

The Meadowlark

The Audubon Society of Omaha is dedicated to the active promotion of environmental awareness to our community through education, conservation, and enjoyment of our natural heritage, especially birds.



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

Prairie Festival August 25th

The prairie festival this year will be held Sunday, August 25, 2013 at Audubon Prairie (formerly Jensen Prairie) in Omaha, from 12:00 noon to 4:30 pm. The rain date is Sept 1.

The Audubon Prairie is a surviving remnant of the tall grass prairies that once covered much of our area. In late August, some grasses can be six to eight feet tall, giving us a glimpse into the setting the first inhabitants of our country knew.

Prairie Wildflowers will be abundant, along with butterflies and birds. The monarch butterfly migration should be underway. Songbirds and raptors make the prairie their home.

Activities for the whole family will be part of the day. At 1:00 p.m. a talk along with a hike will be presented by both Audubon's prairie manager, Glenn Pollock and a person with specialized knowledge of the prairie's wildflowers. Glenn will explain the extraordinary qualities that

allowed prairie plants to survive fire, grazing, drought and floods and describe how prairies are managed. At 3:00 visitors can join a hike led by experienced birders.

Cold water, ice tea, lemonade and cookies will be served. You are asked to bring lawn chairs if you wish to relax in the shade of our tent; also, bring insect repellent and sunscreen. Wear comfortable walking shoes. For your convenience, portable toilets will be provided.

To reach the prairie, take 72nd St to Bennington Road (1/2 block north of McKinley Highway also known as Hwy 36). Turn east on Bennington and go about 1/2 mile to reach the prairie. (Note: When you enter Bennington Road, stay on the gravel portion; do not go on the concrete portion). There is parking on the road and next to the prairie. Volunteers will be there to direct parking.

Volunteers are needed to carry off this event. If you can help, call Eric at 551-5045 or Laurine at 451-3647. For questions call Eric or Laurine.

You are invited to join Audubon for a Picnic at Fontenelle Forest's Camp Brewster Sunday, July 21

Our annual summer picnic for members, spouses and friends will take place Sunday, July 21, at Fontenelle Forest's Camp Brewster, 1313 Bellevue Boulevard North, from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m.

The meal is pot luck, so bring a dish to share, along with any large serving pieces needed. Audubon will supply plates, cups, glasses, flatware, napkins, ice, water and sodas. A stove and refrigerator are in the building. For dining, you may choose indoors or outdoors at picnic tables.

The time is 4:00 to 7:00 pm. Dinner and socializing may be followed by hikes on the boardwalk or in the woods for those interested.

Bring binoculars, a hat, and insect repellent.

If you have questions, call 451-3647.

Start of the Year With ASO

By Laurine Blankenau

As your new president and to those of you I haven't met, I will introduce myself with a few facts. If you've received and read the Meadowlark, that publication was my responsibility since 1991 when I took over as editor. As volunteer positions go, it has some excellent advantages. The work can be a challenge but interesting as well. The most pleasing part has been getting to know members whether they are contributors or are otherwise connected.

I served on Audubon's board as director, recording secretary and 2nd vice president. Because of my lengthy tenure, persons special to me have moved away or found other ways to spend their time. Thanks to the diligence and creativity of our current leaders, we are attracting good numbers to our activities. May the trend continue!

Now on to the present and an upcoming event. First, a prologue. In the summer of 1996 or so, then ASO president Betty Allen and I joined the Iowa Prairie Network for a conference in Red Oak, Iowa. Glenn Pollock, president of the group, graciously allowed us to coattail along to visit a prairie during this glorious time in mid-July when the grasses were tall. It was a treat for the eye and soul as we slogged through the prairie, seeing it as it existed before the plow broke the plains. The temperatures were upper-90's, the sun was hot, but the rewards

were great. Scattered late summer flowers painted the grasses with reds, oranges, yellows and purple. Programs expanded our mental horizons. Botanists and specialists in other sciences explained qualities of plants I'd seen but knew in a general sense only. Whoever I happened to be standing near could point out some intriguing bit of information about a plant at our feet. We met owners of some small prairie plots and some in the process of restoration - or even creation - from land that had met the fate of cultivation. I vowed to return to this special place, which I did, my husband in tow, this time sans experts around to inform. But enjoyable, nonetheless. It was in late July or August and the grasses grew even taller. Writing this today reminds me that it's time for me to revisit this place in the heart of what once was grass, grass and more grass.

Although that was an experience worth a special trip and one you might want to take, you don't have to travel to Iowa to see prairies. In the Omaha area, we have Allwine, Bauermeister, Stolley, and one owned and managed by Audubon. We don't intentionally keep the location of Audubon's prairie a secret although its existence isn't widely known. It is open to the public provided "the public" doesn't mind scaling, creeping under, or slipping through the bars of the gate. (It's not so difficult, really.) Its location is near the North Omaha Airport. More about the location later.

This parcel of the tallgrass prairies once covering eastern Nebraska was preserved by the family who owned it before selling it to Audubon. Like other prairies saved through the years, it has a special value, being rare and possessing precious properties.

Later this summer we will conduct our annual Prairie Festival, and you are invited to attend. In past years we have entertained all ages, from small children to golden-agers. The Festival has fallen on days with extreme heat, but I've heard no complaints. Rather, I marveled at the agility and good nature of the hikers. Visitors have their choice of hikes led by Audubon members who describe the qualities of the prairie or identify butterflies or other insects, flowers, and birds. For relief from the heat and exertion, cold drinks and cookies are provided. A tent cover plus lawn chairs invite repose and a place to visit.

Members will receive a mailing reminding of this event Sunday, August 25. If you visit the prairie on your own, you will encounter a gate (it is designed to keep vehicles out). To reach the prairie, follow the directions given on the Prairie article, page 1 of this issue.

Prairies survived the rigors of past climate upheavals by rooting deeper, recovering from fire, and more. This prairie plot will make it through what lies ahead by relying on its splendid adaptations and its preservation-minded owners—past and present—who helped to bring it this far.

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DeSoto Spring Bird Count Results

By Jer Toll

Each spring in early May, birders from ASO descend upon the refuge to help them with their annual spring bird count. Typically 10-25 birders join in to help the refuge better understand how birds use DeSoto, but with bad weather and illnesses only five sturdy birders braved cold rain and wind to find birds in their hiding places on May 4th.

The cool, wet spring had a diminutive effect on the count, and all-in-all the final list looked more like a list compiled in the third week of April. Waterfowl, shorebirds and sparrows were well represented, but typical May arrivals were few. Warblers were practically non-existent. Only 4 species were seen, all common and only 10 individuals! By contrast 15 species of waterfowl and 16 species of shorebirds were counted!

The final count was 96 species, well down from a typical count between 110 and 125 species.

Some of Our Country - Pesticides and Bird Decline

Grassland birds are those birds that live in or migrate through agricultural areas, and included in the group are meadowlarks, bobolinks, horned larks, two different owls, grasshopper sparrows and others. No group of birds is experiencing steeper declines than the grassland birds. For many years, this decline has been attributed to the disappearance of their habitat, as more and more prairie and pasturelands are torn up to plant row crops.

Now, a new study by Canadian scientists is casting doubt on loss of habitat as the main culprit in the disappearance of our grassland birds. Two Canadian scientists, Pierre Mineau and Melanie Whiteside, identify pesticide toxicity rather than habitat loss as the most likely cause of the widespread declines in grassland birds in the United States. In fact, acutely toxic pesticides were four times more likely than other factors to be the cause of bird loss.

The results of the study were discussed in a Bird Studies Canada online article and in an American Bird Conservancy media release.

Dr. Mineau and his colleague documented that almost all of the grassland species of birds have been found dead in field trials of pesticide use, and those showing the highest declines in numbers, such as the vesper sparrow and horned lark, are species frequently picked up dead in pesticide impact studies. Pesticide drift is a well-known phenomenon, and thus even if grassland birds were some distance from row crops where toxic chemicals were applied, they still could be affected.

Ever since Rachel Carson's blockbuster book, *Silent Spring*, documented the dangers of using DDT, we have been aware of the harmful effects of pesticides on bird populations. DDT was banned in 1972, but it was followed by more dangerous pesticides, among them the organophosphates and carbamates. Their use has decreased in recent years, only to be replaced by a new class of pesticides called neonicotinoids.

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Wanted: Editor for The Meadowlark

We are seeking help in editing our newsletter, *The Meadowlark*, by taking over some of the work involved.

In the past we published 10 issues a year. In the future we will publish 6 issues annually: January, March, May, July, September and November. If you are interested and, preferably, have knowledge of desktop publishing, please phone Laurine at 402-451-3647.

Sarpy Bird Count by Clem Klaphake

The Annual Sarpy County Bird Count was held on May 11th. The total species count for the day was 173. We missed the highest count of 174 in 2011.

Some of the more uncommon and unexpected species seen for the May 11th date were: Horned Grebe, American Bittern, Black-crowned Night Heron, Northern Goshawk, Virginia Rails (3), Hudsonian Godwits, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Northern Mockingbird, Golden-winged Warblers (2), and Black-headed Grosbeak.

Overall I was very pleased with the help, the total number of species observed and the variety of species.

The moment one gives close attention to anything, even a blade of grass, it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself.

Henry Miller 1891-1989

Some of Our Country - Pesticides and Bird Decline

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The American Bird Conservancy asked Canadian scientist Dr. Mineau to research nicotine-like pesticides. His 100-page report, "The Impact of the Nation's Most Widely Used Insecticides on Birds," concludes that these new pesticides are lethal to birds and

to the aquatic systems on which they depend. "A single corn kernel coated with a neonicotinoid can kill a songbird," said Cynthia Palmer, co-author of the report.

Contamination of ground and surface water with these dangerous pesticides is already beyond the threshold found to kill many aquatic invertebrates. And the report also shows that concentrations of several of the neonicotinoid insecticides are high enough to be causing impacts to the food chains.

The American Bird Conservancy has called for a ban on the use of neonicotinoids as a seed treatment and for the suspension of all applications until an independent review of the product's effects on birds can be done. According to the Conservancy, the Environmental Protection Agency has significantly underestimated the risks of these chemicals, ignored the warnings of staff scientists about them, and continued to approve their widespread use.

In a related development, the European Union said in April that it is instituting a two year ban on the use of nicotine-like chemicals, citing their effects on pollinating insects. Neonicotinoids are believed to be responsible for a massive bee die-off in Europe.

In light of the Canadian study, and the action taken by the European Union to temporarily ban nicotine-like chemicals, it is clear that the American Bird Conservancy is correct in seeking more restrictions on these new

pesticides. The future of our grassland birds may well depend on it.

Embark: Journey Into Nature accepting applicants

Embark: Journey Into Nature is a Fontenelle Forest program designed to deepen one's relationship with the natural world by combining information, field study and other experiences. Through presenters and storytellers, field trips, nature journaling and integrative activities, participants will gain a greater sense of what the natural world has to offer.

Embark is looking for 15-18 adults, 18 years and older, with a desire to explore the natural world. These 9 full-day sessions will be held on the second Saturday of each month, running from September 2013 to May 2014.

"If you are serious about learning more about nature, your surroundings, history, and culture you will truly enjoy participating in Embark. I always look forward to each Embark Saturday...." Darrell Eich Embark Participant 2012

To learn more visit www.fontenelleforest.org/embark. Applications are available online, and the deadline for applying is July 15th. If you have questions, contact Elizabeth Chalen at echalen@fontenelleforest.org or call 402.731.3140 x1026.

Addresses to Remember

President Barack Obama

The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington D.C. 20500-0001
Comments: 202-456-1111

Senator Michael Johanns

U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 202-224-4224
Lincoln: 402 476-1400

100 Centennial Mall N Rm 294, Lincoln NE 68508-3803

Senator Deb Fischer

825 B Hart, Senate Office Building, Washington D.C.
20510 Washington Phone: 202-224-6551

Lincoln: 440 No. 8th St, Suite 120, Lincoln NE 68508
Lincoln phone: 402-441-4600

Omaha: 11819 Miracle Hills Dr, Suite 205, Omaha, NE
68154 Omaha phone: 402-391-3411.

Representative Lee Terry

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515
Phone: 202-225-4155; Fax: 202-226-5452

Omaha Address: 11717 Burt St, Omaha 68154
Omaha phone: 402-397-9944

Representative Jeff Fortenberry

House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515
Phone: -202-225-4806

Lincoln phone: 402-438-1598

Lincoln Address:

Governor Dave Heineman

Capitol Bldg, Box 94848 Lincoln, NE 68509
Phone: 402-471-2244; Fax: 402-471-6031

Mayor Jim Suttle

Omaha/Douglas Civic Center
1819 Farnam St, Omaha NE 68183
Phone: 402-444-5000 Hot Line: 402-444-5555

Lincoln Capitol Switchboard: 402-471-2311

Washington Capitol Switchboard
Senate: 202-224-3121; House: 202-225-3121

Memorials

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

We offer two choices of membership: one includes membership in National Audubon as well as in our local chapter, receiving the *Audubon Magazine* and our newsletter, *The Meadowlark*. A portion of the dues is returned to our local chapter.

The other choice is local membership only: this includes receiving *The Meadowlark* and participation in all of our local activities. Dues all go to our chapter.

Membership in the National Audubon Society

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Introductory Membership (1st & 2nd Year) \$20 Make check payable to National Audubon Society

Mail to Audubon Society of Omaha
19612 Ridgeway Road
Plattsmouth, NE 68048 COZCP030Z

Membership in The Audubon Society of Omaha only

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Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Make check for \$20 payable to Audubon Society of Omaha

Mail to Audubon Society of Omaha
19612 Ridgeway Road
Plattsmouth, NE 68048 COZCP030Z

Bequests

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

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

Audubon Society of Omaha

P.O. Box 3542

Omaha, NE 68103--0542

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Office: 1941 So. 42nd Street, Omaha, NE 68105

Elected Officers:

President	Laurine Blankenau	451-3647
1st Vice President	Dennis Kingery	556-9082
2nd Vice President	Tad Leeper	670-5919
Past President	Justin Rink	904-415-3282
Treasurer	Marjorie Smith	350-9516
Recording Sec'y	Nelli Falzgraf	292-9687
Corres. Sec'y	Ann Boice	315-1884
<u>Elected Directors:</u>	Eric Scholar	551-5045
	Jonas Grundman	216-5413
	Elliott Bedows	292-5017
	Bob Fuchs	553-8242
	Helen Bartee	657-3845
	Jamie Vann	733-1891

Standing Committee Chairpersons:

Conservation	Bob Fuchs	553-8242
Education	Clem Klaphake	292-2276
Field Trip	Clem Klaphake	292-2276
Finance	Nelli Falzgraf	292-9687
Membership	Kathy Schwery	296-4788
Program	Jerry Toll	453-9239
Natural Areas Mgt	Eric Scholar	551-5045
Publication	Jamie Vann	733-1891
	Laurine Blankenau	451-3647
Publicity	Jackie Scholar	551-5045

Other Activities:

Bird Seed Sale Chairs	Kathleen Rose	292-8912
	Carole Rasmussen	731-3939
Speakers Bureau	Eunice Levisay	393-0545
Historian	Eric Scholar	551-5045
NAS Board Member	Peter Cannon	608-251-1276

Six issues of The Meadowlark are published annually: January - February, March - April, May - June, July - August, September - October, and November -December. The newsletter may be accessed on our web site, <http://audubon-omaha.org>

Send address changes to Kathy Schwery, 19612 Ridgeway Road, Plattsmouth NE 68048 or email djschw@windstream.net