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To: jtmclochlin@cox.net

Subject: February newsletter

The Meadowlark

**February
2003**



**ASO is a Chapter of the
National Audubon Society
serving Eastern Nebraska
and Western Iowa**

Volume 32 Issue 2

Wolves of the North American Serengeti

In a place called Yellowstone National Park, thousands of large ungulates lived virtually unchallenged by predators until 1995. In that year the gray wolf was introduced back into the park after an absence of seventy years.

What was Yellowstone like before 1995, and how has it changed since the reintroduction of wolves? At the February 13 general meeting, Clem Klaphake will present a program on events leading up to the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone National Park and what their impact has been on the ecology of the park.

and issues raised with the reintroduction of wolves in the Park. He has also put in many hours wolf watching in the park. In February 2000 he attended the International Wolf Conference in Duluth, Minnesota, and has visited the International Wolf Center in Ely, Minnesota, several times.

There are few places left in the lower forty-eight states like the Lamar River Valley in the northeastern part of Yellowstone Park where in one morning wolves, grizzly bear, elk, pronghorn, bison, big horn sheep, Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, Sandhill Cranes and river



mals such as weasels, marten, rodents, and grizzly bears benefit from wolf predation?

These and other topics related to the roles of predator and prey within an ecosystem will be discussed through a slide and video presentation.

The meeting will be held at the Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances (1 block south of 45th & Center) at 7:30 p.m.

A short business meeting will follow the program

Clem is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Bellevue University and has been visiting Yellowstone Park every summer since 1987. While there he has participated in several classes at the Yellowstone Institute on wolf behavior

otters can be observed without walking more than a quarter of a mile. Visitors are welcome.

Are wolves really engineers of biodiversity, as several researchers have claimed? Do birds such as chickadees, nuthatches and woodpeckers, or mam

'Eagles in Winter' Field Trip

By Clem Klaphake

On February 15 I will be leading a field trip to look for eagles and any other feathered denizens hanging around through the winter months.

fish Lake, the Platte River along highway 75, and the Missouri River in Plattsmouth. We will proceed west from there to Louisville State Recreation Area, Platte River State Park, and if there is time, Mahoney State Park.

Most of the observing will be done from vehicles or very short walks to look up and down the rivers. Depending on what we observe, we should finish by 12:00-1:00.

We will meet at 8:00 a.m. at the southeast parking lot at the Southroads Shopping Mall in Bellevue (under the power line tower).

These last three state park locations require a fee or a new 2003 yearly park sticker on your vehicle (might be a good reminder to get your Nebraska State Park sticker).

No specific stop is planned for lunch unless there is a majority revolt. Bring snacks to munch along the way and hot chocolate, tea, or coffee.

From there we will go south to Cat

Steering Birds Away From Windows

By Eric Scholar

The following was adapted from an article by Laura Tangley in a 2002 issue of *National Wildlife*, one I think most appropriate for many of us who enjoy watching birds from our windows. Many of you have reported birds striking the windows of your house or other buildings. Where I work, I have seen

prefer their windows gleaming and spotless.

One solution being considered is an opaque window film designed by 3M that allows people to look out of but not into a window. This is currently not available to the public and is being used

several unconscious birds after they struck a glass-lined walkway connecting the buildings.

This article mainly discusses the situation outside the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Patuxent, Maryland, but it applies to other areas. More than 200 bird species make a migratory pit stop there or permanently reside at this center, which comprises almost 13,000 acres of forest, meadow and wetland and is a welcome oasis in a sea of East Coast concrete.

The birds fly from one tree to another, providing enjoyment to biologists and visitors alike, and fill the air with song. Then suddenly there is a thud. The birds are lured by the leafy reflections on the windows of a dozen buildings on the property. The birds, unable to perceive glass as an obstacle, see a clear passage, and rushing forward, they smash against the transparent barrier. Some die while others drop to the ground, stunned. Apparently this is a problem for a whole range of species from hummingbirds to hawks.

Obviously this problem is not unique to Patuxent. For more than a century, human-built structures have posed serious hazards to birds, but recently the proliferation of radio and television towers have added to the birds' plight. In foggy weather and for unknown reasons, aircraft warning lights confuse them, lure them in and cause them to circle until they either collide with the tower or one another or drop from the sky in exhaustion. Equally treacherous are the collisions that occur when the birds mistake the reflections on the windows and glass walls of skyscrapers for real sky.

Window strikes are not solely the problem of tall buildings and communication towers. Windows on residential homes or similar squat buildings can be just as deadly. Daytime window collisions with low-level structures account for anywhere from

only to place advertisements over bus and taxi windows. While waiting for a long-term solution to appear, homeowners can take some steps now to minimize the danger that windows pose to birds.

One tactic is to ensure that the birds are not flying at full speed when they hit. Many window strikes occur after a scare from the neighbors' cat or after a hawk scatters the birds at a feeder. House plants hung on the inside or vegetation reflecting from the outside may mislead a bird into thinking the area is a passage to safety.

If feeders, baths and other bird attractants are placed three feet or less from the window, no matter how fast the bird takes off, if it hits the window it will bounce to the ground, dazed but still alive. However, a feeder placed more than twelve feet away will mean that 50% of the birds that strike it will probably die. If it is not possible to remove or relocate bird perches, homeowners can cover nearby windows with netting, especially during peak migration periods.

Sometimes people place falcon, owl or spider web decals on their window, but these tactics rarely work. They would have to cover 80% of the glass. When using silhouettes, it is recommended that these hang by chain or rope from an overhang so as to stand out more by blowing in the wind. An alternative is interior covering such as blinds and curtains. If you live in a high rise, this works well to warn birds on nighttime flights. For residential homeowners, this will make a difference only when the sun is shining directly on the window. If it is darker on the inside of a window than on the outside, the pane will reflect like a mirror.

A few dead branches in front of a problem window may help. The branches will reflect, but they'll also slow the bird down a bit. Planting a shade tree or some shrubbery will serve the same purpose, as will an awning.

100 million to 1 billion bird fatalities of both migrant and resident species in the U.S. each year.

The numbers are very high, but often people don't notice the birds dying beneath their windows because they are scavenged a majority of the time. Birds can fly away and later die of injuries, or receive a broken beak which makes foraging impossible. They may also die from a brain hemorrhage.

The long-term solution is glass designed to be less reflective, but it will be difficult to convince people to accept such a material. Corporate directors prize the powerful look mirrored glass brings to a skyscraper, and many home owners

Hanging streamers of shiny reflective plastic ribbons or strips of black garbage bags in front of problem windows is also recommended.

Although today's solutions are limited and not particularly aesthetically pleasing, the first priority is getting people to recognize windows as deadly obstacles that threaten declining bird populations. People see one or two birds that occasionally hit their window at home, and it doesn't seem like much. But if multiplied by every house on your street, in your neighborhood and then all across North America, you have millions of birds dying.

Something has got to be done.

Omaha Raptor Team -

A Committee of ASO

The Omaha Raptor Team had a busy year in 2002. The programs we conduct throughout the year are a necessity, as the donations receive sustain our organization's needs. These and other donations feed and house our birds. Vaccinations of our birds against the West Nile virus will be a new expense we encounter this year.

Our volunteers conducted numerous programs throughout Nebraska and Western Iowa last year, and as always the raptors captivated our audiences. We made an appearance at year's end for the Seibert's (owners of Backyard Birds) anniversary. Two of the Seiberts are pictured here (Sandy and volunteer Lisa Bough were hiding from the camera). From the left are Sherry Seibert with

Team to conduct programs over the years—it means so much to us. Please keep us in mind for the new year. As for the team members, I am most blessed and appreciative of the great people you are. I am so proud.

Harley the Barred Owl, Bill Seibert with Spike the Screech Owl, as well as Ed Gruttemeyer and Carolyn Beavers, holding our "twins," Lucy and Elvis, the Burrowing Owls.

Many thanks to everyone who invited the Omaha Raptor

A Study of Wide-ranging Shorebirds

By Nelli Falzgraf

Plovers and sandpipers are generally found along open shorelines. They have thin beaks suitable for picking or probing for insects, shrimp, worms, and shellfish, and long, bare legs adapted to wading in wet or shallow shores.

In *The Life of Birds*, Jean Durst explains that shorelines are rich in organic matter and bathed in warm sunlight, thus sustaining large populations of invertebrates, upon which most shorebirds feed. Wet, sandy or muddy habitats offer refuge to nesting birds, because the soft substrate doesn't readily support heavy predators like raccoons. For inland-loving birds, there is safety in mudflats after the breeding season when they molt, don't fly, and congregate in flocks before migration.

Thomas Guillard describes two families of shorebirds in *Living Birds of the World*. The Charadriidae family includes lapwings, true plovers and turnstones. Lapwings of the Old World are named for the slow motion of their wings. The familiar Killdeer breeds in meadows and pastures. Most of the ringed plovers, e.g. the Semipalmated and Piping, stay close to mudflats and beaches, feeding on insects and larvae. The Golden Plover inhabit interior meadows but also visit coastal lagoons. Their hunting run is typical of plovers—short dash, halt and freeze, catch an insect, and dart off in another direction.

The Scolopacidae family includes sandpipers, snipe and woodcock. Sandpipers are slender, with a smaller head and

longer bill and legs than plovers. Guillard states, "When they flush, they fly as a closely-knit group in complicated maneuvers. The wings are pointed and swallow-shaped, and the tail is short and square." Snipes are found in swampy grasslands far from shore and travel in flocks, feeding during the night. Woodcocks are crepuscular and, during courtship, the males fly high and dive, producing whistling notes that attract females.

Join Rick Schmid to learn about shorebirds. Rick leads trips, teaches bird ID and helps band birds. Meeting is 7pm Tuesday, February 18 at the ASO building, 11809 Old Maple Road. Everyone is welcome. Call 292-9687 for questions.

The Fontenelle Birding Club invites ASO to join Bob Fuchs at 7pm Thursday, Feb. 6, at the Fontenelle Buffett Center, 111 N. Bellevue Blvd, to learn about backyard habitats and wildlife. Bob interprets forest ecology and teaches raptor education. Everyone is welcome. Call Howard Mattix, 325-1755. or Nelli Falzgraf, 292-9687.

Calendar of Events

Feb 3 (Mon) Conservation meeting

Feb 5 (Wed) Board Meeting

Feb 15 (Sat) Field Trip

Conservation/Legislative Action

By Ione Werthman

I thoroughly believe in Margaret Mead's famous comment: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has." Having said that, I want to report some exciting developments in the environmental field in Nebraska.

First - The NER - In 1997, at the urging of State Senator Chris Beutler, a small group of representatives of Nebraska environmental groups met and signed a Memorandum of Agreement to form what we called The Nebraska Environmental Roundtable - the NER.

Members met in the next few years, going through strategic planning sessions and creating a mission statement that read, "To protect and enhance Nebraska's natural resources for current and future generations through the cooperative efforts of organizations and individuals dedicated to Nebraska's air, water, land, people, plants, fish, wildlife and heritage."

This was well and good, but the member groups were consistently constrained from making the NER viable through lack of time of its busy volunteer leaders. Enter Joe Gabig, retired

The NLCV will hold its first annual meeting Wednesday, February 10, 2003, 6:30 - 9:00 p.m., at the NRD South Platte Headquarters, 3125 Portia Street, Lincoln. Call me at 445-4138 for more information if you are interested in attending.

In the Meantime - Life in the Congress and Unicameral goes on. At last count (at press time), over 900 bills had been introduced into the Unicameral. Our legislative task force from Audubon Nebraska is busy trying to analyze all of them and help set our priorities. While many of the bills do not pertain to the environment, some are very controversial and will affect the environment when the fiscal part of the session begins.

Robbing the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund to pay for state expenses is only one of the controversial issues. The prairie dogs are being attacked again, and the selling of Nebraska's Ogallala groundwater to Colorado will loom very large this session. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled 20 years ago that water is a commodity that states cannot restrict the sale of - unless its transfer would have a detrimental effect on public health or safety.

Nebraska Game and Parks employee and environmental activist who shares our vision. Joe has forged ahead with the paper work needed to drive the organization. I'm happy to report that the NER is now incorporated under the nonprofit laws of our state and has applied to the IRS for a federal 501 (C) (3) nonprofit status.

Second - The NLCV- The Nebraska League of Conservation Voters - A year ago we of ASO hosted at Heron Haven a meeting of many of these same activist leaders to learn more about the Federation of States Conservation Voter Leagues (FSCVL). Consequently, the NLCV was initiated to become a sister organization of the NER. The mission of the NLCV is to make the conservation of Nebraska's natural resources a high priority for voters, elected officials and political candidates.

In 2002 the NLCV was incorporated under the non-profit laws of Nebraska and gained its IRS 501 (C) (4) status under the group exemption of the Federation of States conservation Voter League.

After an executive director is hired to assist both groups, it will now be only a matter of time for this "small group of concerned citizens" in Nebraska to become an effective environmental voice.

While we in Nebraska have never had to be concerned with mining coal or drilling for oil, we are sitting on the largest "sponge" of underground fresh water in North America—the Ogallala Aquifer.

Nebraska has already been involved with lawsuits on surface water issues with Wyoming, Colorado and Kansas, but the mining and sale of our underground water to Colorado is a whole new issue.

As the *Omaha World-Herald* said in a December 22, 2002 editorial, "Top Nebraska officials need to get. . . control of this train before it runs over a precious Nebraska resource."

Wyoming charges a severance tax on coal; Alaska does the same on oil. How will we handle mining water in Nebraska? For the record: Nebraska law states that the water in our state belongs to the state; the land over or under the water belongs to the landowner.

Keep tuned! We have lots of issues to resolve in the next year.

Join us for our next Conservation/Legislative meeting on February 3, 7:30, at the Audubon Office, to help us analyze and respond to these issues.

Revised Expectations

By Jerry Toll

It was one of those days when I wasn't expecting much. I had been to the Hawk Watch the day before, hoping for a big

flock of what appeared to be Swainson's Hawks flying at tree-level in the valley. It is not a place we normally look for

flight. The winds were from the north, normally for early October an excellent flight day, but the movement just wasn't as big as expected. So I wasn't too excited about the prospects the next morning. There was a little fog and no wind, hardly worth my getting out early.

As I approached Crescent, Iowa, the village five miles south of the Hawk Watch site, I noticed a few raptors in the distance drifting north out of the Loess Hills into the flood plain. "TVs," I said to myself, sick of seeing Turkey Vultures drifting around the Watch and wishing their migration flight was over.

Getting closer now, I realized they were not TVs, they were Swainson's Hawks. This is what I'd been hoping for. Each fall the birds form flocks, sometimes huge ones, and kettle their way to wintering grounds in Argentina. In most years the vast majority of Swainson's Hawks passing by Hitchcock do so during a short two-week window. Most years there is a single day when over 500 go past. This could be the day. Last year the large kettle, over 700, came through late in the day just before sunset. Having left at noon, I missed it. I was determined not to miss the big flight this year.

As I approached, perhaps 20 of the birds flew in front of me. I decided to see where they were going. I didn't need to go far. About a mile north, there they were, a field full of them, looking like Canada Geese, they were so densely packed. I parked and started scanning to get a count. They were pretty skittish and started leaving the bean field. I backed off, but before I did, I counted an exciting 816.

Rather than stay, I headed to Hitchcock to see if there were more in the skies. When I arrived, Jim Meyer reported seeing the same group on the way to the Watch and counted roughly the same number. We decided to get a more accurate count. One of us would go back to the flock; the other would stay and watch the skies. I got lucky.

migrating raptors, and it is difficult to identify them in shadow with the setting sun in our faces. Perhaps that is how they were able to get past us.

Before the day was over and rain shut down the migration, we had attained a grand total of 1,054 Swainson's Hawks for the day.

Every birder, in fact anyone who has a passion, can recall events that solidify or reclaim their interest. Many times my interest has reached a plateau, a time of failing enthusiasm, but often I have found some way to reclaim it. Usually it is a shift in direction, a tangent that will add to and eventually round out my interest in birds.

This day, this one event, on October 2, was one of those increasingly rarest of days that reclaimed my passion—a day that began not unlike any other but became memorable—because to see that many Swainson's Hawks in such a common place as a field a few miles from home is to wonder at the possibilities.

DeSoto Christmas Count

By Jerry Toll

Greetings to all! We added two new species to the overall list: Bufflehead and American White Pelican. That brings the overall number up to 103.

We set a new record for species in a single count— 67; the previous record was 64. We also set a new record of individuals—100,182. The old record was 48,027.

Notable sightings were a Prairie Falcon at DeSoto and 3 Trumpeter Swans just east of DeSoto in the Hitchcock sector. Notable absences in this count but sighted in at least half of the past counts were Ross' Goose, Rough-legged Hawk, Red-headed Woodpecker, Winter Wren, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. Species

When I returned to the bean field, only a few hundred had remained, but I found the others farther up the road in a larger field. This time I was able to make a more accurate count, even though they began to drift across I 29 to the west. The final tally—956!

Back at Hitchcock, Jim and I speculated how the flock had gotten past the counters the previous day. Because they were located farther south past the Hitchcock site, they had either passed after dark, which seemed unlikely, or passed unseen under our radar. A few days earlier, I saw a

seen during count week but not recorded on count day were Red-breasted Merganser, Killdeer, Winter Wren, Brown Thrasher, and Eastern Towhee.

Great Backyard Bird Count Needs Volunteers to Help Protect America's Birds and Habitat

Spotlight on WatchList Birds and West Nile Virus

All across the Americas our birds face survival challenges from loss of habitat to introduced predators to diseases like the West Nile Virus. The Great Backyard Bird Count February 14-17 will focus on the effects of these threats, bring conservation home by telling participants what they can do to help, and add vital new information to our understanding of our birds and their environment.

Once again the National Audubon Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology call on volunteers of every age and skill level to make the Count possible. "The GBBC has become an important means of gathering data to help birds, but it can't happen unless people take part. Whether you're a novice or an expert, we need you to take part and help us help

GBBC web site provides useful information to make participation easy and enjoyable.

There is a vocabulary section, birdwatching and bird feeding tips, bird vocalizations and more. For those tired of winter and ready for spring, there will be tips about planning and preparing for the spring bird garden.

Instructions can be found at the web site. There is no registration or fee required. Those who wish to participate but are not online can try their local library (or friends). Libraries, nature clubs, Scout troops and other organizations interested in participating can contact Sally Conyne at Audubon, 215-355-9588, ext. 16, or the Cornell Lab at 800-843-2473.

birds."

Rivers and Wildlife Celebration

Audubon and Cornell ask participants to pay special attention to the more than 200 species on the Audubon 2002 WatchList, issued last autumn, which lists North American birds in danger or decline. "WatchList is an early-warning system designed to raise awareness of birds in trouble, before they become endangered or threatened," explain Audubon's Gill. "Think of it as preventive medicine, protecting our great natural heritage." The GBBC website www.birdsource.org/gbbc includes features on these birds and what participants can do to help them.

The GBBC will also focus on the effects of West Nile Virus on crows and jays, owls, raptors and other birds, and will educate participants about the disease. "The GBBC can serve to educate people about the real effects of the disease and help our scientists reach a better understanding."

"When the last Ivory-billed Woodpecker was seen in the 1930's, there was no concrete way for citizens to help professional ornithologists monitor bird populations," says Cornell Lab Director John Fitzpatrick, who this past year led an expedition to rediscover the Ivory Bill, possibly North America's rarest bird. "We cannot allow other species to face the same fate as the Ivory-bill. The Great Backyard Bird Count provides a way for citizens to help us determine which birds are where, and in what numbers, so we can take steps to protect those that need protecting."

The Count asks families, individuals, classrooms and other groups to count the numbers and kinds of birds that visit their feeders, local parks, school yards, and other areas during any or all of the four count days. Participants enter their sightings at www.birdsource.org/gbbc. The

If you have not signed up for the wildlife gala in Kearney, March 14-16, you still have time. For the lowest rates, your registration must be postmarked by February 28. See the January newsletter for information about costs, how to register, and about speakers.

Lodging is available at the Holiday Inn, convention center site, 1-800-248-4460 (outside Nebraska call 1-308-237-5971), the Hampton Inn (1-800-HAMPTON or 1-308-234-3400), the Wingate Motel (1-800-228-1000 or 308-237-4400, and other Kearney motels. Motel rooms fill up fast, so don't hesitate. The Holiday Inn has guaranteed a block of rooms for the Rivers & Wildlife guests until February 24. The other two motels named above are located nearby.

Field Trips during the Conference include trips to the viewing blinds, to Harlan County Reservoir, the new Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary, and Prairie Chicken Leks.

For complete information, contact Audubon Nebraska, (402) 797-2301, Fax (402) 797-2304.

Birding Adventures

Three birding trips by Penfeathers Tours are listed here. Many more, by the week, weekend, day or half-day are offered, starting in mid-February and running until late September. Most are in Texas.

Mar 29-30 A Cajun Adventure (Southwest Louisiana) - Explores the Creole Nature Trail and the national wildlife refuges that make it special. Some attractions we plan to visit are the Sabine NWR, Cameron Prairie NWR, and the world-famous Avery Island Bird Sanctuary. With a variety of habitats ranging from coastal beaches to cypress swamps, we expect to enjoy a nice assortment of birds.

Apr 26-27 - A Spring Migration Extravaganza. Located midway between the Upper Texas Coast and the Rio Grande Valley, this area is rich with diversity of habitats that play host to a diverse group of birds. We'll spend Saturday birding the hotspots on Mustang Island the Corpus Christi area. Sunday morning will find us birding the Rockport/Fulton area and Goose Island State Park.

Addresses to Remember

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Comments: 202-456-1111;
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Senator Chuck Hagel
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Phone: 444-5000 Hot Line: 444-5555

If you find an injured bird of prey, please contact a Raptor Recovery Center volunteer at 402-734-6817 or 402-731-9869.



Memorials

The Audubon Society of Omaha greatly appreciates the memorials it receives.

When sending your gift, please identify the person you wish to memorialize. Please also give the name and address of the person to be notified.

Birdline

For an update on the sightings in the state, call 292-5325.

Report your sightings after listening to the tape.

**Audubon Society of Omaha, 11809 Old Maple Road,
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Phone: 445-4138 - <http://audubon-omaha.org>

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