

A Bird's Eye View

**Audubon Society of
Omaha
A Chapter of National
Audubon Society**



Alaska/Nebraska: The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Rainwater Basin and Beyond

By Clem Klaphake

Imagine...unzipping your tent and stepping out into the midnight sun to the sight of tens of thousands of caribou passing by with nursing calves and stalking grizzly bears.

You are in the midst of a wild ecosystem with all of its cycles at work. The bison herds that used to number in the millions no longer roam the Great Plains, but tens of thousands of caribou still burst out onto the Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain each spring to calve.

Join field biologist and University of Alaska-Fairbanks Northern Studies graduate student Andy Keller on March 14 at our general meeting for an illustrated slide talk on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and learn how it is connected to Nebraska and the

The largest Refuge in the system, the Arctic NWR is home to the great caribou herds and a fascinating combination of plants and other animals on the northern fringe of the continent.

Andy Keller is a graduate student and Teaching Assistant at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks. His academic work is focused on the debate over the management of the Arctic NWR with a special emphasis on the existence value.

Andy was the Director of the Minnesota Wilderness and Parks Coalition during the difficult struggle over the Boundary Waters and Voyageurs Park in the 104th Congress. He also served as Director of Governmental Relations for the Northern Alaska Environmental Center as

ography from the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. His work experience includes serving as a park ranger, biological researcher, environmental educator, grassroots organizer and director of governmental relations.

Andy's talk will include a brief conservation history of this controversial area, which was featured in the last presidential election debate, and is a key component of the Bush administration's energy policy.

You will learn about Snow Geese, Sandhill Cranes, and other wildlife and be able to compare and contrast Arctic Alaska with the prairies of Nebraska.

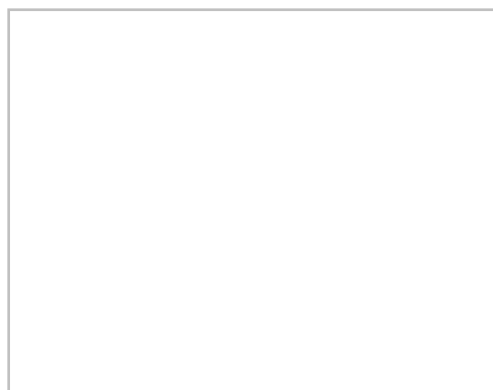
Join us on March 14, 7:30 p.m. at the Hanscom Park

Rainwater Basin. You will follow Andy as he takes you across the famous Yukon River and through the wild Brooks Mountain Range.

well as a campaign consultant for the Alaska Wilderness League in Washington, D.C, and the Great Lakes States. Andy earned a B.S. degree in biology with a minor in ge

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

Ducks and Other Migrants at Branched Oak Lake



In late March, Branched Oak Lake should be a great place to find several species of ducks, numbers of geese, Bald Eagles and other raptors, perhaps a few shore birds, and other early spring migrants before they leave for their breeding grounds in the north.

This is our destination for a field trip Saturday, March 30, to be led by

By Dick Rasmussen Don and Janis Paseka. We will assemble at the Headquarters Building parking lot of Chalco Hills Recreation Area at 8:00 a.m. and car pool from there. To reach the Chalco headquarters, from the I 80/Hwy 50 junction (Exit 440) go about one mile north to Giles Road, and one mile west, then turn left at the gate. Watch for the large building.

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Scholarly Notes

by Eric Scholar

Defense Systems Under Fire

Did you know that strong evidence exists that certain toxic pollutants make wildlife more

arctica. Even low doses such as a single exposure of no more than one millionth of a gram, for

eled off or are declining in many parts of the world, although hot spots of high contamination still exist,

vulnerable to disease and may also do the same to humans?

Over a seven-month time period in 1988, almost 20,000 harbor seals in the Baltic and North Seas died mysteriously. A previously unknown virus, morbillivirus, was identified as the cause of death in these seals.

Within a year, seals in Canada were also found to be infected with the virus, but none of these animals died. Researchers found that the dead seals in northern Europe tended to be from colonies in areas known to be heavily contaminated with toxic pollutants.

Many of the animals had unusually high levels of substances such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in their fatty tissues. These chemicals are known to suppress the immune system in fish and laboratory animals such as mice.

Scientists thought these substances may have made the animals more vulnerable to infection. Although this was only circumstantial evidence, further studies provided direct evidence that pollutants in the water played a role in this massive die-off.

These die-offs have continued to occur around

instance, of some of these chemicals can disrupt immune function.

It is now well known that many of these chemicals have made their way into wildlife, sometimes at very high concentrations. These toxic chemicals become more concentrated as they move up the food chain. Some of the contaminants also can be transferred from a mother's fat into her offspring whether in her eggs or in her milk.

What especially worries immuno-toxicologists is that even fairly low concentrations may make animals less able to fight off disease. Some of the chemicals may disrupt the immune system's ability to distinguish foreign invaders from the body's own tissue, triggering destructive autoimmune reactions. Because the immune system is especially sensitive to toxic substances, it may serve as an early warning system of environmental degradation.

These same chemicals may be putting humans at risk. For example, farm workers exposed to high levels of pesticides after accidental spills have suffered immune abnormalities.

Last year it was found that young adults living in Aberdeen, North Carolina,

particularly in some of the countries once part of the former Soviet Union.

However, even at reduced levels, some of these chemicals will be around for decades as they seep out of hazardous waste sites.

What's more, new industrial chemicals are not routinely tested for their immunological effects. Fortunately, scientists are now developing more reliable tests that will tell us whether a particular animal is immunologically fit or not.

Eventually, experts say they hope to have measures sensitive enough and a monitoring system broad enough to spot immunological and environmental trouble in time to head off catastrophes like the 1988 die-off in the North and Baltic Seas.

(This article was excerpted from one that appeared in National Wildlife, October/November 2000.)

I found the article most intriguing, in light of the reported high levels of lead in areas of Omaha east of 45th Street.

Although lead has not been shown to have immunological effects, you never know what effects contaminants may

the world, some of them linked at least in part to immune-suppressing contaminants in the environment.

Among the substances known to be immunotoxic are PCBs, certain pesticides, mercury and a range of dioxin-like substances. Many of these chemicals can linger in the environment for decades and can spread to seemingly pristine regions of the world with remarkable ease. Some have been found in wildlife in both the Arctic and Ant

home of a superfund site, were two times more likely than nonresidents to have shingles, a painful condition caused by a herpes virus.

It is very likely that children are likely to be at greatest risk because their immune systems are still developing.

Thanks to national and international bans, concentrations of some of the most worrisome chemicals, including PCBs and dioxins, already have lev

until they are thoroughly studied.

Birdline

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

Report your sightings after listening to the tape.

Entries Wanted for

May Photo Contest

Duane Bright has volunteered to take on the photo contest again this year. As most of you know, the entries are displayed at the Spring Banquet. (See item on Page 5 regarding the banquet date of May 9).

The categories this year are Birds, Scenics, Wildflowers and Insects.

Entries are limited to two per person per category and may range in size from 5" x 7" to 16" x 20" and must be matted or framed.

Photographs must be from the wild,

Study Shorebirds

with Joel Jorgensen

By Nelli Falzgraf

Plovers and sandpipers are part of the diverse Charadriiformes order, along with gulls, terns, jaegers, and auks. Most are strong fliers, migrating long distances. Their plumage is compact, white and brown or gray. Living near the water's edge, they are colonial and produce precocial young.

Shorebirds have pointed bills for probing and long legs for wading, and pick in the mudflats for mollusks, insects, and worms.

meaning no pets or zoo shots. Entries should be submitted by Sunday, May 5, to Duane.

Prizes are awarded for First and Second Place, Best of Show and Most Popular, voted by those attending the banquet.

Make arrangements for delivering your photos by calling Duane at 291-6495.

Ducks at Branched Oak

Continued from page 1

Branched Oak Lake is located about 3 1/2 miles north of Malcolm.

We plan to meet the Pasekas at 9:00 A.M. at the south end of the dam. **A day or annual permit is required for vehicles entering the State Recreation Area.**

Guests and beginners are welcome. Bring binoculars, field guides, a scope if you have one, a drink if you wish, and dress for the weather. We plan to have lunch at the cafe in Malcolm.

For details or answers to questions, call Don or Janis at 727-9229.

Mudflats at the seas' edge are rich in nutrients because twice a day the tides flow in and out, leaving a dependable supply of mineral and organic matter.

Mudflats are also a refuge because the soft, shifting substrate is difficult for terrestrial predators such as foxes to gain a firm foothold to pounce.

During the molt, shorebirds can't fly; so mudflats provide both plentiful food and security to sustain large populations.

Please join Joel Jorgensen to learn about the challenging but fascinating species of shorebirds and enjoy his slides. He is coauthor of the recently published "Birds of Nebraska: Their Distribution and Temporal Occurrence" and is the Records Committee Chair of the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union.

Nature Study will be held at the ASO building next to our wetland, 7 P.M. Wednesday, March 20. Open to the public. Questions? Call 292-9687.

Wilson's Phalarope

March Events

Mar 4 (Mon) Conservation/Legislative Meeting

Mar 6 (Wed) Board Meeting

Mar 7 (Thur) Birdbanding /MAPS project

Mar 9 (Sat) Art Contest Awards

Mar 14 (Thur) General Meeting

Mar 15-17 (Fri - Sun) Rivers &

Kevin Poague

at Birding Club

The Fontenelle Nature Association Birding Club invites us to a 7 PM Thursday, April 4, program at Camp Brewster, 1313 Bellevue Blvd North.

Kevin Poague of Audubon Nebraska and Wachiska Audubon will talk about birds and Audubon's Spring Creek Prairie.

Wildlife Celebration - Kearney

Please join us for this event. For details call Howard Mattix, 896-0352 or Nelli 292-9687.

Mar 22-24 (Fri-Sun) Regency Garden Show

Mar 30 (Sat) Field Trip

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Environmental/ Legislative Action By Ione Werthman

Hearings, Testimonies and Congressional Actions

Endangered Species

On February 17, U.S. Rep. Tom Osborne conducted a hearing in Grand Island on the Endangered Species Act and the effects it will have on the Platte and the Platte River Cooperative Agreement involving Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado and the Federal Department of the Interior.

This hearing was different in that only eight invited speakers were allowed to testify and be questioned by the Congressional Committee. Speaking for the birds and wildlife was Dave Sands, Audubon Nebraska Director; John Keys of the Federal Bureau of Reclamation; and Ralph Mogenweck of U.S. Fish & Wildlife. Over 150 people attended.

exportation from the state, processing, sale or offer for sale, or shipment as may be necessary to conserve such nongame wildlife."

"The Commission, with the approval of the Governor, shall issue such regulations as are necessary to provide for the conservation of any species of wildlife or wild plants that is listed as threatened species."

"The Commission, with the approval of the Governor, may enter into agreements with federal agencies, other states, political subdivisions of this state or private persons with respect to programs designed to conserve such species."

now divided between education and conservation projects in all 93 counties of Nebraska. Last year lawmakers diverted \$13 million of the education lottery funds from K-12 programs to higher education.

An article in the Sunday, February 10, *World-Herald* stated that some \$140 million has been distributed from the fund since 1993 for education grants, landfill closures, gambling treatment programs, and environmental grants.

Again, no one spoke in favor of the Bill. Of course, opposition came from the conservation community. Seems as

According to the February 17 article in the *Omaha World-Herald*, farmer Tom Schwarz of Bertrand, Nebraska, spoke on behalf of the Nebraska Water & Parks Users Organization. Believing that the Endangered Species Act wasn't working effectively, he stated that "habitat is truly critical for species should be protected but only if it does not unduly harm private individuals."

Endangered Species in Nebraska

On February 20 I attended a public hearing in the Natural Resources Committee chambers of the Unicameral on a bill to revise the Endangered Species Act of Nebraska, LB 1241. This bill is an attempt to require gubernatorial approval of all actions by the Game & Parks Commission. It contains these provisions:

"The Commission, with the approval of the Governor, shall establish such proposed limitation relating to the taking, possession, transportation,

There was no testimony for LB 1241. Testimony against 1241 suggested that this was an attempt to curtail the actions of Game of the Nebraska Water & Parks and was introduced particularly because of the prairie dog issue. The Conservation Alliance of the Great Plains has petitioned the Commission to recognize prairie dogs as a species in need of conservation.

If you recall, in my January column I reported that the Federal Government is urging prairie plains states to initiate plans to protect prairie dogs from being put on the endangered list.

Legislative Bill 1272, introduced by Senators Pam Brown and Ernie Chambers, would create an Environmental Response Contingency Fund for the State to provide state funding matches required by the federal government in its "contamination response actions."

This Bill addresses the 10% of the superfund costs in the lead cleanup in Omaha that the state (or Omaha?) will be required to match. Guess where the suggested funding will be coming from? You're right! The Environmental Trust (lottery) Funds, which are

though we have to fight this fight every year. I'm not sure where the Bill will go. Comments indicated that most everyone felt ASARCO should be pressured to pay and that it may be another three years before any true costs can be identified.

Also it was mentioned that the City of Omaha could submit a grant proposal to the Environmental Trust for funds just as all other entities in the state have to do. Keep tuned.

Missouri River

The last hearing by the Corps of Engineers on their DEIS (Draft Environmental Impact Statement) for managing the dams on the Missouri River was held in Council Bluffs this past week. In May the Corps plans to make their final decision. I hope you wrote your letter.

I found it encouraging to read that six of the eight states in the Missouri River Basin Association have now suggested a 10-year plan to experiment with the flow changes in an effort to help endangered wildlife on the River.

Continued on page 5

Missouri River,

Continued from
page 4

Slate of Candidates Presented

At the April general meeting, candidates will be presented for election for the year 2002-2003.

Those who agreed to serve in officers positions are President - Eric Scholar; 1st Vice President - Elliott Bedows; 2nd Vice President - Nelli Falzgraf; Treasurer - Sharon Draper; Recording Secretary - Martha Massengale; Corresponding Secretary - Kay Strong.

Beginning two-year terms as Directors are Jackie Scholar (incumbent), Jeff Wallace and Mark Armstrong. Sue Mattix, Bob Fuchs and Paul Kardell are completing two-year terms as Director.

We welcome the new and returning candidates.

That certainly is a step in the right direction. However, I'm not sure that the alternative they selected to use for the 10-year tests (GP 1528) will give the Corps the flexibility in options they will need to make sure the project succeeds. I would hate to see us have to go through another 12 years of debate 10 years from now if the experiments with the GP 1528 Plan should prove that larger flows are needed.

Environmental research on large rivers with similar situations supports the requirement for correctly timed and suitable-sized water

Westroads Hosts Art Contest

Awards Event March 9

Scholarship Available for College Students

You are invited to drop in, view the art works, and cheer the winners of the Student Art Contest at 1:00 p.m. Saturday, March 9, in the Von Maur Court, 1st level, at the Westroads Mall. Deborah Ward of Channel 3 will emcee the ceremony.

ASO is offering a \$1,000 scholarship to second- or third-year students at area four-year colleges (UNO, Bellevue, Creighton and

releases from the dams at the College of St. Mary). Winners will receive the essential ingredient for Applicants are asked to prizes of nature books, native species protection. submit a one- to two-page subsidized by the essay explaining why Bookworm.

Both the Fish & Wildlife they qualify and to state Biological Opinion and their goals and need, Winning entries will be the 2002 National along with a college displayed in the Von Academy of Science transcript and two letters Maur throat leading to study have endorsed the of recommendation. the court. They will larger flexible flow remain on exhibit all day alternative. Let's hope we A recipient will be chosen Saturday and Sunday, have convinced the Corps by a committee and will March 9 and 10. of Engineers to initiate a be expected to participate better plan. in some ASO activities.

Spring Banquet Moves to Johnny's

This year the ASO spring banquet and photo contest will be held on Thursday, May 9, at Johnny's Steakhouse on L Street.

Join us for our Please contact Eric Conservation/Legislative Scholar at 551-5045 if Action meetings the first you are interested. Monday of each month - March 4, April 2, and May 6, 7:30 - 9:00 p.m. at the Audubon Office, 11809 Old Maple Road. Become an Audubon Activist!

Details will be provided in the April newsletter. We hope you will join us, so please mark this date on your calendars now!

Volunteers Wanted for Regency Garden Show

Jenny Henricksen, Chairperson, is asking for volunteers to help plan, set up and staff Audubon's display at the Regency Garden Show March 22-24.

Please call Jenny at 895-5487. The theme this year is an inviting "Garden Palette," one we are more than ready for as spring arrives.

into distant skies. Below, on the autumn rivers, stands a man, above him the bright moon. The man wanders aimless, trailing after the Milky Way. The wind blows past him. I, too, thinks the man, would like to be utterly free. Jiang Yi Ning

It's March The Sandhills will be coming soon. Each season, sometimes each month, is referenced by the passing of a species that holds special significance for me. March, Sandhill Crane.

I have been reading Peter Matthiessen's *The Bird of Heaven*, an account of his experiences with the fifteen extant species of cranes that exist on five of the seven continents of the world.

So far I have only traveled with him through Asia, but it is in Asia that the greatest diversity as well as the greatest threat in crane conservation occurs.

Ten species in three genera of cranes occur including our own Lesser Sandhills that are the only species to be found regularly on two continents and in two hemispheres.

Crane conservators face a difficult task in Asia. Of the ten species found on the continent, six are endangered. The reasons are familiar and simple. Loss of habitat and the cranes' high degree of specialization limit their compatibility and adaptability to human presence.

nated and honored by the U.S. and Canada and to some extent by Mexico as well. In Asia, cooperation between China, Russia, Japan, India, and Mongolia, just to name the largest countries, has been strained for centuries.

Little energy is expended because of old hatreds based on past aggressions and cultural differences. All of these countries share a love of and reverence for cranes in their art and literature. Hope for their survival comes from this tradition, and the scientific influence of the west.

Up until the 1970's, 80's and even 90's, very little was known about the natural history and ecology of the cranes. As an example, Siberian cranes were known to overwinter in India, but the breeding grounds and migration routes were unknown. It is now known that the western population breeds in the subarctic tundra around the Ob River separating European Russia from Siberia. They migrate 3,100 miles, one of the longest migrations of any nonpelagic species, through Afghanistan in a sweeping arc that avoids the Himalayas.

tific background is completed. Imple

entation has begun for most species, and there are capable and dedicated "craniacs" in each country.

Even so, in India and China, countries that possess the most devastated landscapes on earth, recovery is far from certain. In these countries' current climate of embracing western materialism, much will be put aside in the headlong pursuit of wealth.

Sandwiched between these two giants is the tiny Himalayan country of Bhutan. It is an environmental jewel and the home of the Black-necked Crane. The Buddhist theocratic government is making every effort to keep it that way. Isolated politically and geographically, the people have resisted efforts from outside influences to "modernize."

Another jewel of Asia is Outer Mongolia, through which five species of cranes migrate. Also politically isolated, its people have held onto their tradition of being wandering herders. Consequently, the steppes of Asia have scarcely known the plow. Wildlife

The solutions needed to preserve cranes are extremely complex and may well prove in some cases unattainable. For those populations that migrate, not only must they face the physical rigors of migration but must cross political boundaries of adversarial nations.

The International Crane Foundation of Baraboo, Wisconsin, has been instrumental in the preservation of the Asian cranes. They initiated captive breeding and population enhancement programs and funded field studies of their natural histories that are essential to recovery.

is reported to be still abundant. The Steppes of Outer Mongolia are still what the Great Plains once were, according to Matthiessen.

We in North America enjoy good relations with our neighbor countries and fine common interests in preserving those species that cross our borders. Conservation plans are coordi

There are a few bright spots in the recovery process. Most of the scien

Conservation/Legislative Action, Continued from page 4

March Birding

By Babs Padelford

Nebraska has two spectacular examples of migration—the Sandhill Crane stopover during March along the Platte River between Grand Island and Lexington, and concentrations of over a million

Snow Geese and Greater White-fronted Geese in the Rainwater Basin. Following is a partial list of birds that migrate through the midlands and approximate times to see them.

March Bird Calendar

Waterfowl: Good places for ducks in the Omaha area are Cunningham Lake north of Omaha, Wehrspann Lake southwest of Omaha, and Lake Manawa south of Council Bluffs.

Shorebirds: American Woodcocks begin display flights in March. Look before dawn and at dusk around the parking lots on the south side of Lake Manawa.

Look for Cinnamon Teal, Greater Scaup, Long-tailed Duck, Hooded and Red-breasted Mergansers.

Forney Lake and Riverton Wildlife Management area in Fremont County, Iowa, usually have concentrations of Snow Geese and Greater White-fronted Geese and good numbers of ducks. A Garganey was found at Forney Lake in 1999.

There are also very large concentrations of Snow Geese and Greater White-fronted Geese at Funk Lagoon in Phelps County and Harvard Marsh in Clay County.

Look for Ross' Geese with flocks of Snow Geese.

Raptors: Good places to see Bald Eagles in the Omaha area are Lake Manawa, Carter Lake and Boyer Chute NWR. Other raptors begin moving north by the end of the month. The ridges at Waubonsie State Park in southwest Iowa and Hitchcock Nature Area north of Crescent, Iowa, are good lookout spots.

Other early migrants are Killdeer and Common Snipe.

Gulls: Bonaparte's, Ring-billed and Herring. The less common gulls, Lesser Black-backed, Thayer's, California and Glaucous Gulls have all been seen in March at Cunningham Lake. The Salt Valley Lakes near Lincoln are also good for gulls. In addition to those mentioned above, Mew and Great Black-backed Gulls have been seen there.

Passerines: The Eastern Phoebe is the earliest of the flycatchers. Look for the first to arrive the last two weeks of March.

Most of the Northern Shrikes will migrate north by mid-March and be replaced by Loggerhead Shrikes arriving from the south. Look for Fox Sparrow to appear the last two weeks of March.

Participate in Field Research—

Join the Birds in Forested Landscapes Project

By Jerry Toll

Birds in Forested Landscapes Project (BFL) is a citizen science project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the U.S. Forest Service, which needs volunteer birders to help examine the effects of disturbance from recreational development as well as forest fragmentation on North American forest birds.

Findings from the study will be used to develop management recommendations, with descriptions about the kinds and amounts of habitat required to sustain healthy bird populations.

Volunteers will receive a research kit of instructions, data forms, as well as a CD with songs, calls and other sounds of the BFL study species for field use. Participants choose their own study sites in a forest or forest fragment of any size. They make two visits to their sites during the breeding season to conduct the BFL protocol, as well as to record habitat data and landscape variables.

For information contact Sara Baker, forest_birds@cornell.edu or write c/o Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850.

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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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