

The Meadowlark

September 2011

Volume 40 Issue 7

ASO is a Chapter

*of the National Audubon
Society*

*Serving Eastern Nebraska
and Western Iowa*

Purple Martins and the Roost at the Med Center

Why do Purple Martins choose a certain site for their roost each fall? Something special about it—an attraction that most humans don't notice?

On Thursday, September 8, Justin Rink will present a program featuring the Purple Martin Roost in Omaha at the University of Nebraska Med Center, 44th & Farnam. He will explain the life cycle of these unique swallows and what makes the Med Center such a magnet for these birds.

Justin is a 32-year-old Illinois native who started birding at the age of 15. He has resided in Illinois, Wisconsin, Florida, Costa Rica and Nebraska. Some of his past nature-related jobs include Season Interpreter in Illinois and Naturalist in Wisconsin and Florida.

He has birded extensively throughout the United States as well as in central and Southwestern Mexico and Costa Rica. He has been a field trip leader since 2002 for the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival in Harlingen, Texas.

As field trip chair for ASO, Justin has rediscovered local areas such as Forest Lawn Cemetery, Lake Bennington, and "Phantom" Lake. He co-discovered the Purple Martin roost at 44th & Farnam in

is the go-to guy for folks inquiring about the martins.

Currently an Omaha resident, Justin works in plant sales as well as tree and shrub guy at Indian Creek Nursery. He is a brand partner for a phenomenal liquid supplement and healthy energy drink.

For intriguing information about the Purple Martin roost, join us Thursday, September 8, at 7:00 P.M. at the Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances Street (one block south of 45th & Center).

A brief business meeting will follow the program, and the evening will conclude with cookies and a social time. Nonmembers are always welcome.

Field Trip Saturday, September 17- Uplands of Fontenelle Forest

Join Justin Rink for a field trip to the uplands of Fontenelle Forest.

We will be searching for fall migrants and learning about the subtle plumage differences of those confusing fall warblers.

By Justin Rink

We will meet at 9:00 A.M. at the Fontenelle Forest Nature Center main parking lot. Bring insect spray, sunscreen and water.

For additional information, please call Laurine at 451-3647 or Justin at 904-415-3282.

Postcard From The President

The Flooding Missouri River Near Omaha—Its Effects on People and Wildlife

I was taught when I was young that the annual floods that brought renewed fertility to the Nile region were the basis for the rise of civilization of Egypt. How unlike that of the Nile is the flooding this summer on the Missouri River. I think about the hundreds if not thousands of farmers and residents of small towns who have lost their homes, their crops and their livelihoods for this year, if not in the future.

This had the potential of an epic flood of short duration that would sweep away everything in the Valley in its path. Instead it was moderated, prolonged and controlled by the upstream system of dams that protected the many but had a devastating influence on the few who have taken the brunt of the damage.

Not only does the wide Missouri

By Jer Toll

destroyed. The riparian woodlands will die or be diminished. The nesting Bald Eagles should have had great nesting success this year but will lose their nesting trees.

The floodwaters were also spawning grounds not available for many generations of fish. Many fish will die as the waters recede, but many more will return to the river. The endangered pallid sturgeon may have benefited from the flood. In Iowa, catch limits for fishermen in the flooded areas have been lifted.

As the waters recede, migrating wading birds, terns, waterfowl, kingfishers, and scavengers will benefit by the bonanza of trapped fish in pools. Migrating shorebirds will find mudflats galore! It will be an interesting HawkWatch at Hitchcock Nature Center this fall. I expect the numbers to be either more or less because thermals do not form over water, affecting where the hawks fly.

floodplain narrow just north of Omaha/Council Bluffs but also levees that protected our cities created a bottleneck, forcing all of the flood water back into the channel. The bottleneck acted as a dam backing up water north of town from bluff to bluff almost to Missouri Valley and Blair.

At the time of this writing, the floodwaters are beginning to recede, but it will be months before the true impact of the flood will be realized. Roads destroyed, farmsteads deserted, fields enriched by silt in some places and scoured into lakes or made sandy in others. And the trees. All that have stood in water so long will die, according to Jack Phillips, a consulting arborist.

How will the flooding affect habitat and wildlife? Both DeSoto and Boyer Chute NWR's have been closed this summer. Boyer Chute has been almost entirely under water. I was not able to find out the extent of the flooding at DeSoto because I could not contact them. All of the thousands of acres of restored native grasslands were flooded and mostly

This is the summer of discontent wherein Washington is dysfunctional and cannot agree on anything except slashing funding for most everything. State and local government entities are struggling to find money to just maintain services.

Where will the money for recovery come from? Millions have already been spent maintaining and strengthening the levees. The Corps of Engineers will, after the river returns to its banks, inspect the flood control systems of dams, channel control, and levees and hope to find the money for necessary repairs done in time for the next spring flood season. Interstate and highway roadbeds will need repair. This is a primary function of government so that although it may take time, it will be funded.

For the affected residents of the Valley, the struggle is only beginning. County roads and utilities will need to be rebuilt. The farms and homes residents left behind will be radically different from the ones they were forced to leave.

Environmental Protections Under Attack

By Bob Fuchs

The U.S. House of Representatives will continue debating a spending bill for the Interior Department and the Environmental Protection Agency after the August recess. Prior to the recess, a "rider," or policy provision, which would have prohibited the EPA from ever again designating a species as endangered or threatened, was fortunately removed. However, 202 representatives voted to retain this extreme position, including Nebraska's own Congressman Lee Terry.

Wilderness Protections - Interior Secretary Ken Salazar wants to use his legal authority to limit oil, gas and commercial development on public lands that may someday qualify for permanent wilderness protection by Congress. This rider would block him from spending any money to do so.

Information source: *New York Times* website. This information is also available from numerous environmental organization websites, such as Earthjustice.org

Other riders still placed on the appropriations bill:

Greenhouse Gases - The EPA is planning to issue new regulations limiting greenhouse gas emissions from power plants and other industrial sources. This rider would force the agency to take no action for one year.

Fuel Economy - This would stop an agreement between automakers and government agencies to produce cleaner, more efficient vehicles for the model years 2017-25, barring the EPA from spending even a dime on paperwork or enforcement.

Mountaintop Mining - Two riders in this bill weaken protections against mountaintop mining, the destructive practice that has already ruined much of the Appalachian landscape.

Grand Canyon - This would nullify a moratorium on new uranium mining on 1,000,000 acres near the Grand Canyon. The moratorium is intended to protect the Colorado River aquifer, the source of drinking water for roughly 27 million people. The rider also blocks the review process that could lead to permanent protection, or "withdrawal," of those lands.

Clean Water - Over the last 25 years, court decisions and administrative rulings have steadily weakened protections for wetlands and small streams under the Clean Water Act, exposing them to commercial development. This would block the EPA from going ahead with its proposal to strengthen those protections.

Coal Ash - This would prevent the EPA from labeling the toxic ash from coal-fired power plants as hazardous waste, so businesses would be spared the expense of storing or recycling it safely.

Florida Waters - This would prevent the EPA from enforcing a rule limiting runoff of pollutants like phosphorus and nitrogen into Florida's lakes, rivers and, ultimately, the Everglades. That means

All of these riders are intended to provide specific benefits to particular corporations or industries so that they are not forced to consider their environmental effects as part of their costs of doing business. This means that tax money would eventually have to be spent to clean up the messes left behind by coal, nuclear, poultry, sugar, petroleum, and others.

Please contact your Representative Lee Terry or Jeff Fortenberry, and Senators Ben Nelson and Mike Johanns, to voice your opposition to these riders. Contact information is located in this newsletter, as always.

Fall Bird Seed Sale October 22 & 23

By Kathleen Crawford-Rose

It is not too soon to be thinking about your bird seed order for this fall. Our supplier, Des Moines Feed, gives us their estimated fall prices the last week of August, and you will receive your order blank in mid-September.

Please consider ordering some Audubon seed products as the profits from this sale are used to fund many of our educational programs. If you have friends or neighbors who might be interested, call or email Kathleen Crawford-Rose (292-8912 or katcr@cox.net) with their names and addresses.

We will also be asking members for help with the numerous tasks, some requiring strong muscles, others not. The seed bags need to be unloaded at garage sites, and staffers need to be on hand on the dates of the sale for loading and paper work.

Please put these dates on your calendar and give Jerry Toll an email - geritol48@cox.net or phone - call 402-453-9239 to let him know that you are available to assist with this major fundraiser.

More On The Pipeline and Birds' Survival

By Kathy Schwery

Most readers of this newsletter already know of the proposed new oil pipeline route which would cross Nebraska's fragile Sandhills above the shallow Ogallala aquifer. The Keystone XL pipeline would deliver tar sands oil from Alberta, Canada, to refineries in the southern United States. A decision on allowing the pipeline is in the hands of the State Department, and that decision will be announced this fall.

Recently Nebraska's Representative Lee Terry pushed through the House a most unwise bill to speed up the process, when in actuality much more thought needs to be put into the decision of whether the pipeline should be allowed. It is difficult to understand why our Governor and Legislative officials are not doing more to have the pipeline rerouted away from the Sandhills.

There have been many oil spills within the existing pipeline system carrying tar sands oil, so the great concern for Nebraska's water supply is certainly justified. The sand oil is particularly corrosive to pipelines, and the Canadian company Enbridge pipeline illustrates the point very well. The oil from a typical disaster of the type that happened in Michigan should have been cleaned up fairly quickly—skimmed, vacuumed, and absorbed from the surface.

However, the heavy, viscous crude from the tar sands in Alberta is bitumen, so thick that it has to be diluted with a thinning compound made up of natural

especially harmful effects on birds.

The report says that as many as 170 million birds breed in the 35 million acres of the Boreal that may be developed for tar sands oil. Not only will many of these birds die from loss and fragmentation of habitat and from contact with ponds filled with toxic mining waste, but future generations of these birds will be lost. In addition to the loss of breeding habitat for songbirds, the boreal forest is globally important as a flyway for large numbers of wetland-dependent birds. As the tar sands oil industry expands, it will place at risk the shorebirds and others who use the wetlands.

An article on tar sands oil mining in the July/August 2011 issue of *Audubon Magazine* also notes the importance of the boreal forest, stating that the forest provides habitat for 30% of the continent's land birds—at least 215 species. Northbound birds from all four flyways converge on the forest to rest and feed or nest. *Audubon Magazine* refers to the pipeline as "1,661 Miles of Trouble," and indeed it will be, not only for birds of the northern forest but also for the water supply of the states the pipeline crosses.

The NRDC report states that tar sands oil development causes harm through every facet of the process. Projected tar sands oil extraction will cause the strip mining of 740,000 acres, which means direct loss of habitat and wetlands. The

gas, large amounts of benzene and other toxic chemicals, just to make the oil liquid enough to flow through the pipeline. This combination is known as DilBit, and it is difficult to remove because it sinks into the water column and coats the river bottom. A year later, scientists are still working on a plan to clean the submerged oil from the bottom of the Kalamazoo River.

An important concern with tar sands oil extraction, often overlooked in the talk of spills and water contamination, is how this massive drilling process in Canada's northern (boreal) forest will affect America's birds. A report from the Natural Resources Defense Council sheds light on the subject, and the conclusions are disheartening for bird lovers.

The negative impacts of tar sands oil development are many, and the NRDC lists open-pit mines, habitat loss and fragmentation, toxic waste holding ponds, and air and water pollution in the boreal forest as having

massive amounts of water needed for the mining process will affect wetlands and alter rivers in the area. Tar sands oil mining causes air and water pollution which will harm birds and their food sources. This type of oil production is already the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions, producing as much as three times the pollution per barrel as does regular oil production. The huge tailing ponds, which contain toxic chemicals, will cause heavy mortality rates among birds. Combining the various estimates of the loss of birds from tar sands mining and from operations in the area, the Natural Resources Defense Council authors estimate that bird losses could reach staggering proportions.

The tremendous loss of birds and the possibility of an oil spill into our Ogallala aquifer makes the Keystone pipeline a bad idea in every respect. Nebraskans should be in complete agreement with a *New York Times* editorial which stated, "On the merits—economic and environmental and in terms of future energy policy, this is the wrong pipeline for the wrong oil."

Addresses to Remember

President Barack Obama

The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW

Washington D.C. 20500-0001

Comments: 202 456-1111

Senator Ben Nelson

U.S. Senate, Washington DC 20510;
202-224-6551;

ASO is offering two choices of membership: one that 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.

The second option is local membership that includes receiving *The Meadowlark* and participation in all of our local activities. Dues from this membership are all applied to our chapter.

Membership in the National Audubon Society

Name _____

Street _____

fax 202-228-0012; Lincoln phone
#402-437-5246;

Omaha phone #391-3411;

Omaha address: 7602 Pacific St,
#205, 68114

Senator Michael Johanns

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

Lincoln: 402 476-1400

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

Representative Lee Terry

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

Omaha Address: 11717 Burt St,
Omaha 68154

Omaha phone: (402) 397-9944

Representative Jeff Fortenberry

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

Lincoln phone: (402) 438-1598

Lincoln Address:

Governor Dave Heineman

Capitol Bldg, Box 94848 Lincoln, NE
68509

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

Mayor Jim Suttle

Omaha/Douglas Civic Center

1819 Farnam St, Omaha NE 68183

Phone: 444-5000 Hot Line: 444-5555

Lincoln Capitol Switchboard: 402

City_____State_____ Zip Code_____

Phone_____E-mail_____

Introductory Membership (1st Year \$21)

Make check payable to National Audubon Society Mail
to Audubon Society of Omaha

19612 Ridgeway Road

Plattsmouth NE 678048 COZCP030Z

Membership in Audubon Society of Omaha only

Name_____

Street_____

City_____State_____ Zip_____

Phone_____E-mail_____

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

Mail to: Audubon Society of Omaha

19612 Ridgeway Road

Plattsmouth NE 68048

Washington Capitol Switchboard

Senate: 202 224-3121; House: 202
225-3121

Memorials

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

When sending a gift, please identify the person you wish to memorialize and the name and address of the person to be notified.

Mail to Audubon Society of Omaha,

P.O. Box 3542, Omaha NE 68103-0542.

**Please send all changes of address to
djschw@windstream.com**

Bequests

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

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



**Audubon Society of Omaha, Mailing Address: P. O. Box 3542, Omaha
68103-0542**

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

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

Elected Officers:

**President Jerry Toll..... 453-9239
1st Vice President Jackie Scholar..... 551-5045**

**2nd Vice President Linda Dennis..... 733-6548
Past President Clem Klaphake..... 292-2276**

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

Treasurer Dennis Kingery..... 556-9082

NAS Board Member Peter Cannon.. 608-251-1276

Recording Sec'y Laurine Blankenau.. 451-3647

Corres. Sec'y Vacant

Elected Directors: Jamie Vann..... 733-1891

Justin Rink..... 904-415-3282

Elliott Bedows..... 292-5017

Kathleen Rose..... 292-8912

Helen Bartee..... 391-3386

Jason McMeen..... 445-8279

Standing Committee Chairpersons:

**Conservation Bob Fuchs.....
553-8242 Education Clem
Klaphake..... 292-2276**

Field Trip Justin Rink.....904-415-3282

Finance Nelli Falzgraf..... 292-9687

Fund Raising Vacant

Membership Kathy Schwery..... 296-4788

Program Clem Klaphake 292-2276

**Natural Areas Mgt Eric
Scholar..... 551-5045**

Publication Laurine Blankenau 451-3647

Publicity Jackie Scholar..... 551-5045

The Meadowlark is published monthly September through May, plus a summer issue. The newsletter may be accessed on our web site, <http://audubon-omaha.org>

Send address changes to Kathy Schwery, 19612 Ridgeway Road, Plattsmouth NE 68048.

**Non-Profit
Organization**

**U.S. Postage
Paid**

**OMAHA,
NEBRASKA**

PERMIT NO. 79

Audubon Society of Omaha

P. O. Box 3542

Omaha NE 68103--0542
