

September 2007
Volume 36 Issue 7

ASO is a Chapter

*of the National
Audubon Society*

*Serving Eastern
Nebraska*

and Western Iowa

The Great Fall Raptor Migration

Every birder gets excited as migration season approaches, whether it is spring migration or fall migration. Birds we normally don't see are coming through on their way to or from their breeding grounds.

Nebraska is perfectly situated for the spring migration of the Sandhill Cranes. But we are also well situated to watch a variety of raptors ride the winds on their way south in the fall.

The Hitchcock HawkWatch is one of several where we can go to get a good look at hawks, falcons, and eagles as they stream by overhead. On a good day there may be several hundred raptors flying by. Broad-wings, Red-tails, Sharp-shinned, Kestrels and others make their appearance. But telling them apart can be quite difficult. Our September program is going to help you with this problem.

Our speaker, Jerry Toll, is an avid birder who spends much of migration season at Hitchcock. He also recently

**Adam Whitney Gallery and
ASO Cosponsor Special Art
Viewing**

By Nancy Leonard

spent time in New Mexico where he trained for raptor banding techniques. Jerry will help us get ready for the hawk migration with some good tips on raptor identification and some fascinating information on these birds.

Please join us Thursday, September 13, at 7:30 p.m. We meet at Hanscom Park Methodist Church for our program, followed by a short business meeting and social time. The Church is located at 4444 Frances (one block south of Center at 44th Street). Members and nonmembers are welcome, and refreshments will be served. We hope to see you there!

**Field Trip to Schramm Park
September 8**

On Saturday, September 8, Loren and Babs Padelford will lead a trip to Schramm State Park entitled "Anything that flies." We will attempt to identify as many bird, butterfly, dragonfly and insect species as possible.

After lunch we will look for shorebirds,

Saturday, September 1

You are warmly invited to a special viewing at the Adam Whitney Gallery on Saturday, September 1, of an exhibit titled "Susan Tinker - Inside/Outside - Still Lives, Birds and Butterflies." **The artist and ASO members will be there to answer questions from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on September 1.**

The artist, Ms. Tinker, specializes in oil paintings of birds and other creatures of nature. Though her works will be shown from August 18 through September 15, ASO will be cosponsoring this special viewing with the artist present. Cookies and lemonade will be served.

The Adam Whitney Gallery is located in Countryside Village, 87th & Pacific (9825 Shamrock Road). Normal hours of the Gallery are 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m..

so if you wish to continue, bring a lunch.

Plan to meet at the aquarium building. A state park permit is required, so please consider carpooling with someone who has a sticker if you do not, or buy a one day permit.

If you have questions or need directions, call 292-5556 or email lpdlfrd@cox.net.

Bird Seed Sale October 27 & 28

By Kathleen Rose

Each year at this time, preparations are made for the annual bird seed sale, and this year is no exception. We will be asking you for help with the numerous tasks, some

Continued on page 3

Current Currents

By Elliott Bedows

Now Birders Carry iPods, Blackberry Devices and Laser Pointers

An early May business trip took me to South Bend, Indiana, which most people equate with Notre Dame University, but many of us know it as a locale being just an hour's drive from one of North America's non-coastal birding hot spots: the southern tip of Lake Michigan.

I managed to squeeze three vacation days onto the end of my trip and was duly rewarded. I saw over 100 species of Indiana birds including 33 warblers, mostly in copious numbers by our standards, and other eastern birds I don't

she said. "But to some people, that would just be a horrifying thought."

Indeed, many traditionalists who think the whole point of birding is to commune with nature might bristle at the technology now available to the modern birdwatcher, from laser pointers for identifying birds perched on high branches to devices that play bird calls.

recall seeing since my last trip back to my former home in eastern Michigan.

Perhaps the single thing that impressed me most occurred the day I birded with a longtime friend plus a member of the Indiana State Records Committee. If I had not known by scenery and ambient sound, I'd have thought I was birding at Circuit City. These two were decked out with more electronics than I'd ever seen while birding. Aside from the usual equipment (binoculars and scopes) were three digital cameras, two cell phones (OK, that's a good idea for safety reasons, but that's not what they were being used for), two iPods and a BlackBerry device for instant text messaging in case something really rare showed up.

When I got back, I looked into this high-tech explosion issue in birding a bit and discovered that many birders, new and old, are going in this direction, that is, to see the most birds most quickly and get lifers, local or otherwise, more efficiently. It turns out that I am not the only one taken aback by this "explosion."

In a recent article, Andrew Lavalley noted this about ornithologist and Duluth birding icon Laura Erickson setting out on a birding trip. "She now brings along two digital cameras, a Palm device with a bird-species database and an iPod loaded with bird songs."

"I used to be a very low-tech person," said Laura. {But} "it's become such a high-tech kind of thing, with so many people carrying so much equipment now." Laura further admitted that she uses a parabolic microphone to record sounds three-quarters of a mile away. "That doesn't seem any more cheating than using binoculars,"

Professional alerting services, already popular in the United Kingdom and springing up in the U.S., allow hardware hobbyists to receive notices of local sightings on their cell phones or BlackBerrys.

"I have seen good friends in the field who looked like electronics stores when they came down the trail," said Richard Payne, President of the American Birding Association. "It's not my style." *Nor is it the style of this author!!* But, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the 47 million American who observed, fed or photographed birds in 2001—the most recent year for which it has data—spent \$6 billion on binoculars, cameras, film, field guides and other stuff. That number of dollars has increased manyfold with the addition of high technology-related devices.

For example, when a Long-billed Murrelet, a seabird that normally lives near the Pacific Ocean, was seen in southwest England in November, more than 1,000 birders hurried to the site. Many were notified by one of the bird alert services. "You could practically hear the stampede," said a spokeswoman for Sheffield, England-based BirdGuides Ltd, whose electronic alert services have about 5,000 subscribers paying as much as \$186 a year. Rival Rare Bird Alert in Norwich also notified its 1,000-plus subscribers about the sighting. It advertises that its news service is staffed 15 hours a day, 365 days a year. "People have walked out of weddings, people have walked out of their jobs to see a bird," says a spokesman for the company.

Arguably, the greatest point of contention is the use of mobile technologies that replicate bird songs. MightyJams LLC in Atlanta sells an iPod loaded with its BirdJam

Continued on page 3

**Current
Currents,*****Continued from
page 2*****Autumn in the Bluffs October 6
and 7**

software and sample songs of 650 birds. The National Geographic Society also sells sample calls loaded onto memory cards for use in handheld devices. The song libraries are intended as identification guides, but they can also be amplified and played through portable speakers to attract birds.

The American Birding Association's code of ethics advises against the tactic for rare or endangered birds because it can distract them from protecting or feeding their young. "It's a very kind of personal, selfish thing to do," Audubon's Mr. Green says. Denese Van Dyne, one of the partners of MightyJams, says the company is aware of the controversy over the use of recorded calls and encourages customers to limit their use during nesting seasons. "We have an admonition in all our ads: 'BirdJam is a powerful tool. Please use it responsibly.' To me that's like serving alcohol to someone driving a car and saying, "Now please drive responsibly."

For me, it's much more about the simple joys of discovery. And while I appreciate what technology can do, I don't want the distractions when I bird. I prefer to keep things simple, and I add this anecdote to support my case. While back in Ann Arbor, Michigan, this past spring, I stayed with some longtime birding pals, one of whom has won the award for having seen the most birds in his county eight of the past twelve years. He neither owns a computer or any of the fancy gear alluded to above. He uses only binoculars, and a scope when necessary. The most technically advanced thing he owns is a phone with an answering machine. But he is retired (i.e. has lots of time), is patient (a true virtue), and has an awesome pair of ears.

So what matters to you—being the quickest and most technically advanced, or just being the naturally best birder out

On Saturday, October 6, and Sunday, October 7, ASO will staff a booth at Autumn in the Bluffs at Bayliss Park Town Square, 100 Pearl Street, Council Bluffs. The Park is bounded by 1st Avenue, Pearl Street, Willow Avenue and 6th Street. See Page 13 of the new DEX phone book.

Arts and crafts sale items are offered indoors: stained glass, pottery, jewelry, and others. Food is available out of doors, along with other attractions.

We need volunteers for this pleasant work, in a pleasant setting. Hours are 11 to 5 Saturday and noon to 5:00 Sunday.

Please call Patty Albright, 323-1966, if you can help greet the public and make ASO known in the community. Help is also needed setting up and taking down the booth. Any help you can give will be appreciated.

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Award Presented to Ruth Green

Audubon member Ruth Green has been awarded the American Birding Association 2007 Ludlow Griscom Award for Outstanding Contributions in Regional Ornithology.

This honor, a Distinguished Service Award "for individuals who have dramatically advanced the state of ornithological knowledge for a particular region," was presented at their convention in Lafayette, Louisiana in April. Ruth's comment was, "Funny, I never thought it was `dramatic' when I was teaching hundreds and hundreds of kids and adults from here to Chadron and Scottsbluff, in cold, cold, or hot weather"!

**Continued from
page 1**

Some of Ruth's activities earning her this prestigious award are bird banding and education through Elderhostel sessions. The first Midwesterner to be so honored, she received an expense-paid trip to the Convention and a plaque plus

Bird Seed Sale

requiring strong muscles, others not.

The seed bags need to be unloaded at garage sites, and staffers need to be on hand on the dates of the sale for loading and paper work.

Please put these dates on your calendar and give Jerry Toll an email (jertol@cox.net) or phone 453-9239 to let him know you are available to assist with this major fundraiser.

To Save Our Wild and Scenic River

By Kathy Schwery

Will the Niobrara River become the next casualty in Nebraska's irrigation battle? As the Republican and Platte Rivers have become "over-appropriated" and limits are being set on irrigation from those rivers, farmers are expanding their operations in the Niobrara basin.

This year alone, a huge increase in requests for irrigation diversion has agencies and individuals concerned that the Niobrara might not survive as a free-flowing river. Combined with drought and dropping water tables, the increase in surface and ground water withdrawals from the Niobrara area will compromise the viability of the River. With demand for corn at an all-time high because of its use in ethanol production, farmers are planting more acres than ever and hoping for even higher yields, causing heavier use of our water resources.

Just who is going to make the decisions regarding the future of the Niobrara is somewhat confusing. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which manages both

To bolster her view, two court actions have already been brought by irrigators. One suit, against Nebraska Public Power and the NRD, tried to force NPPD to dismantle its Spencer dam, for which it has stream flow rights. For the first time this year, NPPD filed for its full water right for the hydroelectric plant, and irrigators were notified by the NRD that as of May 1 they must suspend operations. However, they would be able to purchase water from NPPD.

Agriculture in Nebraska has the first right to the state's water, but NPPD had seniority on the permit, which it has held for many years, and thus it must be paid for any water used.

On August 1 a district judge threw out the lawsuit, and Director Bleed of the NRD ordered irrigators to stop pumping water out of the River as of that day.

In their other action, irrigators were seeking a temporary restraining order to keep NPPD from forcing them to either

the Valentine and Niobrara Valley Refuges, has stated it feels additional surface and groundwater withdrawals from the River will adversely affect its Refuges. It would have legal avenues available to protect its resources in the two Refuges.

The National Park Service is charged with managing the portion of the Niobrara River which has been designated a "wild and scenic river." The Park Service must ensure sufficient flows of water to maintain the river's wild and scenic characteristics and thus is another federal entity with legal power to protect the Niobrara.

In conjunction with the Park Service, the Niobrara Council, made up of citizens representing largely the agricultural sector but also the power industry, recreation and environmental interests, helps make decisions regarding use of the River. In May of this year, the Council approved a resolution asking for a moratorium on all new water withdrawal applications.

On the state level, Ann Bleed, Director of the Natural Resources Department, has the unenviable task of approving new water diversion requests. She feels she lacks the authority to impose a moratorium on new requests and believes the courts will ultimately make decisions on irrigation issues.

shut off their pumps or pay for the water. The judge in that case turned down the requests for a restraining order, clearing the way for NPPD to exercise its water right.

Another state agency, Nebraska Game & Parks, is considering filing for a water right on the Niobrara. Their concern is that too little water will remain in the River for canoeing and for the benefit of fish and wildlife.

Probably before the end of this year, a public hearing will be held on the Niobrara water issues. Feelings run strong on both sides. It is unfortunate that years of farmer-controlled legislatures have created state law, giving irrigation first right to our water.

It needs to be borne in mind that the majority of those taking water out of the River are far from needy, small farmers trying to make a living. They are giant mega-farming corporations with thousands and thousands of acres under their control.

One of the most notorious of the irrigators, who operates 14,000 acres in the Niobrara Valley, stated

Continued on page 5

5

**Garden Walk - A Beautiful Day
of Beautiful Gardens!**

By Jackie Scholar

The 2007 ASO Garden Walk turned out to be a beautiful day for all those who volunteered their gardens and helped put

**"Autumn Joy" - A Garden
Festival at the Historic Joslyn
Castle**

Sunday, Sept. 9

The Omaha Council of Garden Clubs and Joslyn Castle, 3902 Davenport Street, are sponsoring an event on

it together.

Approximately 85 garden enthusiasts participated in the Sunday afternoon tour of gardens, commenting on what beautiful gardens were on display. They also commented on the fact that the gardens were really created by the people who owned them, and that made them special.

ASO thanks the wonderful people who volunteered their unique gardens and their time:

Karlene and Dennis Kingery

Dick Kirshenbaum

Joel and Cleone Sebek

Sandy and Bill Seibert

Don and Helen Smith

Nina and Pat Swanson

And thank you to the following who volunteered their help at the gardens:

Laurine Blankenau

Pauline Dickey

Nelli Falzgraf

Essie Grill

Ruth and Dave Demarest

Eric and Jackie Scholar

Kathy Schwery

We hope that next year you will consider having your unique garden on this Garden Walk.

Niobrara River,

Continued from page 4

publicly that he pumps 13,000 gallons a minute from our River and that he will continue until he "puts those canoes on the rocks."

As with the Platte and Republican

Sunday, September 9, from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Tours of the Castle and gardens will be provided throughout the day.

Offerings will include a plant sale, speakers, other activities, refreshments, and vendors. Donations will be accepted to help raise funds to restore the Joslyn Gardens and the bird sanctuary. The agenda of talks:

1:00 p.m. Cool Ideas for Your Autumn Garden, by Jan Riggensbach - Music Room

1:00 p.m. Planting and Care of Fall Bulbs, by Kathleen Cue, Master Gardener Program - Ballroom

2:00 p.m. Plants for Fall and Winter Gardens, by Harlan Hamernik of the Bluebird Nursery, Clarkson, Nebraska - Music Room

2:00 p.m. Tips on Fall Pruning, by Jim Keepers - Ballroom

3:00 p.m. Information on Nebraska State Arboretum, by Jim Locklear - Music Room

3:00 p.m. Introduction to Earthkind Roses, by a member of the Texas A&M Earthkind Team - Ballroom

4:00 p.m. Story of the Historic Sass Irises, by Ron Crampton - Music Room

4:00 p.m. Earthkind Trial Roses by Members of the Texas A&M Earthkind Team - Ballroom

Heineman, NRD Director Ann Bleed,

Rivers, other interests than those of agriculture need to be considered as Nebraskans work on a solution to the problems in the Niobrara Basin. The needs of recreation, public power, fish and wildlife are equally important.

We still have a chance to get things right with the Niobrara River. If we wish to continue to canoe the River in the future and if watching birds and wildlife in the Refuges is important to us, we need to contact Governor

and our state senators to make our wishes known.

Even though a member of the National Park Service staff described the Niobrara situation to me as "desperate," there is still time for all the competing interests to come up with a plan to save the Niobrara and preserve it as a free-flowing river.

Platte River Recovery Program Meeting

By Nelli Falzgraf

On Friday, August 17, a meeting regarding the future of the Platte River Recovery Program was held at the Whooping Crane Trust building near Alda, NE. Brought together for the meeting were representatives of conservation, environmental, hunting, and fishing organizations. Representing ASO were Nelli Falzgraf and Kathy Schwery.

Late last year the Governors of Nebraska, Wyoming and Colorado and the Secretary of the Interior signed the Platte River Recovery Program. This Program will provide \$187 million over 13 years to restore and protect critical habitat, better manage river flows, and carry out a research and monitoring plan." Its design is to benefit endangered species along the River and other wildlife that depend on it. Included are a Water Plan, Land Plan, Federal and State Water Depletion Plan, and a Research and Monitoring Plan.

The Land Plan will provide 130,000 -

Festival of the Cranes - Bosque Del Apache November 13-18

The 20th Annual Festival of the Cranes will take place in the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico, November 13-18.

In the past, some ASO members have attended the festival at this great birding site where Greater and Lesser Sandhill Cranes, among others, winter over.

For information, call 505-835-2077, access www.friendsofthebosque.org/crane, or fax 505.838.2959. Mailing address is P. O. Box 340, San Antonio, NM 87832.

What Is Birders' Exchange?

It's a way to share tools and save birds by donating your good but no-longer used binoculars, scopes, and field guides of neotropical birds to the American Birding Association's Exchange program.

The "tools" are sent to countries in South and Central America for use in training and conservation work. These generate responses to the beauty of birds and a

150,000 acre feet of water yearly to improve river flows when it would benefit fish and wildlife. It relies mostly on re-timing existing flows, but includes some conservation and water leasing.

For the Depletion Plan, each state developed a plan to ensure that new water use after 1997 will do no further harm to Platte River flows needed by wildlife in Nebraska. This part of the plan will be the most difficult to implement since nearly half a million acres of additional irrigation has occurred since 1997 and its impact must be offset.

The Monitoring and Research Plan will track the success of the Recovery Program and provide research on the four federally protected species.

Duane Havorka, moderator of the meeting in Alda, provided a history of Platte River issues and outlined the Platte River Recovery Program. He discussed the structure of the Program, including current Governance Committee meetings held in Colorado, Wyoming and Nebraska.

He requested that volunteers fill the environmental slots and stressed that our community needs to be repre

resolve to save, watch and appreciate rather than destroy.

One grateful teacher wrote, "Many of the parents got involved, and after seeing the living birds up close, informed their children that they should stop using sling shots to kill birds and use binoculars instead to watch the birds."

Now Birders' Exchange is conducting an appeal for funds as well as tools to advance its work. Contributions should be sent to American Birding Association, Birders' Exchange Appeal, 4945 No. 30th Street, Ste 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80919-3151.

Of course you may also send your optics and books. They will be received with appreciation and they will help the bird populations of these and other countries when your items make their way south.

sented at the meetings as the Recovery program is implemented.

Havorka stated that as the Recovery Program goes forward, it is important for environmental and recreation groups not only to become well informed about the Plan but that our active participation is necessary if the Platte Recovery Program is to be successful.

Addresses to Remember

President George W. Bush

The White House, 1600
Pennsylvania Ave NW

Washington D.C. 20500-0001

Audubon Society

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The *Audubon Magazine* and your membership card will be sent to this address:

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U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C.
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The Audubon Society of Omaha greatly appreciates
the memorials it receives.

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

Mail to Audubon Society of Omaha, P. O. Box 3542
, Omaha NE 68103-0542

Omaha/Douglas Civic Center

1819 Farnam St, Omaha NE 68183

Phone: 444-5000 Hot Line: 444-5555

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

Bequests

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

Audubon Society of Omaha, Mailing Address: P. O. Box 3542, Omaha 68103-05

Phone: 451-3647 - <http://audubon-omaha.org>

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