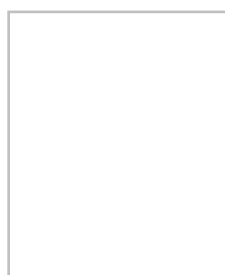
February 2002 Vol. 31 No. 2

Saving Nebraska's Reptiles and Amphibians

A January 16 *Omaha World-Herald* article entitled "New Rules Ban Sales of Reptiles, Amphibians" outlines these rules for capturing and selling turtles, snakes, other reptiles and amphibians native to Nebraska.

Angie Byorth, our speaker at the general meeting February 14, is primarily responsible for bringing about these rule changes made by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.

Angie, better known as the Turtle Lady, has been advocating and educating on behalf of turtles for over 20 years in Nebraska.



She organized the Turtle Conservation Project (TCP) as a nonprofit organization

By Clem Klaphake

phibians by preserving and restoring their natural habitats. It includes hands-on rehabilitation and release of those injured or displaced by development or carelessly taken from the wild for commercial exploitation in the pet and food trade.

In the last 12 years, Angie has been active in getting bills introduced into the state legislature. Her efforts were reported in *USA Today* in 1992, *the Lincoln Journal Star* in 1966, and in front-page headlines of the *OmahaWorld-Herald* May 25, 1996.

Her efforts with the TCP have also been featured on Roger Welsch's national CBS TV show, "Postcard From Nebraska." The setting for this 15-minute piece was the Sandhills. This video will be part of

Fair and has had his photographs printed in *Nebraskaland* magazine. He will show a few slides depicting Nebraska species of reptiles and amphibians.

Angie immigrated from Germany to Nebraska at age 19. While on vacation she fell in love with the Sandhills where she discovered the Ornate Box turtles plodding along among the prairie cactus and Western Painted Turtles sunning themselves on logs in rivers and lakes. Her reaction was, "This is like a scene from the Garden of Eden."

If you want to hear more about the turtles, snakes and other reptiles and amphibians native to our state, come join us at the general meeting Thursday, February 14, 7:30 p.m, Hanscom Park

dedicated to saving what is left of our native reptiles and am

Angie's program.

In addition we will see slides presented by photographer Ron Marquart of Lincoln. He recently has won awards in photo contests at the State

Methodist Church, 4444 Frances.

The general public is invited. A short business meeting will follow the program, concluding with coffee, cookies and conversation.

Birding Wetlands and Woods Feb. 23

By Dick Rasmussen

Our next field trip will be held Saturday, February 23, to be led by Loren Padelford. We will meet at the parking lot at the north end of Lake Manawa at 7:30 a.m. Turn south off the South Omaha Bridge Road at 11th Street (watch for the State Park sign) and proceed straight ahead to the parking lot.

We will car pool from there to the wetlands and woods of Riverton, Iowa. We will hope for open water and mild weather and may visit some other areas.

Bring binoculars, spotting scope and field guide, and dress for possible cold or foul weather. Bring a lunch and drink, as there are no handy cafes nearby. Guests and beginning birders are welcome, as always. Refer questions or comments to Loren at 292-5556.

Calendar of Events

4 (Mon) Conserv/Legis Mtg

6 (Wed) Board Meeting

7 (Thur) Fontenelle Bird Club Meeting

14 (Thu) General Meeting

23 (Sat) Field Trip

Mar.15-17 Rivers & Wildlife Celebration - Kearney

2

Scholarly Notes

by Eric Scholar

**Nature
Activities With
the Bird Club**

Changes in National Audubon's Policy

In the last few months National Audubon has been in the process of changing many of its policies, some of which affect its relationship to local chapters.

In August 2001 National Audubon drafted a document, "Essential Elements of Chapter Policy." As a result of this draft, I and some 32 other chapter leaders from around the country expressed our opinion on these policies in letters to the National offices.

In response, National addressed many of our concerns by making significant changes to the original draft. In this editorial I will bring you up to date on the principal changes proposed.

Most changes do not affect the average member of ASO but do have an impact on the relationship of local chapters to the State Audubon offices and to National Audubon.

The main issues include chapter-only memberships (alternatives to chapter-plus-National memberships, and the relationship between the state office and chapters. Also, specific criteria for chapter recertification have been replaced by emphasis on annual planning formulated by

The changes in chapter certification requirements are quite significant. The old policy contained a number of requirements all chapters had to meet, such as holding a minimum number of meetings per year, number of newsletters, field trips, and others.

The new policy removes these requirements, focusing instead on annual planning. This will allow for differences between chapters. Each chapter will be asked to evaluate its own circumstances and devise a plan for the year according to its characteristics. This plan will then be part of an annual report submitted to the state office.

Regarding the state office, the new chapter policy places an increased emphasis on the relationships of the state office. That office will now be considered the primary link between chapters and National.

These changes mentioned represent the principal items in the new policy adopted by National Audubon.

Environmental Issues

to Watch in 2002

After receiving Audubon's

The Fontenelle Nature Association Bird Club has invited us to a program about authors of nature books. Bette Bauer and Sharon Draper will discuss the books of Kathleen Norris, Cherry Tempest Williams and others. Ms. Bauer is a Professor of Literature at the College of Saint Mary and Ms. Draper is editor of the Bird Club Newsletter.

Please join us at 7:00 pm Thursday, February 7, at the FNA Buffett Learning Center, 1111 No. Bellevue Blvd. We'll serve chocolates as a pre-Valentine's Day celebration.

The Bird Club has invited us to a program Thursday, March 7, on bird banding. Craig Hensley will discuss the winter banding of resident birds at Neale Woods Nature Center, and a new summertime project held at Boyer Chute, "Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship" (MAPS).

Mr. Hensley, Master Naturalist at the Fontenelle Nature Association, wrote that MAPS is a "nationwide, long-term research project that looks to gain an understanding of breeding bird populations."

Please join us at 7:00 pm.

chapters.

Chapter-only memberships are a relatively new policy and are in response to requests from several chapters. National previously discouraged the formation of these memberships but now supports them.

ASO has no chapter-only membership policy at this time, but the board has discussed the possibility. I would like your input regarding this matter. Such a membership would not include the *Audubon Magazine* and would be primarily advantageous to someone who does not wish to receive that.

update from Washington, I want to briefly mention that the following issues will be coming up for votes in Congress in 2002. I know many of you are interested and often express an opinion and write letters concerning these issues. Please keep your eye on them in the coming months.

National anticipates discussion on the Arctic Wildlife Drilling bill to reach a fever pitch in February. Watch for further information.

Other issues: the U.S. Department of Agriculture is proposing to kill by

March 7 at the FNA Buffett Center. Questions? Call Howard Mattix, 896-0352, or Nelli Falzgraf, 292-9687.

poison 2 million Red-wing Blackbirds a year for three years starting in the spring of 2002. This is to reduce sunflower crop damage.

The farm bill and its conservation provisions will be coming up soon. Finally, Congress will be seeking funding for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act.

How to Follow the Farm Bill

Because of its importance to farmers, to you, to me, and to wildlife, it is vital to be able to communicate with our representatives regarding the Farm Bill and its many inclusions. To make this easier, the following was submitted by Wildlife Policy Director Thomas

tion for each state's representative in Washington.

As the Farm Bill debate resumes in the Senate later this month, it is crucial that you voice your support for the Conservation Title within the legislation, providing

Backyard Bird Count Reminder

By Kathleen Rose

Last month we explained the process of participating in the Backyard Bird Count. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society are asking every bird

Franklin, of the Wildlife Society, Professional Organization of Wildlife Managers, Administrators and Educators.

The Farm Bill's conservation programs affect millions of Americans, many species of wildlife across the country, and millions of acres of land. But understanding and explaining the programs to members of Congress can be a challenge.

Thanks to a collaborative effort among a number of leading conservation organizations, you and other partners throughout the country will be able to communicate valuable information to your senators by taking advantage of the Wildlife Society's Web site, which now includes details on the Farm Bill and how you can make a difference.

The Web site, www.wildlife.org, has been updated so that visitors can find the most up-to-date information regarding the progress of the Farm Bill. It guides users on how to effectively and easily communicate specific information from your state.

A detailed database provides specific information relating to each state or region

specific examples from your state on how these programs successfully benefit wildlife, the environment, farmers and the public.

Members of Congress have expressed their need to hear from you directly.

Be sure and bookmark this Web site and stay tuned for more communication tools that will be made available for you to customize to your state or region.

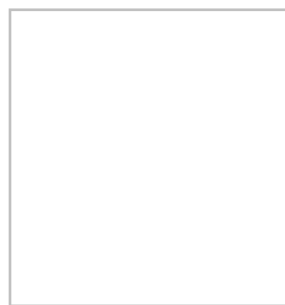
Letters to the editor, Op Ed pieces and sample news releases will be posted at www.wildlife.org as the debate proceeds in the Senate and later when House and Senate conferees begin their deliberations.

enthusiast across North America to help celebrate the Count's 5th anniversary by participating February 15-18.

Frank Gill, Audubon's Vice President of Science and Conservation, says, "Only with the help of birders across the continent will we be able to monitor changes in the distribution and abundance of birds and determine measures necessary to ensure their protection."

For details, see the January 2002 newsletter, or if you wish, call Kathleen or Bob Rose at 292-8912. Also, call Kathleen or Bob if you need someone to enter your data.

Highlights of January Field Trip



Pine Warbler
Fifteen birders joined a feeder-hopping field trip January 12. We birded outdoors first at Camp Brewster and watch four Bald Eagles soar.

You'd think the Padelfords

Mergansers and Goldeneyes in a distant cove on the river.

At the Rasmussens, Carole graciously served us a fine lunch. Thank you to both host and hostess.

Bob and Kathleen Rose's backyard habitat, numerous feeders and bird activity sparked envy in the heart of your editor. Among other species we

regarding the benefits of and need for conservation provisions within the Farm Bill. With this information, users can better communicate with members of Congress and the media about why it is so important that these provisions be funded and expanded.

A number of communication tools are available, including a sample letter to Congress and contact informa

planned the next one. A Pine Warbler appeared, dined, bathed, and perched for some time in plain view. This warbler is most unusual in Nebraska anytime and extremely rare in winter.

We detoured to Mandan Park where an sharp-eyed birder found Common

saw Tufted Titmouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Carolina Wren.

A search for White-winged Crossbills seen recently at Hillside Cemetery failed, but a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker made the effort worth while

We thank Dick Rasmussen for planning and leading this special trip, one that deserves repeating.

Garry Mick Carries

Olympic Flame in Omaha

A unique opportunity was accorded one of our members, Garry Mick, while the Olympic flame traveled through Omaha January 10, 2002, on its way to Salt Lake City. Nominated by his daughter, Garry was chosen to carry the flame and fulfill the dream of a lifetime.

Garry's athletic history includes lettering in baseball and basketball in high school and short-distance running. He later took up distance running, participating in and organizing the Omaha Marathon. He was addicted to running, finding it, in his words, "a cure for everything." Then about eight years ago, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's.

Though it ended his running, those near him know he has not allowed the disease to break his spirit. He prefers to be active, continuing to be involved in the community, including Audubon. He also finds time for fine woodworking and photography.

News releases, receptions, dinners, and an orientation for the "runners" (the quotation marks are his) were held preliminary to the day of the running for those chosen to carry the flame. But none compare to the experience itself..

Garry described the experience while carrying the torch as "the few precious moments I will forever cherish. . .It was over much too quickly although my body complained that it had had enough. In the end I would not have traded it for anything. . .A thousand and one thanks are in order for all the support that the citizens of our great city gave me and the rest of the torchbearers."

Congratulations, Garry, on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Volunteers Wanted for Art of Gardening Show at Regency

March is for Cranes and the Rivers & Wildlife Celebration - 15-17

March in the Midlands finds a rite of spring observed by migrating cranes, waterfowl, and humans from around the country. This is Audubon's Rivers & Wildlife Celebration to be held Friday through Sunday, March 15-17.

Noted speakers engaged are Kenn Kaufman, author of *Focus Guide to Birds of North America* and *Kingbird Highway*; Stephen R. Jones, teacher and author of *The Last Prairie*; and Joel Sartore, *National Geographic* photojournalist, are scheduled to speak.

Trips to blinds on the river at Rowe Sanctuary for crane viewing at sunrise and sunset provide unforgettable experiences. Spaces must be reserved ahead of time—the spots can fill up early. Prairie chicken, waterfowl and other field trips will be offered, or you may go on your own to these sites.

To register, send for a brochure containing complete information about registration, lodging in Kearney and field trips. Prices are lower if registration is made before February 28. Contact Audubon Nebraska, Box 117, Denton NE 68339, 402-797-2301, Nebraska@audubon.org.



Jenny Henricksen is asking for volunteers to help with ASO's display at the popular annual Regency Garden Show March 22-24.

This year's theme is "The Garden Palette." If you have ideas to contribute toward a

display bearing out this theme, we would welcome your participation. If you can help in any way planning, preparing, setting up, or staffing the event, please call Jenny, 895-5487.



Notes from Nature

By Jerry Toll

Consider the Bowerbirds

Now this is a family of birds I can relate to. They are builders, artists, dancers, painters, and individualists. Am I anthropomorphizing? Yes, flagrantly so, but I will offer these observations in my defense.

The bowerbirds, with 8 species in Australia and 18 species in New Guinea, make up the family Ptilinorhynchidae. As builders, they are unique in the bird world.

The males of each species construct mating grounds to attract females. For the Spotted Bowerbird, it's a simple avenue (bower). The male constructs a tightly woven horizontal

His part in the continuation of the species is to attract as many females as possible to his bower, retain them and mate. If he fails to do this, his genes will not be passed on and will eventually die out. In other words, how well he expresses himself determines the survival of his gene pool. I'll come back to this.

Most species of bowerbirds are polygynous. Of these, the complexity of the bower construction is inversely related to the elaboration of the males' breeding plumage. The genus of Gardener Bowerbirds produces larger and more

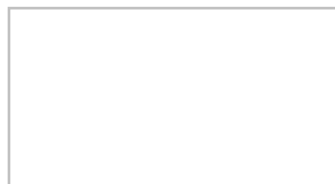
The most basic definition of art is a creative act by an individual. This has been attributed exclusively to humans in the past, but behavioral biologists and cultural anthropologists have been chipping away at the wall that separates the attributes of humans and animals.

Let's not forget the role of the female in this drama. The female as well as male of each species has developed artistic inclinations. It is she who must have the discerning eye. It is she who determines whether the elaborate preparations the male has made for her are acceptable. She determines successful

mat of grass or twigs. He then weaves vertical twigs into the mat so that they form an arch over a central straight pathway or avenue. After this he finds white objects such as bits of bones, rocks, and snail shells and places them, carefully, to one side of the avenue.

The male of this species favors white objects and rejects red, yellow, and blue objects. However, he then masticates something that when mixed with his saliva produces a reddish substance he paints onto the objects in the bower.

The female enters the avenue and looks through it to the placement of the white objects. Meanwhile the male is watching, somewhat hidden. If the female likes what she sees, she signals the male, he reveals himself and does a little dance, sometimes with a song. If she still likes what she sees, they leave the bower and mate.



elaborate structures. Due to lack of space, I won't describe each of the species' bowers, but they have certain characteristics in common. For each of the species, the form of the bower is hard-wired in their brains, but the selection and placement of objects is highly variable and seems extremely important to the success of the enterprise.

I had the pleasure of watching a PBS *Nova* program on the bowerbirds presented by David Attenborough, which led to this article. What struck me as fascinating when I watched the Gardener Bowerbird arranging his arena was his "expression," if I may use that word, or perhaps his body language.

I have seen that same expression on the face of an artist during the act of creation. It posed this question, "Is this bird demonstrating artistic expression?"

Or, con

v

ersely, is there an instinctual predisposition to artistic expression that humans share with other creatures on our planet?

mating. In doing so, she reinforces the genetic predisposition of the practice.

What have these elaborate mating rituals to do with survival of the species? Very little, it seems. She takes full responsibility for rearing young. She determines whether the species will continue to reproduce itself in sufficient numbers to thrive.

There are many things creatures do even though related to reproduction that are seemingly frivolous or unnecessary, sometimes even downright contradictory.

I think this is Nature's way of saying that orderliness is elusive. That,

yes, there is order in the universe but it is not linear. We must search for it in creative ways, ways that might make no sense until we make the slender connection.

The purpose of the bowerbirds' mating rituals is to provide uniqueness. It defines the species. It tells them who they are.

