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ASO is a Chapter

*of the National
Audubon Society*

*Serving Eastern
Nebraska*

and Western Iowa

The Bigger Picture

The old saying about the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing describes the relationship between many national or regional groups and their local chapters. Local chapters focus on issues affecting their members' daily lives. National groups, on the other hand, may not be aware of local issues, focusing their efforts on more abstract or global issues.

Yet local groups are needed to communicate national's message. They can help implement national's or regional's plans and strategies. National's vision and strategies can energize local groups to expand their focus. Both groups benefit from a close mutual relationship.

At our March meeting, we can learn about the National Audubon Society's agenda from our speaker, Karen Orenstein, National Audubon's Outreach Coordinator.

For the past decade, Karen has worked as organizer

By Nancy Leonard
and lobbyist for progressive legislative and grassroots campaigns for the environment and for international human rights. After seven years with the East Timor and Indonesia Act Network, in July 2006 Karen joined National Audubon. A native of Illinois, Karen focuses on grassroots advocacy in the Midwest.

She will introduce us to Audubon's D.C. Policy Office, speak about Audubon's legislative priorities with an emphasis on global warming, and discuss effective advocacy, especially communication with elected representatives. It is vitally important now that we lend our voices forcibly and intelligently on environmental issues in the coming debate.

Join us Thursday, March 13, at 7:30 p.m, Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances (1 block south of Center St). A social time follows the program and brief business meeting. Visitors are welcome.

Identification Class

DeSoto Celebration Sat, Mar. 15

**Saturdays: March 22,
April 19 and May 3**

Time: 9:00 a.m. to noon

Location: Fontenelle Forest Nature
Center

Fee: \$20 per person (covers all three
sessions)

Ages: Adult - limited to 15 participants

Registration: Contact Clem Klaphake at
292-2276 or ckavian@cox.net

Birding is the fastest growing
recreational outdoor activity today, with
over 50 million birders in the U.S. This
class will help you learn how to identify
birds in your back yard, neighborhood,
or when on vacation.

It will be taught by a member of the
Audubon Society of Omaha and will
include several local field trips. No prior
knowledge or experience is required.

DeSoto Refuge will celebrate its 50th
anniversary on Saturday, March 15. The
event is family-oriented and is free and
open to the public. Space is limited so
you need to sign up for tours. Call 642-
4121 to sign up or for more information.
Dress appropriately for the weather. On
the program:

.. From 10 a.m. to 2:00 p.m, two-hour
Eagle Watch tours. Observe Bald Eagles
and learn about efforts to provide
habitat. A driving tour. Carpool.

.. At 10:30 Pallid Sturgeon one-hour
tours explaining projects to help this
ancient species.

.. One-mile, 40-minute walking tours
11:00 to 2:00. Wear comfortable shoes.

.. *Images of DeSoto* photo exhibit,
presentations with live birds by Raptor
Recovery (1:00 pm), children's
activities, cake and cookies.

Current Currents

By Elliott Bedows

Water, The Last Great Resource, And Its Use as a Source of Energy

U.N. warns of biofuels' environmental
risk. In January 2008, the United Nations
(U.N.) Food and Agriculture
Organization met in Bangkok, Thailand.
One of the featured issues on the agenda
of that meeting, which was cosponsored
by the U.N. and the Thai government,

was a discussion of the risk-to-benefit outcome as the world begins to embrace biofuels as an alternative source of energy.

Michael Casey, an environmental writer for the Associated Press who covered the conference, wrote that the U.N. warned that the risks of converting to biofuels from traditional fossil fuels were likely to create substantial environmental and social risks that have not as yet been taken into account.

Among the greatest risks: the consequences of using the massive amounts of water it is going to take to grow these biofuel crops.

Speaking at a regional forum on bioenergy, Regan Suzuki of the U.N. Food & Agriculture Org. acknowledged that biofuels are better for the environment than fossil fuels and boost energy security for many countries. However, she said those benefits must be weighed against the pitfalls, many of which are just now emerging as countries convert millions of acres to palm oil, sugar cane and other crops for biofuels.

According to Casey, another U.N. official said, "The world's rush to embrace biofuels is causing a spike in the price of corn and other crops and could worsen water shortages," which are increasing as the planet warms and its human populations grow "and force poor communities off their land."

Initially, biofuels were held up as a panacea for countries struggling to cope with the rising cost of oil or those looking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The European Union, for example, plans to replace 10 percent of transport fuel with biofuels made from energy crops such as sugar cane and rapeseed (Canola) oil by 2020. But in recent months, scientists, private agencies and even the British government have said biofuels could do more harm than good.

Rather than protecting the environment, "energy crops" destroy natural forests

social and environmental issues are currently being played out in the media," Suzuki told delegates at the forum. Foremost among the concerns is increased competition for agricultural land, which Suzuki warned has already caused a rise in corn prices in the U.S. and Mexico and could lead to food shortages in developing countries. She also said China and India could face worsening water shortages because biofuels require large amounts of water, while forests in Indonesia and Malaysia could face threats from the expansion of palm oil plantations.

Some of those doubts were on display at the U.N. forum, with experts saying many countries in Asia have rolled out plans to mandate biofuels for transport without weighing the potential risks. Thailand is considering delaying the introduction of diesel blended with 2 percent biofuel until April because of palm oil shortages, while the Philippines is considering shelving a biofuels law over concerns about the negative environmental effects.

As I mentioned in my column last month, nuclear power is being reintroduced as an answer to the world's energy needs. But nuclear reactors across the southeast U.S. could be forced to throttle back or temporarily shut down later this year because drought is drying up the rivers and lakes that supply power plants with the awesome amounts of cooling water they need to operate.

Utility officials say such shutdowns probably wouldn't result in blackouts in the short term. But they could lead to shockingly higher electric bills for millions of Southerners because the region's utilities may be forced to buy expensive replacement power from other energy companies. One brief drought-related shutdown, at a reactor in Alabama, occurred during the summer of

that actually store carbon and thus are a key tool in the fight to reduce global warming, and are a very inefficient use of the most valuable resource on our planet—water. "Biofuels have become a flash point through which a wide range of

2007. "Water is the nuclear industry's Achilles' heel," said Jim Warren, Executive Director of N.C. Waste Awareness & Reduction Network, an environmental group critical of nuclear power. "You need a lot of water to operate nuclear plants." He added: "This is becoming a crisis."

Because of the yearlong dry spell gripping the region, the water levels on those lakes and rivers are getting close to the minimums set by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Over the next several months, the water could drop below the intake pipes altogether. Or the shallow water could become too hot under the sun to use as coolant. "If water levels get to a certain point, we'll have to power it down or go off line," said Robert Yanity, spokesman

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Student Art Contest Award Ceremony March 29

By Jackie Scholar

On Saturday, March 29, the Awards Ceremony for the 2008 Student Art Contest will be held at Bellevue University, 2:00 P.M. Prizes will be presented at that time.

All art works will be on display at Bellevue University, Gordon Lozier Center, 1000 Galvin Road South, Bellevue, on Saturday, March 29, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Volunteers are needed for two dates:

Friday, March 28 - Hanging of the art: 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Saturday, March 29 - Staffing of the tables, greeting guests and children, giving out prizes at awards ceremony, Bellevue University, 12:00 noon to 4:00 p.m.

Rivers & Wildlife Celebration March 14-16

There is still time to register for the Rivers & Wildlife Celebration in Kearney, Friday-Sunday, March 14-16. Contact Audubon Nebraska, Box 117, Denton NE 68339, or 402-797-2301; Nebraska@audubon.org, or www.Nebraska.audubon.org. "Taking Action for Birds in a Changing Climate" is a new workshop, Friday, March 14, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The cost is \$20 per person, with lunch included. Deadline is March 7. For more information or to register, visit www.audubon.org/state/ne or call Audubon Nebraska, 402-797-2301.

Water, the Last Great Resource,

Cont. from page 2

for So. Carolina Electric & Gas Co, which operates the nuclear plant outside

If you can help, please contact Jackie Scholar at 551-5045 or Jackie@bellevue.edu.

Election at April General Meeting

ASO Constitution and Bylaws prescribes the nominating process, and second Vice-President serves as Nominating Chair. Next fiscal year nominees for elected positions were recruited by committee members Jackie Scholar, Jerry Toll, Laurine Blankenau, Tad Leeper, Catherine Kuper, Linda Dennis and Nelli Falzgraf.

Election of officers and directors shall take place after the 7:30 PM Thursday April 120 general meeting program at Hanscom Park Methodist Church. Audubon members at the meeting are eligible to vote. The slate of candidates consists of incumbents and new nominees:

Clem Klaphake, President

Urban Lehner, 1st Vice-President

Nelli Falzgraf, 2nd Vice-President

Fritz Davis, Treasurer

Urban Lehner, Recording Secretary

Kathleen Crawford-Rose, Corresponding Secretary

David Crawford, Linda Dennis, Eric Scholar, Jackie Scholar - Directors

Terms for officers are one year and for director, two years. Next fiscal year, Jerry Toll and Nancy Williams will be serving the second year of their two-year terms as directors, so won't be elected now.

Please mark your calendar for a great April 10 program, election of officers and directors who'll start July 1, and congenial company and conversation.

Columbia, S.C.

"Currently, nuclear power costs between \$5 to \$7 to produce a megawatt hour," said Daniele Seitz, energy analyst with New York-based Dahlman Rose & Co. "It would cost 10 times that amount if you had to buy replacement power, especially during the summer."

An Associated Press analysis of the nation's 104 nuclear reactors found that 24 are in areas experiencing the most severe levels of drought. All but two are built on the shores of lakes and rivers and rely on submerged intake pipes to draw billions of gallons of water to cool and condense steam after it has turned the plants' turbines.

Extending or lowering the intake pipes is not as simple as it sounds, and wouldn't necessarily solve the problem. The pipes are usually made of concrete, can be up to 18 feet in diameter and can extend up to a mile. Modifications to the pipes and pump systems and their required backups can cost millions and take several months. If the changes are extensive, they require an NRC review that itself can take months or longer.

Even if a quick extension were possible, the pipes can only go so low. If put too close to the bottom of a drought-shrunken lake or river, they can suck up sediment, fish and other debris that could clog the system. And the long-term forecast calls for more dry weather.

So it seems that wherever we turn, our need for water is ever increasing—and here we just examined some energy-related aspects of the water usage issue.

Won't we all be surprised 20 years from now when it is water, not oil, for which we'll be complaining about having to pay over \$100 per barrel!

Hitchcock Hawk Watch: Season in Summary — The Year of the Vulture

By Mark Orsag

This was not a good season if you look at our numbers. The flight of 9,273 raptors and vultures of 19 species, though average in diversity, was the worst ever of the five years of full coverage at HNCH in terms of total raptors and vultures counted.

This decline occurred despite a record 774 hours of coverage and a runaway record flight of Turkey Vultures (over 4,000). Three new season records were set, however, along with three new day records. Weather patterns didn't help us. Hopefully, our fortunes will be better next year.

Some things went right, though. Our volunteers and our excellent paid counter Libbey Taylor staffed the watch every day between September 1 and December 20. We also got a banding program going, largely thanks to the boundless energy, expertise and enthusiasm of Jerry Toll. Jerry embodies, more than anyone else, I think, what HNCH is all about.

Editor's Note: Mark's report is extensively summarized throughout.

Species Accounts:

Black Vulture - 0. Irregular early season rarity.

Turkey Vulture - 4,004 A massive record, 31% above the 5-year average.

Osprey - 94. The count rebounded from a dismal 2006 total of 73 but well below the halcyon days of 2004 and 2005 when the average was 174 per year.

of Hitchcock.

Red-tailed Hawk - 2,269. 32% below average. 6 Krider's, 25 Harlan's Light Morphs, 28 Western Dark Morphs, 2 Western Rufous Morphs, and 20 dark morphs indeterminate. Stalled fronts in mid-October with rain, fog and low-lying clouds plagued HNCH. Large numbers must have already gone another way.

Rough-legged Hawk - 22. 30% below average. Six dark-morph Rough-leggeds were recorded, amounting to 27% of the flight, maybe suggesting that birds from eastern North American Arctic where these are a high percentage constituted a higher percentage of 2007's flight.

Ferruginous Hawk - 1. A lone juvenile dark morph, 38% below average, but a rare species at HNC and can't be deemed statistically significant.

Golden Eagle - 13. Another poor year, 33% below average.

American Kestrel - 122. 2nd worst count.

Merlin - 36. One of the few bright spots this year. A new season record, 23% above average. South winds in early October and their interest in the banding station and its lures (none were trapped though) probably slowed them down a bit, making them easier to spot. Both *columbarius* and *richardsoni* were recorded.

Peregrine Falcon - 46. Another new season record, 25% above average.

Bald Eagle - 443. The 46% below average total was the season's most perplexing. The problem may be the increasingly west-shifting path of Snow Goose migration which migrant Bald Eagles traditionally follow.

Northern Harrier - 210. 27% below average.

Sharp-shinned Hawk - 766. 24% below average, after a surprisingly fast start in early September.

Cooper's Hawk - 259. One of only four species to post above average (16%) totals in 2007. The second-best total for this species in Hitchcock HawkWatch history.

Northern Goshawk - 2. A rare species at Hitchcock, so it is difficult to draw many conclusions about its migration or population status.

Red-shouldered Hawk - 4. Migratory timing of this species has been quite unpredictable over the years.

Broad-winged Hawk - 511. 2nd highest count of the full coverage era. For the first time ever, the total exceeded that of Swainson's Hawks.

Swainson's Hawk - 419. 75% below average. Main movement of Swainson's seems to have taken place west

Prairie Falcon - 2. 57% below average, with one immature bird seen harassing a Northern Harrier and an adult bird powering past the watch on December 13.

Mississippi Kite - 2. 73% below the 5-year average. After being missed entirely in 2006, this rare species graced the Hawkwatch in 2007.

Special thanks to Brett Ford, Chad Graeve, Kelly Herek, Tina Popson, Elliott Bedows, Aaron Brees, Mark Churchill, Fritz Davis, Bob Fuchs, Griffin (Official Hawkwatch Volunteer Mascot),

Jon and Stan How, Bill Johnson, Clem Klaphake, Don and Shirley Maas, Sue Mattix, Jason McMeen, Jim Meyer, Wayne Nicholas,

Mark Orsag, Babs and Loren Padelford, Don and Janis Paseka, Sandy Reinken, Jim Sinclair, Libbey Taylor, Jerry Toll, and to everyone else who visited HNC and participated in the HawkWatch.

Jerry Toll's report on Raptor Banding follows, next page.

Ecotouring in Costa Rica

By Laurine Blankenau

While on a trip to Costa Rica this past month to vacation and escape our winter, I learned about some of the country's intelligent methods of conserving, restoring, and reducing stresses on its resources.

The owner of the hotel at our first stay is restoring to forest a tract of former farm

electric bill (why would they care?).

Water bottle purchase is discouraged, at least by this tour. Our bus provided water in a large container for refilling water bottles.

We saw natural repellents used near

land. Possessing taste as well as vision, this person's work on the premises at the hotel include eight acres of gardens of tropical vegetation—palm trees, flowers, vines, and ground covers, as well as birds and butterflies. Orchids are abloom in the open area before the entrance, in the lobby, dining room and gardens.

An individual working on his own is impressive, but more important is government funding enabling associations to restore and protect rainforests and dry forests. Some appeals are made to individuals through public relations efforts, such as offering plots of forest for adoption. Grade school children are among those who enjoy having a tract funded in their name.

One government project begun in 2007 and to be completed this year seeks to plant 5 million trees. The trees are distributed to individuals or organizations, with trained persons selecting suitable trees for the habitat.

At the present, Costa Rica sells power to Nicaragua and Panama and is experimenting with geothermal energy derived from the country's active volcanoes.

Small but important efforts we encountered are the use in hotels and other lodging of a refillable dispenser of soap, shampoo and lotion, rather than glass and plastic throwaways. A measure employed here and elsewhere as well.

What about the use of forests, theirs or others, for junk mail and all of its annoying tribe? It seems they have a solution. Poor Costa Ricans! They have to live without coupons and other junk arriving almost daily. To make matters worse, their privacy is violated at times. Bills from power companies are sent without envelopes, so that prying neighbors or others can know the total of one's

vegetable gardens. These were plants named Vim, surely tropical, so I won't go out and look for them in Omaha. Even mole repellents in natural, plant form, were used on one property where we stayed. The moles develop fatal intestinal problems if they dine on the plant.

One survival technique I learned, should I ever be really pressed, is the value of termites for human consumption. They are edible and nutritious. More likely I would rub them on my skin to repel insects, another use for them should I not be near a market or pharmacy.

We were not even close to resorting to termites for food. The nation's huge banana, pineapple, mango, avocado, and papaya crops, along with fresh vegetables the sunny climate affords, made mealtimes especially tasty. We had one lunch at a farm house, part of the nation's effort for locals to share in the profits of tourism.

Of course there were birds, in all their splendor.. Although this was not a birding tour, our guide had a degree in ornithology and could state chapter and verse (actually species and Plate # of our sightings).

An educational center for research on Neotropical and Paleotropical bats that uses nets allowed us to see individuals of two species, up close and in the hand. I had the honor of holding on my hand (gloved) for release a small bat with two tiny, sharp-looking teeth.

I hope to return to this tropical jewel in Central America sometime in the future and learn more about their enlightened methods of protecting their abundant resources.

And of course, soak up the sun and the beauty.

Raptor Banding at Hitchcock HawkWatch 2007

By Jerry Toll

Diurnal Banding

In conjunction with Hitchcock HawkWatch, a raptor banding station was opened this season to expand the knowledge of the migration. By collecting morphological data on individuals, the Watch will have a better understanding of age and sex ratios and health of the migrants. The program will provide a platform for future raptor researchers and educational opportunities.

Results

Diurnal banding began September 25 and continued during the peak migration period which is the entire month of October. The effort consisted of 30 banding days and 161 hours. Three species were banded for a total capture of 37 birds.

5 Sharp-shinned Hawks

.. one male hatch-year

.. four females, two hatch-year and two after hatch-year

9 Cooper's Hawks

.. five males, three hatch-year, two after-hatch-year

.. four females, one second-year, one after-second-year, and one after-hatch-year

23 Red-tailed Hawks. Sex cannot be determined in the fall.

.. Age—sixteen hatch-year, one second year, and six after-hatch-year

.. Forms—One Harlan's, one Krider's, four westerns, and nineteen eastern

Saw-whet Owls were occurring at Hitchcock as a prelude to expanding the program to include Saw-whets.

Four evening sessions were held between November 11 and 27th, lasting 4-5 hours each for a total of 18 hours. The sessions were probably post-to-late season attempts. Sessions were timed to maximize results by banding on dark moonless nights with moderate northerly tail winds. The skewed capture rate is somewhat offset by using heavier mist nets that allow smaller Saw-whets to escape and with a less than recommended net array.

Results

7 Northern **Saw-whet Owls** were captured, although one escaped on approach, resulting in six being banded.

.. Sex: five females; one not reliably determined

.. Age: four hatch-year. Two after-hatch year.

The lack of the smaller males captured suggests that perhaps they were able to extricate themselves before net checks. The high capture rate, particularly late in the season, suggests that Saw-whets occur frequently in the Loess Hills, meriting continued research.

I wish to thank the Iowa Ornithologists' Union for providing funding for equipment used at the banding station. ASO provided funding that allowed me to obtain training in raptor banding at the Sandia mountain banding station run by HawkWatch International. I also thank the Pottawattomie County Conservation Board and specifically the Hitchcock Nature Area for their continued support and encouragement.

The low capture rate was disappointing, but a number of reasons are correctable. The first year is mostly a learning experience. Each site is unique and must be tuned to become more efficient. Equipment is tested and refined. The first season was shortened and was not initiated until peak season for buteos and accipiters and was only opened for a month due to limited funding. The accipiter capture rate was particularly low due to lack of foresight on my part.

Weather influences not only the concentration of raptors on the Loess Hills ridgeline but also the track down the ridgeline.

While the HawkWatch at Hitchcock is set up to identify raptors up to four miles distant in any direction. The banding station is much more limited in scope. Raptors could be seen more than a mile distant from the station, but the highest response rate is by those closer and flying at low or medium heights.

When diurnal banding ceased, it was decided to see if

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An important source of state funding for conserving nongame species, the check-off is spent for diverse species of animals and plants. Look for the Peregrine Falcon symbol near the bottom of your state tax form. Or donate anytime at www.outdoornebraska.org/ or mail to Nebraska Game & Parks, Box 30370, Lincoln NE 68505-0370.

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If you find an injured bird of prey, please contact a Raptor Recovery Center volunteer at 402-731-9869.



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A bequest to Audubon is a gift to those who will succeed us; a gift to secure our natural heritage.

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