

A Bird's Eye View

Audubon Society of Omaha
A Chapter of National Audubon
Society



November 2001 Vol. 30 No. 9

Flora in the Sandhills of Nebraska

By Clem Klaphake

Anyone who claims to be a citizen of our State and has not traveled through the Sandhills should not be considered a true Nebraskan.

The Sandhills are the largest area of sand dunes in the western hemisphere. The area is larger than Vermont and New Hampshire combined. The vegetation is varied and unique in its own way. There are bunch grasses, lowland meadows, sedges, yuccas, and many, many other forbs that we also often refer to as wildflowers. Some are found only in the Sandhills and nowhere else in the world (*Penstemon haydenii* – Blowout Penstemon).

Our speaker for the November 8 general meeting will be Dr. David Sutherland, a Professor of Botany at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. His topic will be the flora of the Sandhills. Dr. Sutherland received his PhD from the

University of Washington in 1967 and has been a professor at UNO for a good number of years.

A sampling of Dr. Sutherland's publications are "Floristic Diversity in Ten Tallgrass Prairie Remnants of Eastern Nebraska," "An Annotated List of the Vascular Plants of Keith County, Nebraska," and "Vegetative Key to GRasses of the Sandhills Region of Nebraska."

At the November 8 meeting at 7:30 in the Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances Street, Dr. Sutherland will show slides of the wildflowers of the Sandhills region. This presentation will be both entertaining and informative, whether you are a veteran Sandhills traveler or a novice to the plans and the Sandhills.

A short business meeting will follow the program, concluding with coffee, cookies and conversation.

Scoping the Waters and Shores of Lake Manawa Saturday, November 17

By Dick Rasmussen

Our next field trip will be held Saturday, November 17, at Lake Manawa State Park just south of Council Bluffs. We will meet at the parking lot on the north end of the lake at 8:00 A.M.

Turn south off the South Omaha Bridge Road at 11th Street (watch for the State Park sign) and proceed straight ahead to the parking lot.

Waterfowl and gulls should be on the lake, and we will look for sparrows, bluebirds and other bush birds around the south end.

We may have time to check out the power plant settling ponds and Carter Lake.

Bring binoculars, spotting scope, and field guides, and be prepared for cold weather. A hot beverage is recommended. The trip may run past noon, so bring a lunch if you

wish to stay on.

We welcome beginning birders who want to learn and develop an exciting hobby.

Refer any questions to Dick Rasmussen at 731-3939.

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Scholarly Notes

by Eric Scholar

ASO - Bird Club or Conservation Organization?

In the little over one year that I have been president of ASO, I have heard many opinions about whether we should be a bird club, a conservation organization, or both.

I have wondered what we really are. I asked a few Audubon members for their views and received varied replies. Does it really matter?

We started out as the Omaha Bird Club, and in recent years we have become more and more involved in conservation efforts. Are we going to evolve further and further toward conservation and forget our origins? I believe we should and can be some of both.

Most birders care intensely about wildlife and its present and future health, population and protection. But birders can isolate themselves from the hard work of watching over and advocating for issues to prevent oil drilling, poisonous chemical use, rampant development,

rather than taking part in the work of haranguing congressmen, attending talks, or informing other environmentalists of issues. But that work has to be done.

Conservationists do paper work, telephone work, e-mail work. They attend meetings and legislative sessions and testify at hearings. They organize letter-writing and telephone campaigns. All of this is time consuming and without assurance of achieving what they want.

But all of us need to value the service of those who can identify an elusive warbler high in a tree. A choice these persons make is to enjoy what we have left and what we wish to save. And to help others to see and hear as they do. They may also lead field trips, teach, write articles, or do research.

With a dedication equal to that of the most ardent conservationist, these persons use skills

these polarities.

Fontenelle Nature Association has the staff and volunteer network to handle environmental education of school children. The Sierra Club has the commitment, zeal, activism and volunteers to handle most environmental issues.

The Nature Conservancy has the intelligence, business acumen, a national network of revolving funds, and professional staff to conduct large scale ecosystem preservation. Small groups such as the Fontenelle Bird Club and Bellevue Nature Club concentrate on nature appreciation and may have limited time for other projects.

Where does that leave ASO? Ideally, I believe we should be both birders and conservationists. Both are important.

It comes down to a balance of the two and respect for each.

urban sprawl, and fossil fuel use, all of which affect avian survival.

It is hard to fault anyone for preferring to spend time tracking birds, butterflies or wildflowers in the field

they have acquired with binoculars in hand or poring over books and memorizing bird songs from tapes and CD's.

Other organizations in the area seem to predominate at one or the other of

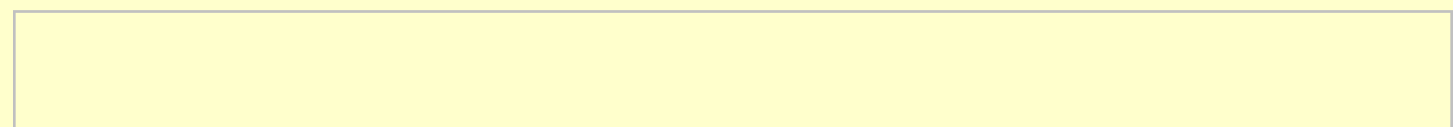
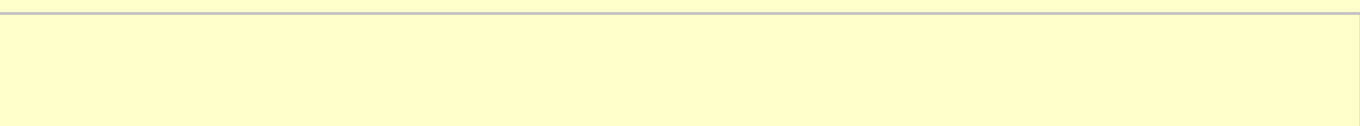
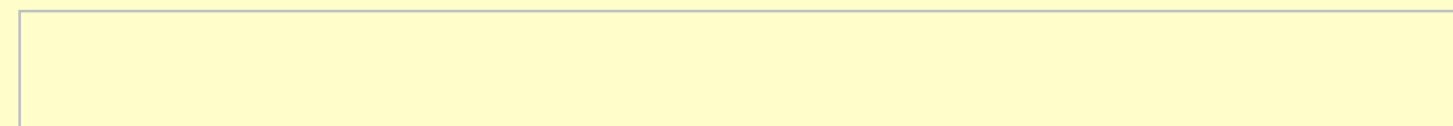
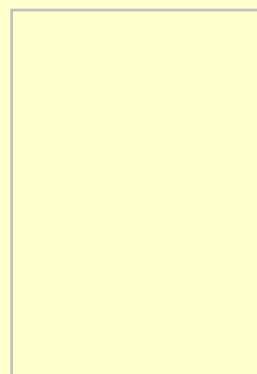
Respect for the conservationists' often thankless labors. Respect for the birders who go out on the trails in quest of birds.

I believe most ASO members have some of both in us, and that is probably fortunate.

2002 Sandhill Crane Calendar

A calendar of exceptional crane images by Michael Forsberg, which will bring back wonderful memories of the Platte River and its magnificent crane migration spectacle, is available from Audubon Nebraska.

Calendars are \$15.70 each (not including shipping and handling) and make great holiday gifts.



Bird Seed Sale 2001 a Success Presenting 'Ducks and Geese' at

A great task is behind us for another year, thanks to the labors of many persons. Sally Hansen, our Sale Chairperson, guided us through the process of this, our major fundraising project for the year.

A special thanks to Sally for taking on this large and time-consuming task another year.

We are grateful to the generous garage owners—the Ratzlaffs, Duane Bright, and Barbara Sennentz, who moved their vehicles and personal belongings out to provide space in their garages for pick-up sites. A site at Heron Haven was also staffed.

Thanks, too, to Jerry Toll, who coordinated the volunteers, as well

November 21 Naturestudy

Compared to songbirds, ducks and geese appear unhurried as they stop and feed on ponds and streams during southerly migration, affording good views of colorful plumage, preening behavior, and social interaction.

Even on crisp fall days, waterfowl seem unaffected by cold water and occasional icy patches. Why don't their skinny legs freeze?

Like other vertebrates, Anatidae's arteries carry warmer blood from the body core to cooler extremities, and veins carry cooler blood from appendages back to the body. The blood vessels of the leg lie closely together, so

By Nelli Falzgraf
than outgoing arterial blood.

This is known as "countercurrent heat exchange, occurring in ears of rabbits, tails of beavers, flippers of penguins and porpoises, and human arms, and other species' appendages.

Also preventing the legs of waterfowl and other birds from freezing is their reptile-like scales, which are dry like our fingernails and don't hold water that would form ice.

as all of those who worked at the pick-up sites carrying heavy bags of bird seed to waiting vehicles.

As for our customers, without you we wouldn't be in business, would we? We value your patronage and hope to see you again next year!

heat loss from outgoing arteries is presenter, to learn picked up by returning about waterfowl and (cooler) veins. for the DeSoto NWR Incoming venous blood goose count. Nature is warmed on its study will be at ASO's return, reaching the Rookery at Heron body just a few Haven, 7:00 p.m., degrees cooler Wednesday, November 21. For questions call 292-9687.

November Events

3 (Sat) Chapter Retreat

5 (Mon) Conserv/Legisl Meeting

7 (Wed) Board Meeting

8 (Thur) General Meeting

8 (Thur) Public Hearing - Nebraska City

17 (Sat) Field Trip

21 (Wed) Nature Study

22 **Happy Holiday**

DeSoto Goose Count

Held this Month

The DeSoto Goose Count will take place Wednesday mornings, starting when the birds have arrived at the Refuge in sufficient numbers.

To experience the sight and sound of thousands of Snow Geese lifting off the lake at dawn, join us at DeSoto for this count. New participants will be given instruction.

To find out if the count will take place on a given Wednesday, please phone Mindy Sheets at 642-4121.

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Environmental/ Legislative Action By Lone Werthman

ACTION ALERT!

RDEIS!

The Corps of Engineers has now published its updated Revised Draft Environmental Impact Statement (RDEIS) for managing the dams on

On the average, just tat base in the riverine one barge tow per day sections that would uses the 735 miles of benefit the listed birds the lower Missouri and fish must be River. restored, enhanced and conserved to encourage

On the other hand, flow

the Missouri River, and the public comment period has begun. On November 8 the Corps will hold a public hearing on this issue in Nebraska City at the Lied Conference Center, 2700 Sylvan Road, at 7:00 p.m. for Nebraska residents.

From 2:00 - 5:00 p.m. on the same day and at the same location, a public workshop on the issues will be presented by Corps staff personnel.

For 11 years the Corps has been working to develop a plan to determine the future of our nation's longest, most endangered, and historically significant river. Two widely divergent visions for the river have developed in the bureaucratic and technical language of the draft.

One vision is for a river restored, supporting strong and healthy fish and wildlife populations, recreation, and tourism. The other is for the status quo—a river dredged eight feet deep to protect a declining barge industry and unfounded fears of increased flooding.

Needless to say, we of the environmental and conservation groups have had an uphill battle to have our views respected and included in the planning.

Now, however, by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's and the Army Corps of Engineers' own estimates, it has been established that barges carry less than one percent of the grain harvested on the plains, benefitting the economy by only about \$6.9 million a year.

changes in the Missouri reproduction. from Gavins Point Dam to create a spring rise have been recommended by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to encourage reproduction by certain birds and fish. These changes would create far greater economic benefits in boating, fishing, hunting, camping, hiking and other forms of recreation as well as protection of the endangered species.

Terns, Plovers, and Sturgeons

Rising spring flows create sandbars needed by nesting terns and plovers, and trigger spawning by sturgeon. Low summer flows ensure that sandbars remain exposed until chicks fly away, and provide shallow places for young sturgeon.

Last November the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service issued its final Biological Opinion on the Missouri River dam operations. They concluded that unless the Corps reforms its operations to include higher flows in the spring and lower flows in the summer, three Missouri River species will likely go extinct. This would mean a violation of the Endangered Species Act.

The Opinion also states that if more Missouri River species are listed as endangered in the future, operational conflicts and constraints will increase, while flexibility to manage the system will decrease.

The Biological Opinion goes on to say that a portion of the historic habi

reproduction. Furthermore, dam reforms would boost recreation from boating and fishing on the lakes behind the dams. These recreational activities already generate \$87 million in annual economic benefits as opposed to the \$6.9 million of the barge industry between Sioux City, Iowa, and St. Louis, Missouri.

Six Plans

The Corps has listed six plans, including a "make no change" plan, called the Current Water Control Plan. Listed next is the Modified Conservation Plan (MCP) and four others (GP 1521, 1528, GP 2021, and GP 2028), each of which adds various water release changes for Gavins Point Dam that could be called adaptive management strategies to the MCP. The Corps named no preferred alternative plan.

GP 2021

Of the six alternatives, we believe that only GP 2021, which some have labeled the "Flexible Flow Alternative," meets necessary environmental requirements and should be the preferred alternative for the Corps.

This alternative option, we feel, provides substantial fish and wildlife benefits and does not unduly impact other uses of the river, such as flood plain farming, hydropower, navigation, or flood control.

Continued on page 5



November Bird Calendar

By Babs Padelford

November brings concentrations of waterfowl and, possibly, some of the rarer gulls. Following is a partial list of birds that can be found in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa.

Call the Nebraska Birdline (292-5325) for the latest sightings and locations and to report your findings.

Loons: Look for Common, Red-throated (rare), and Pacific (rare) at Lake Manawa, Cunningham Lake, Standing Bear and Carter Lake until lakes freeze.

Waterfowl: Numbers of Ross' Geese are increasing and can usually be found with large flocks of Snow Geese at DeSoto NWR.

Look for the more unusual species of ducks, i.e. Greater Scaup, Oldsquaw, Black, Surf and White-winged Scoters, any time until lakes freeze.

Bald Eagles arrive with concentration of ducks and geese. Some remain around the Platte and Missouri Rivers all winter.

Gulls: Bonaparte's, Ring-billed, and Herring Gulls. More unusual—Thayer's, California, Iceland, Glaucous, Black-legged Kittiwake.

Also possible are rarities such as Lesser and Greater Black-backed and Ross' Gulls.

Lake Manawa, Cunningham Lake, and Carter Lake are best places for gulls in the Omaha area. Branched Oak Lake and Pawnee Lake near Lincoln are better for unusual species.

Northern Shrike replaces Loggerhead Shrike and remains for the winter.

Lapland Langspurs can be found with flocks of Horned Larks, usually just after a snowfall.

The best place to see longspurs is in fields east of DeSoto NWR.

Winter Finches: Purple Finch and Pine Siskin. More unusual species, i.e. Red Crossbill, Common Redpoll, Hoary Redpoll, Evening Grosbeak and Pine Grosbeak, are irruptive migrants and unpredictable.

Look for in cemeteries and at feeders.

Continued from page 4

Nebraska City. We will leave from the Hanscom Park Methodist Church parking lot at 5:00 p.m.

Please help us by going to Nebraska City with us! Call 445-4138 to make arrangements. Thanks!

Next Conservation/Legislative Action meeting - November 5.

Action Alert,

San Diego Bird Festival Feb. 7-10

We are invited to attend the San Diego Bird Festival of February 7-10, 2000 for birding on land and sea. Offerings include day-long and overnight nature and birding outings to northern Baja California.

Trips and tours will feature whale and birding boat trips. A guided walk will be conducted along the S.D. flood Channel, through a bird enclosure and hiking trails at the Chula Vista Nature Center. Conference site is the Marina Village Center, Mission Bay, just west of Sea World.

To register, visit our website, www.flitetours.com/festival.htm or email birdfest@flite-tours.com. Or contact Nature Festivals of San Diego, Box 120426, Chula Vista, CA 91912, 619-429-5378.

Birdline

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

Report your sightings after listening to the tape.

We urge you to join us in campaigning for GP 2021 as the preferred alternative. Your comments can be presented to the Corps by attending and testifying at the Nebraska City meeting on November 8.

ASO will again sponsor a transportation van or bus to take us to Ne

2002 Student Art Contest Awards Event to be March 9 & 10

We will be conducting the student art contest again next spring, with an awards ceremony at the Westroads Shopping Center. The 2002 dates are March 9 & 10.

The 2001 contest generated enthusiasm among teachers and students, with many entries submitted. Also enthusiastic were parents who attended the awards ceremony.

This year the contest for grades K-12 will again be open to all Omaha area, Bellevue, suburban, Council Bluffs, and other nearby schools. We have chosen the theme "Birds of the Midwest." Prizes to be given include beautifully illustrated bird books.

Co-chairs Nelli Falzgraf and Laurine Blankenau are asking for volunteers to help with some of the work including receiving contest entries at the Rookery, setting up the display at the Mall, and helping at the ceremony.

To volunteer, please call 451-3647 (Laurine) or 292-9687 (Nelli).

Christmas Bird Count Dates to be December 15, 22

The Omaha Raptor Team

A Committee of ASO

By Alison O'Connor

During a recent stay in Nebraska City, I was fortunate enough to hear, from my hotel room, two Barred Owls calling to each other through the night.

I was thrilled to hear their banter back and forth, and it made me think fondly of our new addition to the Omaha Raptor Team.

One of our newest feathered educators is Harley, the Barred Owl. Harley came to us from Raptor Recovery of Nebraska, who had acquired him from Harlan, Iowa (hence his name).

Unfortunately, this young chick had apparently failed in his attempts to fly,

and broke his wing. He landed in a person's yard, but that individual didn't call for assistance for the young bird until many weeks passed. By then the break was set and nothing could be done to help the chick.

That's when Betsy Finch offered him to us. We were especially pleased to add him to our clutch. Harley is pictured here with Sherry Seibert and Lisa Boughs at his first time "on the glove."

We look forward to introducing you to Harley in the near future. You will be thrilled by his beauty.

Mark the above dates on your calendars and plan to join ASO in tallying our winter birds.

The Omaha area count will be held Saturday, December 15. The DeSoto Refuge Count is set for the following Saturday, December 22.

Plan to take a break from the noise and hullabaloo of shopping for a true respite consisting of bird calls and sightings.

ASO members will be providing information regarding the areas that will be included and the leaders to contact will be provided in next month's issue of the Newsletter. Novice birders are welcome. The counts are excellent opportunities to learn

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Notes from Nature

By Jerry Toll

ASO members will be providing information regarding the areas that will be included and the leaders to contact will be provided in next month's issue of the Newsletter.

Nature and God: Where Does Man Stand?

There is a long-standing debate among social ecologists as to whether humans should be considered a part of the ecology and studied from that perspective. Tribal cultures, generally speaking, consider themselves a part of the natural world. Their belief systems and world views reflect an intimate association with the natural world around them.

But tribal societies have virtually disappeared due to the onslaught of western cultural influences. Western thinking evolved from tribal beliefs and codified its new beliefs in what was to become the dominant Abrahamic religious traditions we now hold.

as a species. For instance, why do humans engage in war? On the surface, it is flagrantly absurd for an individual to suffer the effects of war, and yet war is very much the history of man. Humans have created a system of psychological and sociological reasons why aggression exists. I would add that humans engage in war as a way to control our population.

The biological literature has well documented the cyclical nature of animal populations. The rise and fall of populations is controlled by limiting factors such as food availability or nesting habitat.

For millennia, the spread of the most

ing or minimizing undesirable traits and producing very large numbers of genetically similar plants and animals. Today's monoculture farming is a case in point. In Michael Pollan's book "The Botany of Desire," the author takes the unique perspective that domestication is mutually beneficial to both the plant and to humans.

In other words, we are coevolving. He says we derive a reliable source of food from the domesticated plant. The plant, in exchange, thrives and dominates the landscape by our service to its needs. The farmer insures that it has adequate moisture and nutrients and is protected from predators. By doing so, we humans have

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If you find injured bird prey, please contact a Rap Recovery Center volunteer
402-734-6817
402-731-9869.

In the Old Testament, God gave man dominion over the earth. This has been generally considered to mean that man is superior to and outside of nature, that we were chosen to be somewhere just below God but above nature.

Western science presents a different point of view. Darwinian theory holds that all living things evolved over great periods of time from simple life forms to increasingly more complex forms. Humans are the culmination of millions of years of evolution. We are currently top predators on this earth, but by no means the only complex creature and end result of evolution.

These two views, often thought of as mutually exclusive, are, I believe, both true. After all, they are both describing the same phenomena. What the Old Testament describes is as true now as then—humans are top dog.

Intellectually I consider humans as part of the ecology. Those same processes we attribute to nature can also explain our actions as individuals and

adaptable species on earth was slowed by aggression between competing populations, i.e. cultures.

War is no longer an adequate limiting factor on humans. The Industrial Revolution, the Green Revolution, and medicine have extended our ability to survive. But that's another story.

Darwin, reflecting his time, didn't consider humans part of the ecological landscape. Instead he separated "natural selection" from "artificial selection." By natural selection he meant those processes that increase the variability of the gene pool, which increases adaptability and may lead to a new species. Artificial selection refers to the domestication of plants and animals.

Both processes accomplish the same thing. The difference is that humans intervene to manipulate the gene pool to produce a desired effect that is beneficial to humans. However, Darwin was at least in part wise to separate the two.

Modern domestication has actually decreased the gene pool by eliminat

suppressed genetic evolution.

All living things coevolve with other living things that feed on them or rely on them in some manner. Each species is in constant change in response to changes in the environment. It's a constant balancing act between species competing for dominance. When a species can no longer compete, the population crashes. In the case of domesticated plants, only those traits deemed desirable by the seed companies are sought. Pesticides and herbicides act to bolster the plants' abbreviated evolution.

Technology and urbanization have combined to isolate us from our tribal roots. Our peers are the most disenfranchised from nature in history. How we look at the world has a major influence on our actions.

If we view ourselves as part of the whole and realize we are part of the process, perhaps we can better understand what is happening to our world without the subjective interference of stewardship.

National Audubon Society

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Name

Street

City State

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.

Bequests

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

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68164

Phone: 445-4138 - <http://audubon-omaha.org>

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