

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.

March/April, 2016
Volume 45, Issue 2



ASO is a chapter of the National Audubon Society, serving eastern Nebraska and western Iowa.

Snowy Owl Researcher To Speak At Fontenelle Forest

by Clem Klaphake

Mark your calendars for Thursday March 17th to hear Denver Holt give a talk at Fontenelle Forest at 7 p.m. His presentation on the Snowy Owl is being sponsored by the Audubon Society of Omaha and Fontenelle Forest.

Denver Holt is a wildlife researcher and graduate of the University of Montana. He is founder and president of the Owl Research Institute and the Ninepipes Wildlife Research Center, a nonprofit organization located in Charlo, Montana. As a dedicated researcher, Holt believes that long-term field studies are the primary means to understanding trends in wildlife populations. In 2000, he was named Montana's "Wildlife Biologist of the Year", by the Wildlife Society of North America.

Since 1978, Holt's research focus has been owls and their ecology. He has published more than 90 papers and technical documents, including four species accounts for *The Birds of North America* project. He was team leader for the Strigade Family owl species accounts for the Handbook of the Birds of the World, volume 5, covering 189 species of the world's owls. He has co-authored two children's science books on owls: *Owls Whoo Are They* and *Snowy Owls Whoo Are They*. In 2006 he wrote a chapter on Owls for the

book *Arctic Wings*. The book won the National Outdoor Book Award for design and artistic merit.

Holt's research was the cover story for *National Geographic Magazine* in December 2002. His work has been the subject of television bites on all of the major networks. In addition, his work has been featured on

Audubon's *Up-Close Series*, PBS's *Bird Watch*, and David Attenborough's *Life of Birds*, among others. His Snowy Owl research was the focus of the British Broadcasting Company's (BBC) documentary series called *Frozen Planet*, sequel to the highly acclaimed *Planet Earth* series.

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March Field Trip to Branched Oak Lake

by Clem Klaphake

On Saturday March 26th the Audubon Society of Omaha will be going on a field trip to Branched Oak Lake (BOL) near Lincoln in Lancaster County. We hope to see a variety of water dependent bird species such as ducks, geese, possible common Loons, grebes, coots, pelicans and gulls. There also are likely to be some early passerine migrants such as eastern phoebes, yellow-rumped warblers and kinglets. Raptors also should be on the move by that date. Larry Einemann of Lincoln will be meeting us and guide us to the best birding areas. We will meet on the south end of the dam at BOL at 8:00 a.m.

It is about an hour drive from the Omaha area to BOL. There are several routes you can take to get there. The most direct

way coming from Omaha: take I-80 to exit 401, which is right on the north side of Lincoln, then go north at the exit onto Hwy 34 for about 4 miles, then turn right onto Hwy 79 to West Raymond Road where you turn left. Then drive 3 miles to where the road splits, take the right road which goes over the dam (these are all blacktop roads). Before you go over the dam turn left into the parking lot and then down to the dam. Rather than have us all meet somewhere and caravan on the interstate, I'm leaving it up to individuals to find or form a carpool. Some of you may want to just bird for half a day and others all day. We will be on our own for lunch. The last couple years we have stopped at a small café in Raymond for lunch.

APRIL FIELD TRIP – SEE PAGE 3

Field Notes from the President: By Tad Leeper

Greetings ASO members! As I write this article, spring is just around the corner. Plants will soon be waking from their months-long winter slumber and migratory birds will be heading north toward their summer nesting grounds.

Meanwhile, your ASO Board has been working hard on your behalf this winter. Tisha Johnson, ASO Second Vice President wrote and secured a Watchable Wildlife grant for \$3,000. These funds will be used for youth outreach - especially to promote ASO's monthly field trips for young birders and their parents. In addition, the ASO Board invested \$10,000 toward the Nebraska Land Trust's ongoing efforts to secure conservation easements for properties in eastern Nebraska and the Sandhills.

Spring is an ideal time for families to engage in outdoor nature activities. So in the remainder of this President's column, I'll share several actions identified by nature writer Richard Louv to combat *Nature-Deficit Disorder* in children - and their parents.

The following list of nature activities for kids and children is largely excerpted verbatim from the Richard Louv's book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*.

- Go birding — urban or suburban, rural or wilderness. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology (birds.cornell.edu) offers, in English and Spanish, the Celebrate Urban Birds program for youngsters, focusing on sixteen species of birds often found in urban neighborhoods. Young people can post their bird sightings onto satellite maps and track bird populations in their own neighborhoods. ([\[post.com\]\(http://post.com\)\). Participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count \(\[www.birdsource.org/gbbc/\]\(http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/\)\) or Project FeederWatch \(\[www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/\]\(http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/\)\).](http://www.bird-</div><div data-bbox=)

- Purchase natural history field guides for your children. The Peterson, Sibley, and Audubon guides work well for older kids and adults. For young children, remember this pocket-size, Golden Guides, popular in earlier decades? They're back in print. At your local bookstore or library or online, you can pick up guidebooks to area hiking trails, rivers, lakes, parks and other natural attractions. Many of these publications offer detailed descriptions, maps, levels of difficulty and age ratings.
- Trump the iPod with the nPod — develop hidden powers. Learn to use all of the senses at the same time, to sit under a tree and consciously listen to every bird song and bug call, to watch, to be aware of what the body is touching, what the nose is smelling, what nature is broadcasting.
- Plant a garden. If your children are little, choose seeds large enough for them to handle and that mature quickly, including vegetables. Whether teenagers or toddlers, young gardeners can help feed the family, and if your community has a farmers' market, encourage them to sell their extra produce. Alternatively, share it with the neighbors or donate it to a food bank. If you live in an urban neighborhood, create a high-rise garden. A landing, deck, terrace or flat roof typically can accommodate several large pots, and even trees can thrive in containers if given proper care.
- Go harvesting. In past de-

cadecades most children had family connections to farming — grandparents who still farmed, for instance. That connection can be echoed today by picking berries and other fruit or vegetables on commercial farms or in orchards open to the public. Consider joining a local food co-op; some invite the public to help with the harvest.

- Encourage older children to become citizen scientists, and become one yourself. Volunteer at a wildlife rehabilitation center or other wildlife care facility. Help restore habitat and monitor rare and endangered species through natural history museums, state and national parks, and wildlife protection groups.
- Use nature as a partner to strengthen family bonds. What better way to enhance parent-child attachment than to walk in the woods together, disengaging from distracting electronics, advertising, and peer pressure? When reminiscing about childhood, grown children often mention outdoors adventures as their best memories —even if they complained about such outings at the time! And if you a parent who missed out on nature as a child, *now's your chance*.

In closing, I want to encourage you to attend Denver Holt's special ASO-sponsored presentation about Snowy Owls on Thursday, March 17 at Fontenelle Forest. This presentation will take the place of our regularly scheduled monthly meeting in March. There is no charge to attend the program.

As always, I welcome your ideas, suggestions and questions with the goal of continuing to move ASO's conservation mission forward. Happy birding!

Snowy Owl Researcher from page 1



Jerry Toll

In May 2011 and January 2012, Holt's research was featured in the New York Times. Also in 2011 Holt worked closely with PBS on a documentary featuring the breeding and ecology of the Snowy Owl at his research center in Barrow, Alaska. The film, *The Magic of the Snowy Owl*, aired in 2012.

In 2014, Holt advised and assisted on the BBC Natural History film looking at predator/prey relationships in Snowy Owls. In April of 2015, The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology featured Holt's research on Snowy Owls in their prestigious *Living Bird Magazine*. Holt has been the keynote speaker for several major bird festivals in the United States and abroad.

When not researching owls, Holt is involved in wildlife watching tourism as a natural history tour guide and co-owner of Wildlife Planet Nature Tours (www.wildplanetnaturetours.com). In addition, he is a part-time trip leader for Victor Emanuel Tour Company (www.ventbird.com), the largest tour company in the world. To learn more about Holt and his efforts in wildlife research, education and conservation, visit www.owlinstitute.org.

We look forward to seeing you on Thursday, March 17th at 7 p.m.

Topic of April Meeting: Bats

by Jerry Toll

Bats are valuable members of the ecosystem. They are a moderator of flying insect populations and they help to control insect damage to crops but they face many challenges. Our speaker for the April 14th meeting, Dr. Keith Geluso, will be discussing his research with bats and the myriad challenges they face including white-nose syndrome and the increasing conflict with wind energy systems. Dr. Geluso is a professor at the University of Nebraska Kearney. During the course of the last two decades, he has authored or coauthored over 60 papers in his field of interests including 17 articles on bats. I first met Keith before he started his college career in 1991 when he volunteered at the first hawkwatch. He already possessed a keen interest and experience with wildlife being the son of Ken Geluso, mammalogist at UNO.

Plan to attend the April 14th general meeting at 7 PM on the UNO campus at the Weitz Com-

munity Engagement Center, room 209. Free parking on the campus is in lot E north of the Center. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Youth Birding Group Field Trips

by Tisha Johnson

*Omaha Youth Birding Group
Field Trip dates and venues
March thru May*

We are planning to do two field trips per month this Spring, so we hope you will join us for several of our outings. Our schedule is as follows:

March 12th, 10:00am - Breakin' out the big scopes, waterfowl at Lake Zorinsky

April 2nd, 5:00pm - Add 'dancing woodcock at dusk' to your lifelist near Cunningham Lake

April 23rd, 10:00am - We want warblers! An early Spring? Towl Park and Hillcrest-West Lawn Cemetery

Our recent field trip to Fontenelle Forest was well attended with 7 parents and 10 youth. We saw firsthand the banding of birds and birding on a 65 degree February day, hiked Hackberry to Hawthorn trails. We heard the Pileated, which has been seen near the Nature Center, saw a tree it had been active at drilling and pulling apart, but never saw it. The Omaha Youth Birding Group was recently awarded a Watchable Wildlife grant from the Nebraska Land and Conservation Fund administered by Nebraska Game and Parks. Your continued word of mouth advertising about this new, fun program is greatly appreciated. We will be introducing our field trips to the Girl Scouts of Omaha in March.

April Field Trip to Burt County Nebraska

by Clem Klaphake

On Saturday April 30th the Audubon Society of Omaha will be going on a field trip to the Summit Lake area near Tekamah, NE. For county listers this will be an opportunity to add to your Burt County lists. The time and meeting place will be posted in the brief version of the April Meadowlark or at omahaaudubon.org. Early neo-tropical migrants should be starting to show up by that date. Stay tuned for more specific information.

Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival Set for March 2016

by Deb Hauswald, Audubon Nebraska

Audubon Nebraska is pleased to announce its 46th annual celebration of the sandhill crane migration, Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival. The Festival will be held at the Holiday Inn Hotel & Convention Center in Kearney, March 17-20, and features a variety of birding excursions including guided half- and full-day trips to local birding hotspots, sunrise and sunset trips to crane viewing blinds along the Platte River at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary, and an overnight outing to see prairie grouse.

Main speakers include acclaimed nature photographer

Thomas Mangelsen; emeritus UNL professor and ornithologist Paul Johnsgard; and Brian Trusty, executive director of Audubon Texas. Other presenters will give information on a variety of nature-related topics. Two workshops on crane behavior will be presented, and the popular and family-oriented Wild Experience Room will return with hands-on activities for kids.

For registration and general festival information, visit nebraskacranefestival.org or call 402-797-2301. General crane viewing information can be found at rowe.audubon.org or by calling the Iain Nicolson

Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary, 308-468-5282.

Nebraska is home to one of the most amazing and spectacular wildlife migration phenomena in the world – the sandhill crane migration. Over eighty percent of the world's population of lesser sandhill cranes (approximately 500,000-600,000) use the Platte River and adjacent fields to rest and refuel before continuing north to their nesting grounds in the northern U.S., Canada, and Siberia.



OMAHA GIVES!

powered by the Omaha Community Foundation

On Wednesday, May 25, 2016, the Omaha Community Foundation will sponsor Omaha Gives!, a 24-hour, online fundraising event to raise support for nonprofits in the Omaha area. It is a community-wide event in its 4th year. In 2015, more than 20,000 participants raised \$8.8 million for 704 local nonprofits. Last year, 52 donors gave \$2,634 to Audubon Society of Omaha. With incentives from local sponsors, Audubon Society of Omaha received a total of \$2,737 for its local conservation efforts.

Support our cause – the health of the environment - by donating a minimum of \$10 by credit card on-line at Omaha Community Foundation's secure website: [https:// www.omaha-gives24.org](https://www.omaha-gives24.org) during the event on May 25, from midnight to midnight. Or, you can ensure that you don't forget the date by scheduling advance donations starting April 1st, which will be processed on May 25. Audubon Society of Omaha is a 501(c)(3) organization and your donation is fully tax deductible.



Phil Swanson

Election of Officers for 2016-2017

by Tisha Johnson

The annual election of officers and directors will be held at our April general meeting. The slate of candidates is listed below.

President: Matt Miller

1st VP: Laurine Blankenau

2nd VP: Tisha Johnson

Treasurer: Betty Fullerton

Recording Secretary: Linda Dennis

Corresponding Secretary: Kathleen Rose

Directors: Alex Wiles, Shannon Engberg, Galyn Langer

Nominations can be presented at the meeting, provided permission has been obtained from the nominees.

REMEMBERING IONE WERTHMAN

The Audubon Society of Omaha offers its sincerest sympathy to the family of Ione Werthman on her recent passing. Ione was a long-time member of our chapter and well-known to many of us. Through the years she served in multiple capacities, holding the offices of president, treasurer, editor, conservation committee chair, and chapter representative to Audubon Nebraska, our State office. Also, she was elected to and served a term as Regional Representative on the Board of Directors, National Audubon Society. In addition to holding offices, Ione organized groups of our members to speak at hearings around the state as

the need arose.

Ione was most noted for securing funding for the acquisition of the area known as Heron Haven, a wetland, a rare site in the City of Omaha. The property is natural habitat for birds, butterflies, flowers and other plants, as well as a respite for those wishing to escape the urban scene hiking the trails through its wooded acres. The property includes a building with office and meeting room. A garden maintains cultivated flowers, other plants and design elements. Along with many faithful volunteers, for many years Ione was a principal force in the management and

preservation of Heron Haven.

Our chapter also purchased a tallgrass prairie saved from the plow in its original state by its owners, a local family. Ione's work acquiring grants also made this purchase possible. Today the prairie is open to hikers and is managed by one of our members.

Any of us who knew her can attest to Ione's outstanding energy and persistence.

She is remembered by those who worked with her on the Audubon Board and on the many projects she worked with or led.

Desoto Christmas Bird Count

by Jerry Toll, compiler

The Desoto CBC was held on Saturday, January 2nd under clear skies and moderate temperatures and wind. Fifteen counters recorded 69 species and 12,539 individuals. This is a respectable tally for the count but below the record of 74 species. Twenty-two of these species were represented by 2 or less individuals suggesting to me that some hangers-on were still in evidence after the cold and snow came to the refuge. Six coots were a new species for the count. Some of the more unusual sightings were: great white-fronted goose, gadwall, ring-necked duck, lesser scaup, hooded merganser, great blue heron, red-headed woodpecker, pileated woodpecker, prairie falcon, northern shrike, winter wren, snow bunting, both towhees, savannah sparrow and purple finch. New high counts were 3 great blue herons and 439 meadowlarks (species). Thanks to the Desoto Refuge staff and all the birders who came to the count.

SAVE THE DATE

Thursday, May 12th – Annual Audubon Banquet
A special Meadowlark with full details will be sent in April.

PHOTO REQUEST FOR ANNUAL BANQUET

Members are encouraged to bring photos to be display at our ASO banquet on Thursday, May 12th. The photos should be mounted or framed. No more than four photos per person. Attendees will vote for the photo they like best.

SPEAKER FOR ANNUAL BANQUET

Steve Van Riper will be speaking at our annual banquet. He will do a presentation on his trip to the Peruvian Amazon and Machu Picchu.

WEBSITE UPDATE

The ASO is beginning a website update. Help from anyone with website development experience, especially the SquareSpace platform, would be greatly appreciated. We also are seeking new content for our website. The following are needed for our website: Nebraska bird or habitat photographs, local birding information and ASO history. Please contact Bob Wells at rcwells@cox.net or 402-639-5446 if you would like to help with this project. Thanks in advance.

"I sincerely believe that for the child and for the parent seeking to guide him, it is not half so important to know as to feel. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which seeds must grow. The years of childhood are the time to prepare the soil."

— Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*

Oak Savannas: The Perfect Mix Between Prairie and Woodland

by Matt Miller

This vegetative structure in its prime once reached from Canada to Texas and from the Appalachian Mountains to Eastern Nebraska. In Nebraska this important ecological community is an afterthought behind grasslands but is in every bit of danger of over-development and agriculture. Oak woodlands and Savannas are the transition habitat that allows the grassland and woodland species to intermix, creating a highly diverse ecotype.

Savannas are a favorite habitat for a variety of residents and migrants in the avian community. With spaced living and dead trees along with mix of tall and short prairie plants below those trees, Oak Savannas draw a good mix of cavity nesting birds like red headed woodpeckers, nuthatches, and eastern bluebirds, along with ground nesting birds like turkeys and bobwhite quail. This diverse group of ground and air foraging birds is testament to

the diversity in insects, fruit, and seed bearing plants.

Eastern Nebraska and Western Iowa are awesome places to bird in oak woodlands and savannas. Fontenelle Forest, Neale Woods, Indian Cave State Park, Hitchcock Nature Center, T.L. Davis Preserve, and Twin Oaks Wildlife Management Area are a couple of excellent areas that I can think of with great habitat and a diverse mix of terrain and species. All of these places use fire to manage their properties, which is important to clear off the dense remnants of years' previous ground litter (dead grasses and leaves). Prescribed fire set by naturally occurring events or earlier by Native American communities eliminated a lot of the smaller woody encroaching species such as dogwood, hackberry, or iron wood. This is very important because without this disturbance oak savannas would eventually vanish, and the

giant oaks and hickories that make up the spatial dynamic would be encroached upon and choked out, resulting in this disturbance-based ecotype to turn into a dark forest with little to no vegetative and animal diversity.

Disturbance based habitats all over the world are in serious trouble. With the lack of grazers and prescribed fire, prairies and oak savannas will eventually subside to woody encroachment and the dreadful edge effect. This is jeopardizing many bird species that depend on feathered edge and open grassland habitat.

By birding in our local Oak Savannas, you the birder will then start the all-important education process. Spreading the word on how impressive the species lists are, how easy the walking is, and the open binocular lanes will bring more and more birders and general public.



Red Headed Woodpecker

Josh Preister

Addresses to Remember

President Barack Obama, The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington DC 20500-0001, Comments: 202-456-1111

Senator Deb Fischer, U.S. Senate, Washington DC 20510; Phone: 202-224-6551; Fax: 202-228-1325; Lincoln Phone: 402-441-4600; Omaha Phone: 402-391-3411; Omaha Address: 11819 Miracle Drive 68154

Senator Ben Sasse, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510; Phone: 202-224-4224; Lincoln Phone: 402-476-1400

Representative Brad Ashford, U. S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515; Phone: 202-225-4155

Representative Jeff Fortenberry, House of Representatives, Washington DC 20515, Phone: 202-225-4806; Lincoln Phone: 402-438-1598

Governor Pete Ricketts, Capitol Bldg, Lincoln, NE 68509; Phone: 402-471-2244

Mayor Jean Stothert, 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

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 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 3542, Omaha NE

Memberships

We offer two choices of membership:

1. Includes membership in National Audubon as well as in our local chapter. It includes receiving the *Audubon Magazine* and our newsletter, *The Meadowlark*. A portion of your dues is returned to our local chapter.
2. Is a local membership that includes receiving *The Meadowlark* and participation in all of our local activities. All dues go to our chapter.

Membership in the National Audubon Society and in the Audubon Society of Omaha

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Introductory Membership (1st & 2 year) \$20 Make check payable to: National Audubon Society. Mail to: National Audubon Society, Inc., 225 Varick Street, 7th Floor, New York, New York 10014

Membership in Audubon Society of Omaha only

Name _____
Street _____
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Make check for \$20 payable to: Audubon Society of Omaha. Mail to: Audubon Society of Omaha, 19612 Ridgeway Road, Plattsmouth, NE 68048



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

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Phone: 402-720-1635 – omahaaudubon.org.

Office: 1941 S. 42nd St., Omaha NE 68105

Elected Officers:

President Tad Leeper – 670-5919
1st Vice President Eric Scholar – 551-5045
2nd Vice President Tisha Johnson – 885-0990
Past President Laurine Blankenau – 451-3647
Treasurer Betty Fullerton – 493-4362
Recording Sec’y Linda Dennis – 733-6548
Corres. Sec’y Kathleen Rose – 292-8912

Elected Directors:

Jonas Grundman – 216-5413
Bob Wells – 393-4683
Bob Fuchs – 553-8242
Helen Bartee – 657-3845
Matt Miller – 681-4625
Sarah Miller – 908-9678

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 – 733-6548
Natural Areas Management Glenn Pollock – 571-6230

Program Jerry Toll – 453-9239
Publication Helen Bartee – 657-3845
Publicity Jackie Scholar – 551-5045

Other Activities:

Bird Seed Sale Chairs
Kathleen Rose – 292-8912
Carol Rasmussen – 731-3939
Speakers Bureau – Eunice Levisay – 393-0545
Historian – Eric Scholar – 551-5045
Exec. Dir., Audubon Nebr. – Marian Langan – 402-797-2301
ASO Administrator – Julie Spellerberg – 402-720-1635
NAS Board Member – Michele Crist – 208-863-1918
Pan-Flyway Director – Karim al-Khafaji

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The newsletter may be accessed on our website,
omahaaudubon.org.

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email: djschw@windstream.net.