

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

Land of the Long White Cloud

Alone in its region of the Pacific, New Zealand is the planet's most isolated major land mass. More than a thousand miles from Australia, its nearest neighbor, New Zealand's flora and fauna show much of the distinctive development naturalists have come to expect of islands. Once home to the largest flightless bird the world has ever known, the *moa*, New Zealand still has the tuatara, the last surviving species of beak-faced reptiles that flourished in the Triassic Period. More than 320 bird species have been identified in New Zealand, including 61 endemic species. Of the 88 species that breed on the main islands, 43 (49%) are endemic. These endemics include 3 species of kiwis, 2 species of New Zealand wren and 2 species of wattlebirds.

By Nancy Leonard

Kiwi who came to the U.S. in 1968 to work on a Ph.D. at Penn State. In addition to pursuing his studies in Food Science and Biotechnology, Ross renewed his interest in birds in Pennsylvania and later in North Carolina. He now lives in Iowa where he is an active member of both NOU and the IOU, holding office and writing for their publications. Ross has traveled and birded all through the "Lower 48" and is a member of the "600 Club." He returns to New Zealand to lead birding tours every other year and will be going back in November.

New Zealand's geography is astounding, too. Straddling two tectonic plates and located on the Pacific Ring of Fire, it has snow-capped mountains, glaciers, fjords, volcanoes, high-altitude lakes, forests, wide valleys with braided rivers, coastal cliffs, beaches and mudflats. The Milford Track, a 53-km hike on the South Island, is considered by many people to be the finest, most beautiful walk in the world. Rudyard Kipling once declared that Milford Sound should be the eighth wonder of the world. So join us Thursday, September 8, 7:30 p.m. at Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances (one block south of Center Street), as Ross leads us on a trip of a lifetime to the "land of the long white cloud."

September Field Trip to Schramm

By Clem Klaphake

The first ASO field trip of the fall season is planned for Saturday, September 17. Anyone interested should meet at the Schramm State Recreation Area Aquarium parking lot at 8:00 am. The park does require a Nebraska Game and Parks car sticker. Loren and Babs Padelford will again lead the group in finding birds, butterflies, dragonflies, and damselflies.

Regardless of your identification skill level, all people from novices to experts are welcome. Last year we had 28 people turn out to see such species as the Yellow-throated Vireos, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Green Heron, and Buff-breasted Sandpipers. Some of the butterflies seen were Viceroy, Meadowhawk, Widow Skimmers; we also saw an American Ruby Spot Damselfly.

Bring a sack lunch and drink. For those who want to bird more, we can continue along the Platte River in the afternoon. If you have any questions, e-mail me at ckavian@cox.net.

Bird Seed Sale October 15, 16

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 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 e-mail (jertol@radiks.net) or phone call (453-9239) to let him know that you are available to assist with this major fundraiser.

I just looked out our windows and saw some very scruffy Baltimore Orioles at the jelly feeders; the males in molt, like the juveniles, are rather unkempt creatures this time of year. I then saw a flock of about eight House Finches, both at the jelly and thistle feeders. The latter were adorned in predominately female-type plumage, but the alpha male was present to remind all observers that his family were mostly juveniles, as well.

Bird watching in July and August can seem very uninspiring to some of us, especially when we factor in the heat and humidity along with the lack of bird activity that accompany us out in the field. But some of my fondest birding memories have occurred during the midsummer months, and I will share them with you in future months.

I especially want to relate how lucky we are to be able to bird as freely as we do. I know this must sound like heresy to those turned away from favorite birding spots because of newly enacted security regulations. It appears to be a lot worse on the East Coast than in the Midwest, however, regardless of how often you've been told you *may not* bird Base Lake or the Mid-American Power Plant. Certainly world events are making it more difficult to bird world wide than ever before.

In September 2001, a group of us headed down to Bolivia to do some scouting for what would eventually turn out to be a series of birding trips run by WINGS, Inc, led by Dan Lane and Rich Hoyer. (The usual disclaimer here—I receive nothing from WINGS for providing this information: no discounts on any tours, and no claims that they are the best group to travel with, or anything like that.)

On 9/11, the events that rocked the world changed birding, as well as many other aspects of our lives, likely forever. I have recently received a report from one of that scouting group's co-leaders, Rich Hoyer, who told me that now civil war is raging in Bolivia. For those who request more details, email me for a copy at ebedows@cox.net for that long, detailed report.

Other countries, such as Jamaica, have become much more dangerous to bird in. One of my friends, an ASO member (name withheld) was within blocks of the first London subway bombing. It is a changing world, but we in Nebraska are among the luckiest and freest birders in the world.

On the lighter side.....

This account was contributed with permission from Terry Hunefeld of San Diego.

"I birded Marlette Lake just east of Lake Tahoe this morning. Found a pair of Pine Grosbeaks near the road along the south shore of

"The highlight of the day for me (other than the Pine Grosbeaks) was when I was alone, a mile from the nearest human, in a marsh

"A louder `phish' resulted in a snapping sound behind me. I turned around just in time to see a (probably female) bear round the corner

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New Office for ASO at Center Mall

ASO has rented office space as of September 1 at the Center Mall, Room 108, where our board meetings and other meetings will be held.

The office will not be open for regular hours in the foreseeable future. Our mailing address will continue to be P. O. Box 3542, Omaha, NE 68131.

Heron Rookery Near Plattsmouth

ASO members, who have volunteered with the Tern & Plover Partnership for several years, have monitored Great Blue Herons and Bald Eagles this year. Chris Thody, sent this photo, taken from an airboat at the Plattsmouth heron colony in June.

Two volunteers at the colony counted 38 birds on the nests and branches at one time, and two were flying around. The last count before all the leaves filled out was 27 nests.

Photo by Kari Andresen, Non-game Bird Biologist, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission.

Audubon Members Receive Discount at Old Market Shop

It Flys, a shop dedicated to kites and more, will give Audubon members a 20% discount on purchases.

This is a special place to shop for your children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and friends. Or for yourself! Attractive kites, wind socks, banners, seasonal and holiday yard decorations in dazzling colors are among the choices. Metal objects that twirl dizzily in the breeze are the thing to lend pizzazz to a yard.

Drop in and be sure to let them know you are a member of Audubon.

You won't be disappointed shopping at **It Flys, 1208 Howard Street.**

Park. Nelli Falzgraf wrote to the Sarpy commissioners regarding the environmental impacts on the development. The Commissioners deferred action on the proposed development pending further study. (See item on Page 5.)

Researched the proposed tree clearing of an area of Hanscom Park during nesting season. Wrote to Mayor Fahey and the City Parks & Recreation Director Larry Foster expressing our concern about the proposed tree removal.

ASO Conservation Committee members include Nelli Falzgraf, Jackie Scholar, Laurine Blankenau, Kathy Schwery, Bechara Embaid, and Tad Leeper (Chair). You are encouraged to contact these members when you become aware of an issue you think may warrant the committee's attention.

Busy Summer for ASO Conservation Committee

By Tad Leeper, Conservation
Committee Chair

The Conservation Committee spent an active summer researching local and state environmental issues and when necessary, writing letters, e-mails, or otherwise contacting local and federal government leaders about the issues. Here is a brief summary of the Conservation Committee's summer activities:

Conducted a unanimous e-mail vote of ASO Board members regarding sending a letter to the Nebraska Congressional Delegation in support of the State Wildlife Grants program. Elliott Bedows wrote and e-mailed the letter to the legislators on behalf of the Board.

Responded to a request for assistance from Audubon Nebraska concerning the proposed MUD water well field near the Platte River in southeastern Nebraska (Saunders and Douglas Counties). Contacted Mr. Jacob Wobig, Special Counsel to the Saunders County Board of Directors, which is opposed to the proposed well field. Voiced the Conservation Committee's opposition to the proposed well field. Contacted Steve Virgil from the Great Plains Environmental Law Center and requested that his organization provide additional legal resources to Mr. Wobig and the Saunders County Board.

Partnered with the Missouri Valley Sierra Club and Kim Stuhr, a resident of a Sarpy County neighborhood that is the site of a planned development near Schramm

Energy Bill Ill-Conceived

By Tad Leeper

The recent passage of the long-debated Energy Bill means a missed opportunity to provide forward-thinking federal leadership concerning the nation's energy policy. While the bill did contain some good provisions (e.g. ethanol production incentives), according to the Union of Concerned Scientists, "The Energy Bill ignores our oil dependence, fails to promote renewable energy (and) disregards global warming. The bill will increase our gasoline consumption while ignoring conventional technology that could increase fuel economy, generate hundreds of thousands of new jobs, and save consumers billions at the pump."

In short, the Energy Bill gave lip service to the twin objectives of renewable energy development and energy efficiency. Coupled with the Bush Administration's seeming obsession with opening the ANWR to oil drilling, the Bill is further evidence of the Administration's ill-conceived energy policy.

Ironically, while most other industrialized nations of the world are implementing aggressive measures to reduce the consumption of fossil fuels and the resulting emissions, the Bush Administration seems to believe that the U.S. can drill our way to energy independence.

The American public would be better served by a federal energy policy that creates incentives for renewable energy development by the states, requires auto manufacturers to develop and produce more environmentally friendly automobiles, and implements market-driven strategies to accelerate the nation's progress toward a sustainable future.

In a recent *New York Times* op-ed column, Thomas L. Friedman commented about the myopic federal energy policy as follows: "If you are president and you had just seen more suicide bombs in London, wouldn't you say to your aides, "We have got to reduce our dependence on Middle East oil. We have to do it for our national security. We have to do it because only if we bring down the price of crude will these countries be forced to reform. And we should want to do it because it is clear that green energy solutions are the wave of the future, and the more quickly we impose a stringent green agenda on ourselves, the more our companies will lead innovation in these technologies."

Bluebird Workshops Offered

Have you ever wanted to attract bluebirds to your property? Maybe you want to increase the population of bluebirds in your area. Whatever the reason, Bluebirds Across Nebraska (BAN) is holding a series of workshops providing information about the bluebird recovery efforts in Nebraska and neighboring states. These workshops are free and open to the public. Participants will learn about the life history of bluebirds and why they need our help. They will learn how to select or construct and install a proper bluebird nest box, the importance of monitoring and keeping records; and how to resolve issues of predation and other problems which may occur.

A slide presentation will be offered followed by a question and answer session. A 3-year membership in Bluebirds Across Nebraska will be available at the workshop for \$20.00 and include two bluebird nest boxes with mounting poles. Refreshments and door prizes will be provided by BAN.

A workshop will be held in Gretna Sept. 18th, from 2-4 pm. To register, contact Bill Seibert, (402) 334-8691. Workshops are also held in other areas in the state. If you wish information about a workshop at any of these sites, please contact Laurine at 451-3647.

Remember, there is no charge to attend a workshop. Becoming involved in Nebraska's bluebird recovery program offers the opportunity to get out and enjoy nature, interact with one of the state's most beautiful birds, and have a rewarding experience participating in a citizen-based conservation program.

Over the past 12 years, Bluebirds Across Nebraska has become one of the most recognized bluebird recovery organizations in North America, with nearly 1,800 members fledging over 20,000 bluebirds annually. For more information on the recovery efforts of bluebirds, visit BAN on the web at www.bbne.org

congressmen NOW and let them know your opposition to oil drilling in the ANWR. Further, encourage our Nebraska leaders to push for an energy policy that focuses on a sustainable future.

One Last Thought from the Lighter Side

A mother was telling her little girl what her own childhood was like. "We used to skate outside on a pond. I had a swing made from a tire; it hung from a tree in our front yard. We rode our pony.

The federal budget bill containing provisions to allow drilling in the ANWR comes up for a vote by congress in a few weeks. I encourage you to contact Nebraska

We picked wild raspberries in the woods." The little girl was wide-eyed, taking this in. At last she said, "I sure wish I'd gotten to know you sooner!"

Schramm Park Area Rezoning on Hold

Thanks to the work of area homeowners and environmental groups, a plan to rezone land near Schramm Park State Recreation Area was satisfactorily resolved, at least for now.

The rezoning plans presented to the Sarpy County Board of Commissioners were to subdivide properties near Highway 31 and the Platte River. Kim Stuhr, homeowner near Schramm Park, spearheaded efforts of other homeowners, environmental experts and groups to contact the Sarpy County Board of Commissioners. Among the groups enlisted were the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society of Omaha, who constructively lobbied the Sarpy County Board regarding the rezoning amendment.

The rezoning amendment set off concerns among residents about adverse effects on water quantity and quality and other environmental impacts of higher density and scattered site housing, adding to rapidly expanding growth in Sarpy County. A threat of perhaps the greatest concern is a planned amusement park in the nearby Nebra-Ski area.

The Schramm Park area is currently zoned for one house per 20 acres, allowing for scattered site housing. A future growth plan calls for conservation-residential (cluster), rather than scattered site housing. This plan allows drainage ways to remain intact, providing habitat and trails.

The planned rezoning by 3 developers was to subdivide the properties into lots of 5 acres, while two developers planned lots of 3 acres, requesting a waiver of the current 20-acre minimum from the County Board. One of the developers is a County Planning Administrator, a public official who is charged to review private development proposals.

Local landowners use well water and septic tanks. The residential flow rate is 5 gallons per minute, already low. Concerns about a potential shortage of water and its quality if the area is rezoned for higher densities were expressed by Steve Oltmans, General Manager of the Papio-Missouri NRD, and UNL geologist Scott Summerside. A soil scientist from the Natural Resources Conservation Service determined the area has rocky and sandy soils that

Platte River is impaired and on the EPA's 303d list, being contaminated with fecal coliform bacteria and the mineral selenium. A 4-H camp at Schramm Park engages over 6,000 youths and adults per year. Across the river in Cass County is Camp Kitaki, from which children canoe on the polluted river. More houses and more interconnected roads to service the proposed scattered housing could mean more lawn chemicals and road salt leaching into the soil and groundwater, possibly contaminating private wells, and further impairing the Platte.

In their statements to the County Board, those testifying emphasized Schramm Park's connection with the surrounding lands via greenways and waterways and that changes in local land use would affect the area as a whole. The area is currently home to resident and migratory birds, and many depend on interconnected woodlands, riverine, and open areas for food, water, shelter, nesting, and raising of young.

Constructing roads and installing infrastructure to connect more scattered housing would fragment the landscape for some wildlife and disrupt the daily and seasonal routes of others. Costs of County services would increase. Vehicular collisions with deer or turkey come to mind. Kim Stuhr stated, "Wildlife that people come to see will move away if habitat is not protected." The ASO noted that loss of habitat is the primary threat to our State's native fauna and flora. When humans change landscapes to suit them, it is costly and controversial to restore lands to bring back wildlife and scenery that drew us to the countryside.

Kevin Poague of Audubon Nebraska wrote that Schramm Park was nominated an Important Bird Area. The Omaha Peddlers Bicycle group encouraged the County Board to oppose high-density housing because many of their biking group use the bridge over the Platte and value the scenic view as they bike.

Ms. Stuhr summed up her stance: "Open space (greenspace) is an asset to communities and consistently pays its own way."

It was heartening to read in the *Omaha World-Herald* of July 13 that the Sarpy County Board of Commissioners

require careful consideration regarding decision making.

It was noted that, if concerns of experts and homeowners are not addressed, costs to remedy foreseeable problems may be left to County taxpayers.

The situation is made more dire by the fact that the

rejected the development proposed by Sarpy County's top planning administrator "because it did not comply with the County's future growth plan." The Board stated they will hire an urban planner to replace the public planner who proposed the private development.

Great Backyard Bird Count Participants Thanked

National Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology would like to thank all participants in the 8th annual Great Backyard Bird Count this February.

You contributed to the most comprehensive GBBC count ever—613 species and 6.5 million birds were tallied continent-wide, shattering the previous records of 567 species and 4.8 million birds, respectively.

Program Reduces Water Use, Pollution While Increasing Farm Yields

The one thing Nebraska farmers depend on most is water. That fact is even more apparent as our state enters another year of drought (Ed. Note: Relieved somewhat and in some areas by recent rains) that has emptied rivers, lakes and streams and turned fields of corn into dried-up remains. In the Nebraska Panhandle, landowners in the South Platte Natural Resources District are producing better crops using less water with the help of the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

The goal of the Center Pivot Conversion Incentive Program is to protect groundwater quality and quantity by encouraging the wise use of water. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, irrigation is the second-largest use of water in the United States and accounts for 34% of all water usage. Traditional furrow irrigation requires large amounts of water and can lead to groundwater contamination.

The South Platte NRD has monitored nitrate levels in groundwater since the early 1990's, focusing on education in nitrogen and irrigation water management to reduce nitrate contamination.

Research from the Univ. of Nebraska shows that reducing the amount of irrigation water per acre is effective in preventing agricultural chemicals from leaching into groundwater. The Center Pivot Conversion Incentive Program helps landowners reduce water usage by providing cost-share assistance to convert to more

At the GBBC web site www.birdsource.org/gbbc, we've posted an article highlighting some of the year's most exciting results, illustrated with colorful photographs from participants. At the web site, you can also explore results compiled from all 51,928 checklists, view animated maps, visit the photo gallery, and find out if your town made the Top 10.

efficient center pivot irrigation. Producers are reimbursed for up to 30% of the cost of the sprinklers, pipe and water meters.

The Nebraska Environmental Trust has provided \$360,000 since 2002 for the cost-share assistance. "Farmers are the stewards of the land," said Mary A. Harding, Executive Director of the Trust. "The participants in this program have made a commitment in time and money to protect the water in their community. We are proud to help them achieve their goals by providing our financial support." The combination of funds from the Trust, the South Platte NRD, and landowners has funded 22 pivot systems to convert gravity irrigated fields to sprinkler irrigation in western Nebraska.

Results from the program so far have been encouraging: 1,910 acres have been converted in the South Platte River and Lodgepole Creek valleys, and groundwater nitrate levels after conversion have shown significant decreases. Other benefits for farmers are the increased yields on converted fields, some up to 50 bushels per acre. These are more than enough to offset the loss of irrigated land in the field corners.

For more information, contact Ken Quandt at 877 800-1030.

The above information was excerpted

Addresses to Remember

President George W. Bush

The White House, 1600
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Comments: 202-456-1111; fax:
202-456-2993

Senator Ben Nelson

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Washington, DC 20515

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Governor Dave Heineman

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Omaha/Douglas Civic Center

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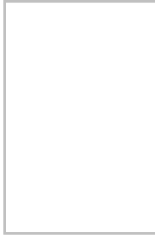
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Mail to Audubon Society of Omaha

P. O. Box 3542, Omaha 68103-0342

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Carol Rasmussen.....731-3939

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NAS Board Member Ione Werthman..... 493-0373

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