

# A Bird's Eye View



Volume 29, No. 8 October 2000

**Audubon Society of Omaha**

**A Chapter of National Audubon Society**

## Restoring America's Serengeti

**By Clem Klaphake**

The pre-settlement Great Plains were by many counts North America's richest ecosystem, with an almost incomprehensible abundance of wildlife, including vast herds of large grazing animals.

By the middle of the 20th century, it was one of the most destroyed ecosystems. Yet at the dawn of the 21st century, the Great Plains have more potential for substantive wildlife restoration than any other area on our continent.

As a result of economic, demographic, and technological factors, the region is ripe for wildlife restoration on a scale never before seen. This scenario is best known via the Buffalo Commons metaphor.

At the next general meeting of the Audubon Society of Omaha, Dan Lict will discuss the ecological considerations of large-scale wildlife restoration on the Great Plains. Dan has worked for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for a num

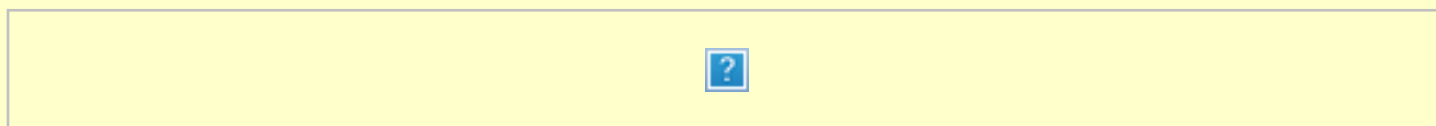
ber of years but recently transferred to the National Park Service where he now serves as the Regional Wildlife Biologist for an area stretching from the Dakotas to Arkansas and northeast to Ohio and Michigan.

While working in Texas, Maine, South Carolina, California, North Dakota, Alaska, Minnesota and now Nebraska, Dan has worked with and studied the Spotted Owl, prairie dogs, black-footed ferrets, woodcock, waterfowl and many water-related issues.

He has published a number of articles on numerous topics as well as a book on the grasslands and Great Plains. Dan received a B.S. degree in Wildlife Management from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and a M.S. degree in Wildlife Sciences from Texas A&M University.

Dan will be our guest speaker at the general meeting Thursday, October 12 at 7:30 p.m, Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances Street. The general public is invited to attend.

A short business meeting follows the program, concluding with coffee, cookies and conversation. Field guides for many nature-related topics, T-shirts and other items will be offered for sale before and after the program.



## Hawk Watch, Boyer Chute

### Trip Set for October

On Sunday, October 15, Clem Klaphake will lead a hawk watch at Hitchcock Nature Center.

Depending on the weather, there should be a good variety and number of hawks and other migrants.

### Bird Seed Orders Due Friday, October 6

It's time to replenish your backyard bird supplies, so don't forget the October 6 deadline for bird seed orders.

Participants should meet at the main building at 9:00 a.m. Bring a lunch and be prepared to spend the day. Dress appropriately; it can be quite cool. Bring your binoculars and a scope, if you have one.

If you have not purchased from us before and wish to, or if you have misplaced your order form, please phone Sally Hansen at 334-2329, or the Audubon Office, 445-4138.

Sale dates are Saturday and Sunday, October 21 & 22. We thank you for your patronage and hope to see you then.

**Continued on page 3**

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### Scholarly Notes

by Eric Scholar

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### Governor Bush Speaks on the Environment

He feels his greatest contribution to the world. Finally, he was tasked with what is the best way to build a new and lasting partnership between Land and Water. He feels that it was a conservation challenge in Texas to

With the presidential election coming up in November, I will use this and next month's columns to present two candidates' positions on environmental matters. He feels that it was a conservation challenge in Texas to

I will begin this month with George Bush and his stated position. The following are excerpts from the Bush web page stating his views. Bush recognizes that the U.S. is entering a new era of environmental policy that requires a new philosophy of stewardship and personal responsibility. He feels it is important for our country to reduce our reliance on foreign oil and encourage Americans to do the bare minimum, fail to reward innovation and breeds litigation.

### Further Opinions

Some other positions Governor Bush has taken include support of the moratorium against new leases for oil and gas drilling off the coasts of California and Florida. He will work with state leaders and local communities to determine on a case-by-case basis whether or not drilling should go forward on existing leases. He opposes breaching dams in the Pacific

On the question of the Clinton administration's plan to protect more than 43 million acres of roadless national forest land, Bush states that conservation must begin with

Washington to regulate, conversation. Again he Northwest. He wants to penalize, and dictates we must build alleviate the substantial from afar. cooperative repair and improvement conservation backlog facing our Therefore he claims he partnerships between national parks, wildlife will set high federal and state refuges and other public environmental governments, local lands. standards and work to communities and build conservation private landowners. With regard to urban partnerships between sprawl, Governor Bush the federal and state In his opinion, he believes the challenges governments, local White Mountain of land management communities and National Forest in New decisions are best private landowners. He Hampshire is a model handled by local and also claims that as that balances state government. president he will work conservation efforts Finally, he supports the on a bipartisan basis with a sound multiplene new Tier II standards with both parties to use policy. He states that will require lower achieve certain that the Clinton top sulfur, cleaner burning environmental goals. down approach ignores gasoline and cleaner successful efforts such cars.

### Bush Responds to Questions

For additional Mr. Bush was asked information about Mr. about his support for Bush's position, please In the recent issue of the *Kyoto Protocol*, see his web page *Audubon* magazine, Mr. under which developed ([www.goergebush.com](http://www.goergebush.com)). Bush was asked five countries would reduce hope these excerpts questions by a reporter. greenhouse gas present a clear picture His answers explain his emissions by 5% of his environmental position on several compared with 1990 positions. Next month I environmental matters. levels. He says that will present those of changes in the earth's Vice President Gore. atmosphere are serious and require much more extensive scientific analysis.

He basically opposed the Kyoto Protocol, finding it ineffective, inadequate and unfair to America because



## Spotlight on Sparrows at October 18

### Nature Study

By Nelli Falzgraf

Seeds, the protein-rich, fat-laden product of forbs, abound in early fall and fuel sparrows for their annual migration.

As these little bouncy birds flock through our locale, many frequent backyard feeders, enriching our day with their energetic antics.

Phil Swanson will help us identify and enjoy this widespread species. He has provided engaging photographs of songbirds for spring events, like the Art of Gardening with the Omaha Botanical Gardens, Earth Day with the Sierra Club, Wings & Wetlands with Fontenelle Nature Association, and Men's Garden Club plant sale at Boys Town. He has photographed all of the

## The Omaha Raptor Team

A Committee of ASO



birds he's counted.

Please join us and perhaps bring information to share, 7:00 p.m. Wednesday, October 18, at the Rookery, 11809 Old Maple Road. Please call Nelli at 292-9687 for questions.

Waterfowl study will be our topic on November



### Field Trips, Continued from page 1

Hitchcock Nature Area is located just north of Council Bluffs. In Crescent, Iowa, turn left at the "T" intersection and head north four and one-half miles on Hwy 183. You will see the Hitchcock Nature Area sign on the left. Continue to the main building. Daily admission is \$2.00.

Our second outing this month will be held Saturday, October 21, when Jerry Toll will lead a hike through Boyer Chute NWR. He will help us identify those little brown birds we see



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### Environmental/ Legislative Action By lone Werthman

Summer is winding down, as is the Omaha Raptor Team's busy summer schedule. Most of the volunteers (feathered and otherwise) had a bit of a break through August, but late in the month one "volunteer" went diligently to work for us.

Dick O'Connor, fondly nicknamed "Bird Dad" by the team (pictured here with Jenny Henricksen) began work on the *ultimate* birdhouse.

Known to friends and family for his unique birdhouse building abilities, Dick was given his most elaborate assignment yet—an outside recreational area for our new male American Kestrel.



migrating this time of year. A number of "good" sparrows possible include Fox, LeConte's and Harris'.

Bring a lunch and binoculars and dress appropriately. We will meet Jerry at the main parking lot at 8:00 a.m. Boyer Chute is located 3 miles east of Ft. Calhoun, NE.



## Congress

it's October, and Congress is rac-

ing to adjourn in order to go out campaigning. Which bills will pass is your guess. Shall we make bets?

CARA: This is the last chance this year for CARA, the Conservation and Reinvestment Act. CARA will provide almost \$45 billion over the next 15 years for a broad array of federal, state and local programs aimed at protecting our birds, other wildlife, parks, coasts, forests, and wetlands.

CARA is touted as one of the greatest and most expansive conservation bills in our nation's history. It passed the House overwhelmingly in May. President Clinton has publicly stated he wants to sign the bill into law, and 63 bipartisan Senators have joined to urge passage before adjournment this year. However, action is not assured due to a limited legislative calendar and many other priorities. Keep watching.

Urging passage were Sen. Kerrey and Sen. Charles Grassley (IA). Sen. Hagel has gone from a possible "yes" vote to a "no" because, he says, "CARA mandates \$450 million a year for the next 15 years for new federal land acquisitions. This is a direct threat to private property rights and states' rights."

To answer some of his arguments, the CARA bill specifically says that approval of Congress is required before federal lands may be acquired with CARA funds, and all lands must be purchased from willing

## S-2878—NWR Centennial Commemoration Act

The National Wildlife Refuge System Centennial Commemoration Act was passed overwhelmingly by the House earlier this year. The Bill now waits for Senate action.

Consisting of more than 500 Refuges in 50 states, the Refuge System hosts more than 700 bird species and is primary habitat for about 250 threatened and endangered species.

The Refuge System has been a target of some members of Congress over the years and has received limited and inconsistent management attention. Passage of this Bill will create a commission to plan highly visible public projects marking the 100th anniversary of the NWR system.

## S-2797—Restoration of the Everglades

This Bill would authorize a series of projects to return the natural quantity, quality, timing and distribution of fresh water to the Everglades and to form a "river of grass."

The measure, however, has not passed the House, so the Senate must act immediately in order to give the House enough time to take action. The odds don't look good on this one.

## Riders

Things seem to get nastier and nastier as some die-hard members of Congress add riders to appropriation bills that are devastating to the environment.

A rider placed on the Missouri River part of the Senate Energy and Water Development

sent to the President to sign. At this writing, he is still contemplating whether or not to veto the Bill.

On September 21, members of the House-Senate Conference on Interior Appropriations included a Snake River anti-restoration rider. This would prohibit federal agencies from spending money to study dam removal to save endangered salmon. President Clinton is urged to veto the Interior Appropriations bill.

An anti-environmental rider has found its way into the Senate-passed version of the FY '01 Agriculture Appropriations bill. What hard-rock mining has to do with agriculture, I don't understand, but the mining industry and certain members of Congress sneaked a rider onto the Bill. This rider would block enforcement of stronger mining regulations.

Last year a bipartisan compromise agreement was forged allowing the Department of the Interior to strengthen environmental and taxpayer protection against irresponsible mining on federal public land. This rider violates that compromise. The Bill has passed both the House and Senate and is now in committee to work out differences between the House and Senate versions. The House version does not contain the rider. The President may or may not veto the Bill if the rider remains in the final version.

By the way, the 1872 Mining Act governing mining on federal public land has never been reformed. Under the law, the mining industry pays no

sellers. Condemnation cannot be used unless specifically authorized by Congress.

According to some, Sen. Harkin (IA) is not particularly against CARA, only against the (small?) amount of money that Iowa could get.

Appropriations Bill for royalties for extracting `01 would block Missouri billions of dollars of River dam reform. The gold, silver, and copper Bill did pass and has from these lands and been can purchase federal public land outright for as little as \$2.50 an acre. No environ

**Continued on page 5**



## October Bird Calendar

By Babs Padelford

Following is a partial list of birds that migrate through eastern Nebraska and western Iowa in October.

Be sure to call the Nebraska Birdline (402) 292-5325) for the latest sightings. The Nebraska Birdline is also available on the Internet.

**Water Birds:** grebes, pelicans, cormorants, ducks. Look for the more unusual ducks such as Surf, White-winged and Black Scoters at the end of the month and into November.

**Hawks:** Migration continues with the peak of Swainson's Hawks early in the month and Red-tailed Hawks throughout the month. The best hawk watching spot is Hitchcock Nature Area north of Crescent, Iowa. As many as six Northern Goshawks have been seen at Hitchcock in October. Other areas to see hawks: Neale Woods north of Omaha and Camp Wakonda in Bellevue.

**Gulls:** This is the time to look for unusual gulls: Sabine's Gull, Little Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake and jaegers. Good areas include the Salt Valley Lakes around Lincoln, Lake Manawa in Council Bluffs and Cunningham and Zorinsky Lakes in Omaha.

**Passerines:** Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Golden-crowned Kinglet. Warblers have mostly moved south except for Orange-crowned, Black-throated Green and Yellow-rumped.

**Sparrows:** Savannah, LeConte's, Fox, Lincoln's, Swamp, White-throated, Harris's, White-crowned, Dark-eyed Junco. The rarer Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow usually can be found at Jack Sinn WMA south of Ceresco and at Cracker Barrel Marsh and Arbor Lake, both in the Lincoln area.

## Swainson's Hawk



## Former ASO President Jim Ducey Publishes New Book

Jim Ducey, former ASO President, lists written records of Euro- the Missouri River in northeast Nebraska by Maximilian in 1833-34 and

## Conservation/Legislative Action,

**Continued from page 4**

mental standards exist for hard-rock mines, and cleanup requirements are minimal. Many mining companies have simply walked away from heavily polluted mine sites. Cleaning up abandoned mine sites is estimated to cost taxpayers \$32 to \$72 billion.

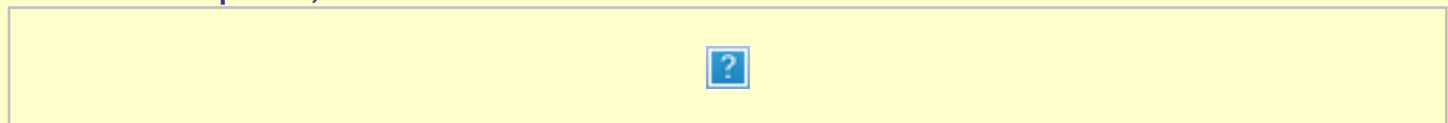
### Action Needed

Contact President Clinton

(common line: 1-202-456-1111):

- Veto the Agriculture Appropriations Bill if it contains the anti-environmental hard-rock mining rider;
- Veto the Interior Department Appropriations Bill if it contains the Snake River anti-environmental rider;
- Veto the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Bill because it contains the anti-environmental Missouri River Rider.

Join us for our next Conservation/Legislative Action meeting November 6, 7:30 p.m., ASO office at Heron Haven.



and free-lance writer, has published a new book, *Birds of the Untamed West: The History of Bird Life in Nebraska, 1750 to 1875*.

Jim will appear at Borders Books and Music at 132nd and Maple on Saturday, October 7, at 2:00 p.m. for a book signing.

His book traces the history of bird life in the state through the histories of Native American tribes and the ear

American explorers and the state's pioneer settlers. Utilizing the journals and recorded sightings of Pierre Tabeau, Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, Prince Maximilian, and John James Audubon, Ducey provides complete historic records of each species sighted in the state, including date of sighting and location.

The book details how the Sandhill Cranes, for example, were noted along

south of the Platte River by Audubon in 1843.

Ducey describes, using many of the original witnesses' own words, the great variety of trees and shrubs of the Missouri River, the open prairies of the Platte River Valley, the extensive wetlands of the rainwater basin and the natural shallow-water lakes of the Sandhills.

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## Notes from Nature

By Jerry Toll

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## Field Identification of Fall Empidonax in Nebraska

The Empidonax genus of North American flycatchers are difficult to separate to species for even the most ardent birder. Most of us rely on vocalizations and behavioral quirks to identify them, and when they are quiet, we pass them off as just "Emps."

Ross Silcock, co-author of the soon-to-be-released "Birds of Nebraska," has come up with a key to separate Empidonax in both the eastern and western portions of our state. It is reprinted here from an original posting on NeBirds@rip.physics.unk.edu.

This is a "field key" designed to sort through the expected possibilities using key structural features. Of course *all* of these features must be seen *well* to enable an ID to be approached. By the way, this key is no way to ID vagrants.

Look for the following categories:

1. Underbill color (mostly dark, about half dark, tip only dark).
2. Bill size (small to large).
3. Eye-ring boldness (virtually absent to bold).
4. Eye-ring shape (evenly round, tear-dropped to rear).
5. Primary (wing) extension (long or about equal to tertials, medium or about half tertials, short or about a third or less tertials).

### Key to (Nebraska) Panhandle, July-September

- A. Underbill mostly dark: **Hammond's Flycatcher** (verify: bill very small, eye-ring bold and tear-dropped to rear, primary extension long, fresh plumage with quite a bit of yellow on flanks).
- B. Underbill about half dark: **Dusky Flycatcher** (verify: bill pointy and straight-sided; eye-ring bold, usually tear-dropped to rear; primary extension medium).
- C. Bill tip dark: **Gray Flycatcher** (verify: bill shaped like Dusky; eye-ring evenly round, medium shaped; primary extension medium; pumps tail like phoebe). Rarest of the western Empids, especially in fall.

D. Underbill all orange

- a. Bill small, some dusky below: **Least Flycatcher** (verify: bill small, straight, not out or convex; eye-ring bold, usually evenly rounded but not tear-dropped; primary extension very short).
- b. Bill medium, bold eye-ring: **Cordilleran Flycatcher** (verify: bill medium, bold, tear-dropped to rear; primary extension medium). Also **Pacific Slope Flycatcher**.
- c. Bill medium, eye-ring weak or absent: **Willow Flycatcher** (verify: primary extension medium. Includes **Alder Flycatcher** also. Alders show an even, rounded eye-ring which is still thin.

### Key to East (Nebraska) May to September

All have orange underbills and bills about the same size except for the panhandle which is much more of a challenge than the panhandle unless vocalizing.

- A. Primary extension very short: **Least Flycatcher** (verify: see above).
- B. Primary extension very long: **Acadian Flycatcher** (verify: eye-ring bold, evenly rounded; bill large).
- C. Primary extension medium:
  - a. Weak eye-ring but usually present: **Willow or Alder Flycatcher** (verify: eye-ring weak or absent; bill medium; primary extension medium) (separate by call or song).
  - b. Bold eye-ring, evenly rounded: **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** (verify: eye-ring bold, evenly rounded; throat in spring).

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## Article by Mary Mick on Heron Haven is Published

Kudos to ASO member Mary Mick, whose article on Audubon's



Also featured was an interested view of our boardwalk, photo by Ben Blackwell.

**Birdline**

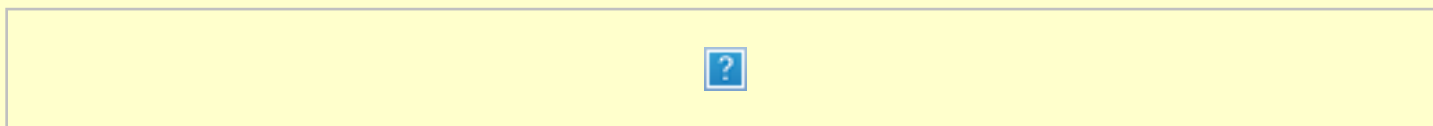


For an update on the sightings in the state, call 292- 5325.

Report your sightings after listening to the tape.



If you find an injured bird of prey, contact a Raptor Recovery volunteer at 402-734-6817 or 402-498-9869.



## Audubon at Work - October

By lone Werthman

### Mississippi River

ASO members Betty Allen, Eunice Levisay and I just returned from a three-day conference on the Mississippi River held in Dubuque, IA; Sinsinawa, Wisconsin; and on the River itself. We toured the River and its backwaters in small motor boats. National Audubon brought us up to date on the part their efforts play in restoring the degraded part of Old Man River, sister to our Missouri.

The enthusiasm of the 250 Audubon members attending from Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois was contagious.

We soon realized that, just as we have learned about the Missouri, the Mississippi that once provided a healthy habitat for migrating birds, waterfowl, mammals and fish is giving up its life in the name of "progress." Both rivers have paid a heavy price in lost habitat, declining wildlife diversity and

Heron Haven. Nelly Falzgraf, Nature Study Chair this year, has put together some fine learning sessions for the coming months. Her column appears on page 3 of this issue.

Our environmental education center is just now ready to fly, taking off, so to speak. This past month we entertained several Omaha citizen clubs with lectures on Heron Haven's history and with hikes on the trails. One Saturday I gave a study on birds to 50 people—30 children and their parents from across the city, who were participating in the environmental education outings program "Eco Kids Club." The Club is sponsored by the Sierra Club Educational Foundation and directed by Melissa Gardner of the Sierra Club and ASO.

Contractors are now working in Heron Haven building the photographic blind way back in the wild area along the waterfront.

have been meeting with other environmental groups in Nebraska and have formed a Nebraska Environmental Round Table to share problems, national, state and local legislative issues, and present possible solutions.

At every meeting someone has recommended that we need representation on the Governor's advisory boards, local commissions, and so forth.

We also come up with names of persons who would best represent the environmental point of view. Most of all, we need to get into the action, even to run for elected office.

To answer the call, some ASO members have done just that. Tom Foster was elected to the Board of Directors of the Papio-Missouri Natural Resources District (PMNRD) a few years ago.



degraded water quality. Dan McGuinness, National Audubon's Upper Mississippi Campaign Director, told us of the next "Audubon Ark" trip from Cairo, Illinois, upriver 483 miles to Davenport, Iowa, with community celebrations in over 30 towns along the way. He informed us that at the Dubuque Mississippi River Museum, a new Ark will be built for Audubon for continuous travel excursions on the River.

For the record: 11 dams have been built on the Upper Mississippi, plus 9 in-channel lakes and 29 locks. The river is maintained at a depth of 9 feet; 82% of the flood plain has been cut off.

### On the Home Front

Many of you missed a fine Nature Study lecture on hawks given by Clem Klaphake Monday, September 18, at

This project has been in the planning for four years. (It's always best to have the money before construction starts. )

" Nice News! When ASO took our Jensen Prairie Conservation easement papers to the Douglas County Assessor's office for tax filing, they informed us they would downgrade our taxes to "green space" rather than from commercial to agriculture.

ASO had decided at the time of purchase that we would pay taxes just as all property owners must, rather than invoke our non-profit tax exempt status. For the record, most Audubon sanctuaries pay taxes on all properties they own, even though by law in most states, non-profits are not required to do so.

### Round Table/Election

For the past four years, ASO and other Audubon chapters in the state

Maryanna Anderson ran for election to the Board of the PMNRD in her subdistrict last year. She lost by fewer than 1,000 votes.

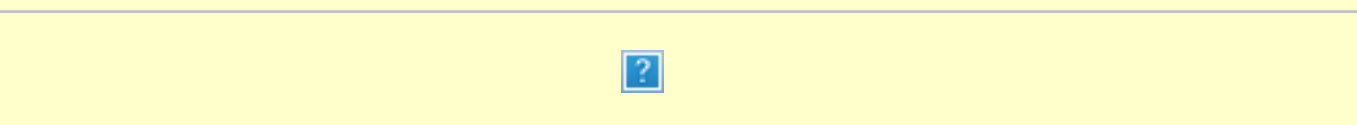
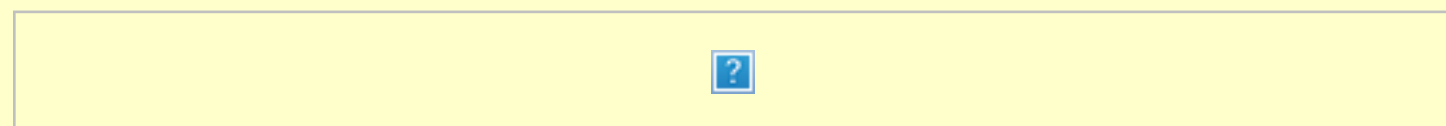
This year Melissa Gardner of ASO has earned her place on the November ballot in Subdistrict 7 for a four-year term on the PMNRD Board.

The Papio-Missouri NRD has the responsibility of protecting and managing our soil and water in the 1,745 square miles along the Papio and Missouri Rivers in Nebraska.

Board members decide flood control projects, dams, hike/bike trails on the levees and in the county, as well as recreation, water quality, wetlands and wildlife enhancement.

I believe the Papio-Missouri NRD Board is one of the most important local items on the ballot in the November election.

We as environmentalists should study the candidates in each of our districts and vote in November.



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## Memorials

The Audubon Society of Omaha greatly appreciates the gift you send. Your gift will be received by the person you specify.

When sending your gift, please identify the person you wish to memorialize. Please also give the name and address of the person to be notified.

## Bequests

A bequest to Audubon is a gift to those who wish to support the Society's work.



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Phone: 445-4138

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2nd Vice President Ed Higgins, 3717 No. 93rd St, Omaha 68134 572-1957

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