

The Meadowlark

March 2010

Volume 39 Issue 3

ASO is a Chapter

*of the National Audubon
Society*

*Serving Eastern Nebraska
and Western Iowa*

Bird Banding

By Rick Schmid

What is MAPS and why do ASO members care? On Thursday, March 11, Rick Schmid will answer these questions. Rick is the Director of Education at Fontenelle Nature Association (FNA) and also a bird bander. He has been an avid birder for over 40 years and has led birding trips to 20 U.S. states as well as to Belize.

In addition to finding a lot of birds on his field trips, he has found some interesting adventures, including

- .. Getting lost in the woods on Michigan's Upper Peninsula while chasing a Veery
- .. Rerouting the birding plans in Belize to search for a trip participant's lost passport
- .. Answering questions from the Border Patrol in southeastern Arizona about why he was driving people around in mini-vans by the Mexican border.
- .. Watching most of the group suffer from seasickness off the shores of Cape Hatteras
- .. Cruising the streets of Key West amid oddly-dressed residents while searching for Red Junglefowl. Who knew anyone dressed more oddly than birders??

Over the past 10 years, Rick has conducted numerous presentations for local organizations, school groups and the FNA Bird Club covering topics ranging from bird identification to bird banding to bird feeding.

In his presentation for ASO on **Thursday, March 11**, Rick will describe his (and ASO member Betty Grenon's) involvement with a multinational bird banding project that is providing valuable information about bird populations. The acronym MAPS stands for Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship.

Please join us for our program at **7:30 P.M.** at the Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances Street (one block south of 45th & Center Streets).

A brief business meeting will follow the program, and the evening will conclude with a social hour, coffee and cookies. Visitors are welcome.

March Field Trip to Branched Oak Lake

By Elliott Bedows

The March field trip will travel to Branched Oak Lake near Lincoln on Saturday, March 27. We will meet at 8:00 A.M. at the south dam and bird from there.

For those coming from the east, south-central Omaha, or Bellevue and vicinity who wish to carpool (always a good idea), we will meet at 6:30 A.M. at the southeast corner of Southroads Mall in Bellevue.

Typically, the group has lunch together in Malcolm, and we then bird our way home as we wish, but the lunch and afternoon part of the day is strictly optional.

Please dress for the weather, recalling that even on a relatively warm day, the lake water is still cold, and the air around the lake is likely to be chilly.

Don and Janis Paseka will lead, and birders from Wachiska Audubon Society are encouraged to join us.

Introductory Bird

Identification Class

Saturdays: March 13, April 10, & May 1

8:00 A.M. - Noon - Fontenelle Forest
Center

\$20 fee includes all three sessions

For ages 12 and older

Registration required: Contact Clem
Klaphake at 292-2276 or
ckavian@cox.net

This class is limited to 15 participants
With over 50 million `birders' in the
U.S, bird watching is the fastest-
growing outdoor activity today.

This three-part class, led by Audubon Society of Omaha President Clem Klaphake, includes local field trips and instruction on identifying birds everywhere. No prior knowledge of bird identification is needed.

Wind Power III

By Clem Klaphake

Despite the current recession and difficulties getting loans from banks, the U.S. wind power industry grew at an unbelievable rate in 2009, adding 39 percent more capacity. The country is almost at the point now where 2 percent of our electricity will come from wind turbines _ some want the U.S. to reach 15 percent by 2025.

There is a strong push for wind power from many "greens," pollution-conscious people, and various environmentally focused organizations. Is there a downside to wind power? There are some concerns that I would like to address in this short essay.

One concern is habitat and wildlife. Let me give you an example from Kansas. The few prairies still remaining now become targets for wind turbines, but not the wheat fields or other cultivated acres of land. One of these areas is the Flint Hills in central and eastern Kansas. For example, what used to be an 8,000 acre low impact ranch land now has 100 turbine towers, transmissions lines and a large electrical substation. Remember each tower is approximately 390 feet tall (taller than the Statue of Liberty). As Rob Mane, The Nature Conservancy's Director of Conservation in Kansas, says, "The tallgrass prairie is almost all gone, and most of what is left is in the Flint Hills."

Initially, the building of this wind farm in the Flint Hills caught The Nature Conservancy off guard. Since the building of this farm, Mane has been spending most of his time steering wind farm developers away from the Flint Hills and other large intact grassland that is used by ground nesting birds, which includes the declining Lesser Prairie Chicken. The wind farms tend to drive the Lesser Prairie Chicken out of their current habitat in Kansas _ the same is occurring with the Sage Grouse in Colorado and Wyoming.

The American Bird Conservancy (ABC) has taken a strong lead in addressing the issues of wildlife, habitat and wind turbines. Their position is: "ABC supports alternative energy sources, including wind power, but before approval and construction of new wind energy projects proceed, potential risks to birds and bats should be evaluated through site analyses, including assessments of bird and bat abundance, timing and magnitude of migration, and habitat use patterns. Wind energy project location, design,

operation, and lighting should be carefully evaluated to prevent, or at least minimize, bird and bat mortality and adverse impacts through habitat fragmentation, disturbance, and site avoidance. For example, wind power projects should be sited on areas with poor habitat, such as heavily disturbed lands (i.e. intensive agriculture), where possible."

ABC also suggests there be close scrutiny of sites that are frequented by federally endangered species of birds and bats, in known bird migration pathways, areas where birds are highly concentrated, and areas that have landscape features known to attract large numbers of raptors (Missouri River corridor?).

How are birds affected by wind energy production? There are a number of ways:

- Mortality from colliding with the turbine blades, towers, power lines, or other related structures, and electrocution on power lines.
- Avoidance of the wind turbines and habitat surrounding them.
- Direct habitat impacts from the turbines' footprint, roads, power lines, and auxiliary buildings.

There are more and more studies being published on the mortality rates of birds due to wind power. However, the rapid growth of wind power sort of sneaked-up on conservationists and ornithologists; thus more studies need to be done on the mortality rates caused by wind power projects. Some preliminary studies show the following:

West Virginia Wind Energy Project (44 tall towers) 80 percent of the avian fatalities were neotropical migrants _ 30 percent of all mortalities were Red-eyed Vireos. Some other studies in western states have found that about 14 percent of the fatalities are House Sparrows, Starlings and Rock Pigeons.

California has the largest number of mortalities of raptors according to recent studies. Approximately 700 deaths per year are due to wind turbines. Many of these are Golden Eagles. With more and larger turbines operating (some wind farms have over 1,000 turbines concentrated in one area), new data suggests that the total number of raptor fatalities has risen, but raptor mortality per turbine at new wind projects is very low due primarily to site location. For more

Continued on page 3

**"Great Plains: America's Lingering Wild
"**

**Michael Forsberg Exhibition at
Joslyn**

Now Through May 16

The title of the above exhibit bears the title of the latest book by Michael Forsberg, well-known photographer of America's heartland wildlife and places. Sixty photographs from the book are on exhibit at Joslyn through May 16.

Joslyn's publication describes the photographic images as "unparalleled encounters with the wild creatures and the breathtaking landscapes of one of the world's great grasslands. a 1-million-square mile network of ecosystems stretching from Canada to Mexico."

**On Thursday, March 4, "An Evening
With Michael Forsberg" will be held
at the Museum beginning at 6:30 P.M.**

His illustrated lecture details the three-year process of creating his book.

The program will be held in the Witherspoon Concert Hall with exhibition viewing following, plus a cocktail and hors d'oeuvre reception. Tickets are \$10 for Joslyn members, \$20 for the general public. Reservations: 402-661-3862.

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from
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information on bird fatalities see

http://www.west-inc.com/wind_reports.php

As with everything new, wind power is not a panacea for our energy crunch. For example, one of my concerns is with the large migration corridor through the Rainwater Basin and Platte River valley: Sandhill Cranes, Whooping Cranes, nesting Piping Plovers and Least Terns, to name a few species that either spend the summers there or several weeks during migration season.

Are there regulations in place to adequately assess the threats to birds and habitat before 390-foot towers are sited through some of these sensitive areas? Progress has been made on where to site or not to site towers, design of the blades,

Entries Wanted for

Photo Contest

By Eric Scholar

Audubon's photo contest will be held again this year, and entries are being sought. These will be on display at the **Spring Banquet, May 20.**

Contest categories are birds, other animals, wildflowers, scenics/people in nature, and insects. Photos must be from nature — zoo shots and photos of pets are excluded. Entries are limited to two per person per category, may range in size from 5"x7" to 16"x20", and must be matted or framed.

First and second prizes will be awarded in each category along with Best of Show. Most Popular will be voted on by guests at the banquet.

Entries must be submitted by April 24. To make arrangements for delivering your photos, please call Eric Scholar at 551-5045.

You are encouraged to enter your photos, which are a popular part of our Spring Banquet.

Volunteers Needed!

By Jackie Scholar

For enjoyable work—a chance to see bird art by students from kindergarten through senior high.

We will be needing volunteers to help accept the entries for the Audubon Student Art Contest at the Audubon Office in the Center Mall on:

Friday - March 5 4:00 - 6:00 P.M.

Saturday - March 6 - 10:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.

Also we would appreciate help in setting up the artwork at Bellevue University on:

and shutting the turbines off during heavy migration times.

This is a BIG topic. Development and growth of wind energy production is just really getting going. Stay informed.

Friday - April 9 9:30 A.M. to Noon.

Any help would be appreciated. Please contact

Jackie at 551-5045 or jbscholar@cox.net if you can help.

Bob Fuchs Honored at Fontenelle

Audubon Board member and Conservation Chair Bob Fuchs has been recognized recently for his extensive volunteer work with Fontenelle Nature Association recently.

A Teacher Naturalist at Fontenelle, Bob's service dates back nearly 25 years, earning the gratitude of staff, visitors and other volunteers. His work at the Forest finds him taking on multiple roles. He has done resident raptor handling, educating while leading hikes, doing animal presentations for children, and other ventures as he's needed. He does land conservation work: managing volunteer groups in clearing unwanted trees, planting trees, pulling garlic mustard, collecting seeds, and more. He conducts astronomy programs (constellations) at Neale Woods. It seems where and when a volunteer is needed, Bob is likely to be found.

He says he finds volunteering to be a pleasure, having learned so much through his associations with other staff members and through his work.

He serves ASO on the Board as Conservation Chair. He contributes articles for *The Meadowlark*. See his article on page 6 of this issue.

Slate of Nominees Presented

The Nominating Committee has presented the following slate for election of officers and directors beginning July 1 for the 2010-2011 year.

Officers:

President - Jerry Toll

1st Vice President - Jackie Scholar

2nd Vice President - Linda Dennis

Treasurer - Patty Albright

Recording Secretary - Laurine Blankenau

Corresponding Secretary - Kathleen Crawford-Rose

Directors:

Jamie Vann, new to our board; David Crawford, beginning a second two-year term (directors may serve a total of four years). Continuing in their positions as

Neale Woods Nature Center

Reopening

Beginning March 27, the Neale Woods Nature Center will be open on weekends after a winter hiatus. The hours are Saturdays 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. and Sundays Noon to 5:00 P.M.

A special offering each day will be Critter Encounters where children (and adults) will be introduced up close to the animals cared for at the Nature Center.

We welcome the reopening of this fine facility north of Omaha off River Road to White Deer Lane and around the bend to parking near the Center.

The Center will observe these hours through Sunday, June 20, Father's Day.

Helping Wildlife With Check-Off

As you prepare your Nebraska State Tax form, you will be invited to donate to the Wildlife Conservation Fund of our State.

Please consider making a contribution, even a small one, to fund the non-game Wildlife Conservation Fund for Nebraska Game & Parks.

Look for the Peregrine Falcon symbol on your state tax form. You can also donate throughout the year online at www.outdoornebraska.org/. Or mail a donation to Nongame & Endangered Species Fund, Nebraska Game & Parks, Box 30370, Lincoln NE 68503-0370. All donations are fully tax deductible.

Directors are Nancy Williams, Helen Barte, Phil Swanson, and Jason McMeen. Eric Scholar will finish four years as Director and continue as Natural Areas Committee Chair.

The vote will be taken at the April general meeting, with all members present eligible to vote.

Please join us for the program on bird banding and to vote for our officers and directors.

Spotlight on Nature

Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers

By Eric Scholar

This is the first of what will probably be a bimonthly series spotlighting the natural history of a particular species of bird, other animal or plant that is prominent in the surrounding area at a particular time of the year. For this first issue I would like to highlight the Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers. The author welcomes suggestions for future topics.

In the winter, things often seem bleak and lifeless. At this time of year most activity is not readily apparent as for the most part we are in our houses. For those who have bird feeders in their yards and for those who take an occasional hike outdoors, a lot of wildlife is more noticeable than during other times of the year. The Downy Woodpecker, and to a lesser degree the Hairy Woodpecker, are two birds which are often seen and heard during this time of the year. These birds are not only common in this area but throughout the country from the east to west coasts.

Seven species of woodpecker are found in our area, each with its own unique lifestyle. The Downy Woodpecker is probably the most common. Pairs of these woodpeckers occupy territories during breeding season but disperse for fall and winter, maintaining a solitary existence from other woodpeckers though occasionally associating in small groups with chickadees, nuthatches and titmice. The Downy feeds in the wild on wood-boring insects excavated from branches as well as suet at feeding stations, and thus is usually abundant. In harsh weather it uses tree cavities for protection. Its close relative, the Hairy, is less common. The Downy Woodpecker is about 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches long. It is a small black and white woodpecker with a white back and a tail that has black bars. Males are recognized by the small red patch on the back of the head. It can be distinguished from the larger Hairy Woodpecker, which is a little over 9 inches long, by a smaller bill and the black bars or ladder markings of the tail.

Woodpeckers, like other animals that survive the winter, must be good at finding food. To accomplish this, they have a strong propensity for pecking wood. Most obtain the bulk of their food —insects, larvae and eggs— from tree bark or from burrows within the bark. To carry out this task, woodpeckers have straight, unusually sturdy, chisel-shaped bills backed by skulls that are exceptionally strong. Those skulls are made up of a tough case of spongy bone, which surrounds the birds' lightweight brains. There is also a narrow space between the skull and brain which probably helps absorb the shock of pounding when a woodpecker drives its bill hundreds of times a day into a tree. The strong muscles of a woodpecker's neck help drive the head and bill. These muscles also act as shock absorbers during the pecking process. While they do this work, the woodpeckers are steadied by three or four curved claws on each foot. Their tails meanwhile are tipped with sharp barbs that prop them up against trees. To locate their prey, woodpeckers apparently depend on

their sense of hearing.

Woodpeckers also have extraordinarily long, wormlike tongues which they can stick out to astonishing lengths when feeding. Unlike other birds, their tongues are not attached at the rear of the mouth. Instead, the tongue forks into a pair of bony bases that loop behind the skull, pass over the top and are rooted in one nostril.

The woodpecker's beak is also used to excavate cavities for nesting and shelter and to drum on wood. This drumming is often heard while walking in the forest in winter and early spring. This is a form of communication used by woodpeckers to stake out territories and attract females for mating. They often drum on hollow trees that cause a lot of noise, but they will also drum on almost anything, including the sides and roofs of houses.

It should be mentioned that both of these

woodpeckers are beneficial in that they
often provide cavities for

**Continued on
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By Bob Fuchs

Items of interest on the environmental scene are always with us. Often these seem overwhelming, making us want to hide

Recently the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) worked with Frank Luntz, a well-known pollster. His specialty is finding

"Americans want their leaders to act on climate change — but not necessarily for the reasons you

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clean energy

jobs.

Environment Omaha has published the final drafts of Natural Environment, Urban Form and Transportation, and Building

Items of interest on the environmental scene are always with us. Often these seem overwhelming, making us want to hide from the many problems so few seem to take serious

Recently the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) worked with Frank Luntz, a well-known pollster. His specialty is finding language that resonates with voters even if, according

"Americans want their leaders to act on climate change — but not necessarily for the reasons you

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Audubon Society

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Addresses to Remember

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The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania
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Washington D.C. 20500-0001

Comments: 202 456-1111

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 Michael Johanns

U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 202
224-4224

Lincoln: 402 471-2311

Representative Lee Terry

U.S. House of
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20515 : Phone: (202) 225-4155 ;
Fax: (202) 226-5452

Omaha Address: 11717 Burt St,
Omaha 68154

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Representative Jeff Fortenberry

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Make check payable to National Audubon Society Mail to
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The Audubon Society of Omaha greatly appreciates the
memorials it receives.

When sending your 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
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Bequests

A bequest to Audubon
is a gift to those who
will succeed us; a gift

If you find an
injured bird of
prey, please
contact a Raptor

to secure our natural heritage.

Recovery Center volunteer at 402-731-9869.



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Phone: 451-3647 - <http://audubon-omaha.org>

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