

January 2007
Volume 36 Issue 1

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

Nebraska is for Otters

By Nancy Leonard

River otters may not be the first animal you think of when considering Nebraska's native fauna. But 200 years ago, they were not only native but commonly seen and reported by explorers in this area.

Living in the major waterways of the United States, otters were hunted for their pelts. During the peak hunting years, around 1800, as many as 65,000 otters were reported killed in a single year in North America. But by 1904 the harvest down to approximately 4,500, and river otters had disappeared from Nebraska.

During the next 75 years, there were infrequent sightings of transient otters in Nebraska but no signs of a permanent population. In 1986 otters were declared an endangered species, and Game and Parks took responsibility to restore the river otter to a stable population level. From 1986 to 1991, 20 individuals were released in 7 river systems in Nebraska.

Sam Wilson of Nebraska Game and Parks will speak to us on Thursday, January 11, about river otters, their life history, their habitat needs, their present status and their prognosis for reestablishing their home in Nebraska.

Start your new year off right and join us on January 11 at 7:30 p.m. at the Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances Street (one block south of Center). As always, nonmembers are welcome.

The program will conclude with a brief business meeting followed by a social time with coffee and cookies.

On Saturday, January 20, Roland Barth will lead a field trip to Fontenelle Forest to look for birds and other forest denizens including trees and vines.

We will meet at the Buffett Learning Center, Fontenelle, at 8:30 a.m. Nonmembers not accompanied by a member will pay an entrance fee.

We will break for lunch (bring your own or eat at a restaurant). Those who wish may continue in the afternoon if they wish.

Watch for weather reports and come prepared for wintry temperatures if appropriate.

For information call Roland at 292-6291. .

Green Art

An enviro-conscious art exhibit and forum will open at the Bellevue University Art Gallery January 6 - February 30, M-F 8 a.m. to 10 p.m; Sat 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The show is free and open to the public.

The art work will include works involving recycling of materials and works that form a springboard to spur

Continued on page 2

2

Rivers & Wildlife Celebration

The 37th annual Rivers & Wildlife Celebration will be held Friday through Sunday noon, March 16-18, in Kearney.

The event will be coordinated by Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary, Audubon Nebraska, and the Nebraska Partnership for All-Bird Conservation.

Featured presenters: Bruce Babbitt, former U.S. Secretary of the Interior; John Acorn - "Acorn, The Nature Nut," as seen on the Discovery Channel and Animal Planet; Scott Hereford - Wildlife Biologist, Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge; and Dr. Paul Johnsgard - Renowned ornithologist.

The real highlights of the weekend, of course, are the birds, and there are many opportunities to witness the spectacular migration. Viewing blinds along the Platte River allow up-close observations of cranes leaving the River at sunrise and returning to the river at sunset. Experienced birders will lead full- and

DeSoto Xmas Count Results

Twenty persons assisted with the DeSoto Bird Count on December 23, a sunny day starting out cold and ending rather balmy. Participants fanned out covering DeSoto, Boyer Chute, Hitchcock and Ft. Calhoun quadrants.

In all, it was a good count day, according to Jerry Toll, captain of the Boyer Chute area. At 6:00 a.m. when much of the city was asleep, Jerry began owling and was rewarded with 4 species.

Individuals totaled 39,257, better than average. Species count was 64, a total aided by good waterfowl numbers (12) at DeSoto. Present among these were 8 Trumpeter Swans. Total raptor species was 9 including a Merlin.

Birds to write home about, better known as the day's best finds, were White-winged Scoter, Northern Goshawk and Saw-whet Owl.

half-day trips to the best local birding areas to view migrating waterfowl and other birds and wildlife.

Field trips: Crane viewing blinds along the Platte at Rowe Sanctuary, Rainwater Basin (wetlands hosting migrating waterfowl), Half-day and full-day trips to local birding hotspots.

Also offered: Crane behavior class - a conference favor.

For a brochure or more information, call or write Audubon Nebraska, Box 117, Denton NE 68339; (402) 797-2301; www.Nebraska.audubon.org;

For crane viewing information, contact Rowe Sanctuary, 44450 Elm Island Road, Gibbon, NE 68840; 308 468-5282; www.rowesanctuary.org.

Nature is a part of our humanity, and without some awareness and experience of that divine mystery, man ceases to be man. When the Pleiades and the wind in the grass are no longer a part of the human spirit, a part of very flesh and bone, man becomes, as it were, a kind of cosmic outlaw, having neither the completeness and integrity of the animal nor the birthright of a true humanity. As I said elsewhere, "Man can be either less than man or more than man, and both are monsters, the last more dread.

Henry Beston, *The Outermost House*

Green Art, Continued from page 1

conversation, maybe even action regarding current environmental topics.

A variety of other types of events will focus on environmental issues. Several movies followed by discussion will be shown in the Bellevue University auditorium.

A reception and panel discussion will be held Wednesday, January 24 from 7 -9 P.M. at the gallery.

Movies to be shown include the following:

.. a documentary on nature artist Andy Goldsworthy - his art and philosophy

.. a screening of the artful film Koyaanisqati (Life Out of Balance)

.. a film on renewable energy

.. Al Gore's film An Inconvenient Truth

Other features will include a demonstration of mixing pigments from nature and talks by the artists on the materials they use to create their art work.

For more information, call the Art Gallery, 402-293-2048, or Jackie Scholar at 402-293-3790.



Combine the fun of bird watching with conservation

What midwinter activity is fun, easy, free, and helps bird conservation? What can parents and teachers do with children that connects them to a whole new world of natural wonders? This February, the tenth annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon, will give everyone a chance to discover the birds in their neighborhood and "Count for the Record."

During February 16-19, 2007, people of all ages, from beginners to experts, are invited to join this event which spans all of the United States and Canada.

Participants can take part wherever they are—at home, in schoolyards, at local parks or wildlife refuges. Observers simply count the highest number of each species they see during an outing or a sitting, and enter their tally on the Great Backyard Bird Count web site at www.birdsource.org/gbbc.

Visitors to the web site can compare their sightings with results from others as checklists pour in from throughout the U.S. and Canada. Last year participants reported 7.5 million birds overall and 623 species. They helped chronicle the early spring migratory routes of Sandhill Cranes, documented lingering migrants such as Orange-crowned Warblers and Tree Swallows, and revealed the ongoing range expansion of introduced Eurasian Collared-Doves.

Would you like to sharpen your bird ID skills?

You can take a "short course" from the web site given above, which offers tips and access to photos, sounds, maps, and natural history information on more than 500 bird species.

Before you count, go to www.birdsource.org/gbbc for easy-to-follow instructions and local checklists.

Take part on one, two, three or four days. Watch the birds for as long as possible

A word on what's happening at Audubon's Spring Creek Prairie is due, maybe overdue. We are fortunate and proud to have this distinctive place nearby to visit, hike, and enjoy. We applaud those who made possible its preservation and its continued growth that I will outline for the rest of you who may not have heard. It is through the staff and their management that Spring Creek is perceived for its outstanding importance to our region.

The *Lincoln Journal Star* of November 30, 2006, reported on Audubon's Spring Creek Prairie's recent expansion.

Through a purchase by the National Audubon Society and a "long list of donors," 168 acres were added at for a cost of about \$530,000. The total size of the land was thus increased from 640 acres to 808 acres.

"Much of the cost was paid by Campbell and Marilyn McConnell and their son Curtis." Additional funds came from the Nebraska Environmental Trust, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, Wachiska Audubon Society, Dick Denman of Salt Lake City, and 20 other donors.

The Star reports further that easements were obtained from neighboring landowners that protected another 1,300 acres, much of this native tallgrass prairie, for a complex of 1,208 acres. The easements were obtained by the Lower Plate South Natural Resources District and the Federal Natural Resources Conservation Service. Under the arrangement, landowners may continue farming and ranching while the property is protected from development. The total cost of one 200-acre easement was \$357,000.

The acquisitions are important because of the native tallgrass prairie that represents one of the largest plots in eastern Nebraska and our region. Once covering vast areas of our State, less

(15 minutes or more) each day. Go back to the GBBC website, complete an online checklist, and report your sightings electronically.

View your results. You can see lists and maps online, continually updated throughout the count. See how you and your town fit into the big picture.

than 2 percent of the total tallgrass prairie remains here and in the nation. The rest was broken for farming and other development.

Curtis McConnell, whose home is about 3 miles west of Spring Creek, is quoted by the *Star*, "Spring Creek is quite a jewel and more people are discovering that, and the more land they have the better because I think we are already to the point where most people can visit a prairie only by going to places like Spring Creek Prairie."

Tallgrass prairies possess amazing properties enabling them to withstand drought, fire and other natural

occurrences. They maintain habitat for declining and stressed species.

Continued on page 4

Green Gains and Great Expectations

In November Amanda Griscom Little of *Grist Magazine* analyzes election outcomes in "Green Gains" and quotes several persons. Sierra Club's Cathy Duvall states, "Voters elected a greener U.S. House, a greener U.S. Senate, greener U.S. governors, and they gave a green light to a new energy future."

League of Conservation Voters President Gene Karpinski termed the focus on the environment the first he remembers in our history that made the top issue a "clean-energy future."

Reelected Republican Gov. Schwarzenegger of California defeated a Democratic candidate, possibly winning over the voters by signing into law a mandatory cap on greenhouse-gas emissions.

Another Californian, Democrat Jerry McNerney, toppled Richard Pombo from his anti-environmental seat in the State

Democrats gave us a convincing blueprint for what they want to do with energy? No. Does it mean voters were saying we see a bright future to clean energy? No."

A more optimistic view was taken by Ann Cohen of the Center for American Progress. She points out that grumblings about oil subsidies, huge profits by the oil companies, and the connection with Middle East oil and our oil dependence helped return the Democrats to office. Where does this leave environmentalists' concerns? They are, in Cohen's words, "inextricably connected to the issues that concerned voters most—national security and the economy."

Nancy Pelosi, to be sworn in on January 4 as House Speaker, claims energy independence to be her top priority and that she will work to promote alternative fuels and energy efficiency.

Democrats gave us a convincing

Legislature. He was aided significantly, it is claimed, by financial support of the Sierra Club and Defenders of Wildlife and their impressive \$1.2 million poured into the campaign. Pombo had clearly stated his anti-environmental position by promoting drilling in natural areas, opening public lands to development, and eviscerating the Endangered Species Act.

Montana's Jon Tester, a Democrat, will take office in January, having beaten out his opponent by promoting Montana as a "stronghold" of an energy economy. Tester has already proved himself in the Senate, aiding in the enactment of a law insuring that by 2005, 15 percent of the state's utilities must be supplied by renewable energy sources. As was stated prominently in news items about Tester, prior to his service in the senate he was an organic farmer.

Hard work of the opposition to drilling in the Arctic NWR paid off in Missouri when eager-to-drill Jim Talent was defeated. Election results in Colorado and Ohio tell the same story, with eight of the nine "Environmental Champions" reelected. It seems the Dirty Dozen list was actually 13 (a baker's dozen?), of which nine will not be returning to office.

Some reservations may be needed to temper our expectations from the newly elected. Opposition to the President may have been equally or more important than the environmental issues.

A senior editor with the Cook Political Report, Amy Walter, believes energy and the environment were less prominent issues than the dissatisfaction with the president's party and the war. She says, "Does it mean that

blueprint for what they want to do with energy? No. Does it mean voters were saying we see a bright future to clean energy? No."

A more optimistic view was taken by Ann Cohen of the Center for American Progress. She points out that grumblings about oil subsidies, huge profits by the oil companies, and the connection with Middle East oil and our oil dependence helped return the Democrats to office. Where does this leave environmentalists' concerns? They are, in Cohen's words, "inextricably connected to the issues that concerned voters most—national security and the economy."

Nancy Pelosi, to be sworn in on January 4 as House Speaker, claims energy independence to be her top priority and that she will work to promote alternative fuels and energy efficiency.

Human visitors experience the physical and spiritual qualities of the grasslands, views and wildlife, long absent elsewhere.

The property encompasses woods, a creek, wetlands, ponds, and trail ruts of the Nebraska-Fort Kearny Cutoff to the Oregon Trail. Found and recorded are 199 bird species, 27 mammal species, 47 butterfly species, and 29 species of dragonflies and damselflies.

A new Education Center holds programs for adults and children. Projects focus on nature in art, writing, and learning about wildlife. The site is ideal for field trips and informal hikes and is open for visitors every day except Tuesdays. It is located 3 miles south of Denton. To reach the site, take S.W. 98th Street out of Denton.

For more information about the Center or to arrange for a visit, call 797-2301 or write to scp@audubon.org

5

Addresses to Remember

President George W. Bush

The White House, 1600
Pennsylvania Ave NW

Washington D.C. 20500-0001

Comments: 202-456-1111; fax:
202-456-2993

Senator Ben Nelson

U.S. Senate, Washington DC
20510; 202-224-6551; fax 202-228-
0012; Lincoln: 402-437-5246;
Omaha 391-3411; Omaha address:
7602 Pacific St, #205, 68114

Senator Chuck Hagel

U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C.
20510-2705

Audubon Society

Membership Application

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

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____

Zip Code _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Introductory Membership

National Audubon & Local Chapter

(1st & 2nd Year \$20)

Make check payable to National Audubon Society

Phone: (202) 224-4224; Fax: (202)
224-5213

Omaha phone: (402) 758-8981

Representative Lee Terry

U.S. House of
Representatives, Washington, DC
20515

Phone: (202) 225-4155 ; Fax: (202)
226-5452

Omaha phone: (402) 397-9944

Representative Jeff Fortenberry

U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington, DC 20515

Phone: (202) 225-4806

Lincoln phone: (402) 438-1598

Governor Dave Heineman

Capitol Bldg, Box 94848 Lincoln,
NE 68509

Phone: (402) 471-2244; Fax: 471-
6031

Mayor Mike Fahey

Omaha/Douglas Civic Center

1819 Farnam St, Omaha NE 68183

Phone: 444-5000 Hot Line: 444-
5555

Mail to Audubon Society of Omaha

19612 Ridgeway Road

Plattsmouth NE 68048

PO 3

7XCH

Bequests

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

Memorials

The Audubon Society of
Omaha greatly appreciates
the memorials it receives.
When sending your gift,
please identify the person
you wish to memorialize and

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

the name and address of the person to be notified.

Mail to Audubon Society of Omaha

P. O. Box 3542

Omaha NE 68103-0542

