



# Meadowlark

MAY/JUNE 2023  
VOL 52 ISSUE 3

Published by Audubon Society of Omaha, chapter of National Audubon Society since 1971

## Brown Creepers Aren't Creepy

By Julia Rawnsley

Is it a wren? Is it a woodpecker? What is that long-beaked bird pecking under the bark? Though the Brown Creeper's conservation status is considered "low concern," ASO members should consider themselves lucky to spot one. The Brown Creeper can be found in wooded areas, foraging for insects on large trees with ridged and furrowed bark. Most Nebraskans do not have this habitat in their backyard, but ASO member Tom Neneman is not most Nebraskans. Tom's property west of Immanuel Hospital, which includes a stream that originates about a mile north, has been largely untouched for 60 years. Tom says, "It is never too late to become an ASO member and to start adding a little something to your yard for birds and wildlife." Tom's reintroduction of native prairie grasses, bushes, and trees has no doubt contributed to the wide variety of birds and wildlife that he now appreciates seeing in his own backyard.

Of the Brown Creepers, Tom says, "They seem to hunt for food at dusk and dawn, and dislike sunny days. The little Creepers must have learned that the bright light makes it easier for predators to spot them." Tom also observes that relatively larger birds, such as Downy Woodpeckers, White Breasted Nuthatches, and Juncos, chase them away from trying to feed on pieces of suet that have fallen into the cracks between the bark. Taking pity on the tiny birds, Tom ensured that his local Brown Creepers were able to enjoy some treats away from the bullies during the long winter months.



The naturalist W.M. Tyler, writing in 1948, captured this species' energy and fragility in a memorable description, "*The Brown Creeper, as he hitches along the bole of a tree, looks like a fragment of detached bark that is defying the law of gravitation by moving upward over the trunk, and as he flies off to another tree he resembles a little dry leaf blown about by the wind.*"

Photo by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

### GREEN CORNER: HOW YOU CAN COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE

*Conservation begins at home; each of us can help restore our unique ecosystem.*

#### Cook out greener in May

Switch to gas. Gas grills are much more energy-efficient than charcoal grills and produce far fewer pollutants. If possible switch to natural gas – it's the cleanest fossil fuel and burns cleaner than propane grills.

#### Garden good guys June

Leave the opossums alone; they eat slugs, ticks, rodents, bugs, dead animals and are more beneficial than harmful. Opossums prefer rotting food, so generally, they won't eat your fresh vegetables.

# ON THE HORIZON

## May

### FIELD TRIP

SATURDAY, MAY 27

**What:** Prairie Birding Hike

Join us for a birding hike at the Audubon Society of Omaha Prairie Preserve. See what birds are back and what's blooming on the prairie. Learn about the history of the Preserve and our restoration and management efforts.

**Where:** Audubon Society of Omaha Prairie Preserve, 6720 Bennington Road

**When:** 9 a.m.

**How:** Register for this field trip at [audubon-omaha.org](http://audubon-omaha.org) on the calendar page. You will receive an email with directions and parking info.

**Who:** Members and the public (free)

### JUNE – AUGUST PROGRAMS

While Audubon Omaha doesn't offer summer programs, you can continue your birding and conservation education with Wachiska Audubon Society (Lincoln, NE.) which offers educational programs on the second Thursday of the month. To see upcoming programs and register for the meetings visit: [WachiskaAudubon.org](http://WachiskaAudubon.org).

# President's Letter: Change the Name?

by Christine Prescott, President, Audubon Society of Omaha

Dear members,

As we approach summer, I would like to take a moment to reflect on the mission and values of the Audubon Society of Omaha. Our organization is committed to the conservation and protection of birds and their habitats, as well as promoting the enjoyment and appreciation of nature. We believe that all people have a role to play in this effort, and we strive to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community.

With this in mind, I would like to bring to your attention to a matter that has been under discussion by our Board of Directors in recent months. Specifically, we have been considering the possibility of changing the name of our local Audubon Society, due to the negative history surrounding John J. Audubon, the 19th-century naturalist and artist for whom our organization is named.

While Audubon is widely recognized as a pioneer of American ornithology, and his art continues to inspire and educate people around the world, it is also true that he held deeply troubling views on race and ethnicity. As we strive to create a more inclusive and equitable society, we believe that it is important to acknowledge and address these historical realities, and to ensure that our organization's name reflects our commitment to these values.

We recognize that this is a complex and sensitive issue, and we want to hear from our members before making any decisions. **We invite you to share your thoughts and opinions on this matter by emailing us at [audubonomaha@gmail.com](mailto:audubonomaha@gmail.com) no later than August 31, 2023.** Your feedback will help inform our discussions and guide our decision-making process.

In the meantime, I want to emphasize that our commitment to the conservation and protection of birds and their habitats remains unchanged. We will continue to work tirelessly toward these goals, and we look forward to doing so with your support and participation.

Thank you for your ongoing dedication to our mission, and for your contributions to our Audubon Society of Omaha community.

# The eyes have it – your photos

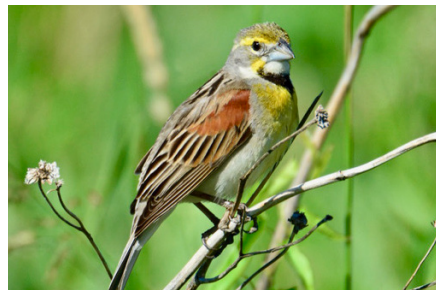
We love to see your bird photos! Please email them to [photos@audubonomaha.org](mailto:photos@audubonomaha.org)



Blue Jay, Photo by Tad Leeper



Yellow Warbler, Photo by Jennifer Dobey



Dickcissel, Photo by Bob Tooley



Cooper's Hawk, Photo by Cindy Marr



# Winter Waterfowl, Sandhill Cranes Make Outings Memorable *by Amy Campagna*

On February 25, an eager bunch of birders, both new and experienced, gathered at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge east of Blair, Nebraska, for some winter waterfowl watching. Ranger Rea shared a little history of the refuge, noted highlights from recent years and helped us spot birds among the masses in the open water on the lake from the great viewing area in the Visitor's Center. We saw several species of geese and ducks as well as Trumpeter Swans, Bald Eagles, Red-tailed Hawks, a Northern Harrier, and a couple of coyotes. The Goldeneyes put on quite a show, perfecting their head-throw-kick courtship display!

Audubon Omaha members were invited to join a virtual sandhill crane program and tour, courtesy of our friends at the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary on March 13. Beka Yates from the Sanctuary presented on Crane Behavior Basics. Participants learned about common behaviors cranes display along the Platte River, as well as conservation efforts by Rowe Sanctuary to help preserve the critical Platte River ecosystem. Participants then joined Sanctuary staff viewing the livestream of cranes coming in to land on the river for the evening.



## Precious Metals Mining in Nebraska: Niobium or Opprobrium?

*by Dan Murphy*

With apologies to the Sixties-era rock band, Rare Earth (metals) may soon be found near Elk Creek, Nebraska. So, "Get Ready," 'cause here they come.

NioCorp Developments, based in Centennial, Colorado, confirmed earlier reports that the mining concern will break ground on what could become the nation's second-most-productive source of the precious rare earth metal, niobium, as soon as research verifies that the Elk Creek Critical Minerals Project is economically viable and financing is finalized. Scandium and titanium also will be mined and refined at Elk Creek. The company has been clearing brush and trees from the proposed site to prepare the land for extensive grading.

Once completed, the facility will become "North America's only niobium / scandium / titanium advanced materials manufacturing facility co-located with an underground mine," NioCorp notes on its website.

### WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

From a strategic standpoint, niobium is one of only a few metals that the National Defense Stockpile purchases. Currently, the U.S. imports all of the

niobium it uses from either Canada or Brazil, the only two countries now producing this rare earth metal. "You probably don't look at cars like I do," NioCorp CEO Mark Smith told WOWT's Brian Mastre. "I see cars. I see niobium. Every single car that has a steel chassis has it. It makes the car lighter, which means the car can go further on a tank of gas. It's part of the environment movement. Scandium does for aluminum what niobium does for steel. You add just a little bit to aluminum and it makes it stronger and lighter."

### WHAT COULD THIS MEAN FOR NEBRASKA?

Estimates indicate that the project could bring 450 full-time jobs to Southeast Nebraska and generate as many as 2,000 additional support positions. Company officials stress that they plan to "hire local" and support area businesses during and after construction. KETV reports that the total value of the project could reach \$3 billion, with the state benefiting from millions of dollars of new tax revenues. The precious metals mined are expected to advance lower carbon economy goals and enable defense and aerospace technologies.

### BUT WHAT ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT?

NioCorp's website says that, "The Elk Creek Project has been designed to minimize the environmental footprint of niobium, scandium and titanium production." CEO Smith emphasized to WOWT that, "This isn't just talk. We started as in the health, safety and environmental world. So, to us, operating a business in the right way keeps people safe and the environment as unharmed as possible. That's the way we do business."

### THE JURY IS OUT

Ethically managed businesses always try to balance economic and environmental considerations. But, over time, the environment always has the final say. Stewards of the environment typically play the long game. Nebraskans would do well to remember the inscription carved over the main entrance to their Capitol: "The Salvation of the State is Watchfulness in the Citizen."

*Sources: NioCorp.com, WOWT.com, KETV.com, Omaha.com*



# Student Art Show: What a Big Deal!

by Virginia Stauffer

With nearly 700 entries, the 2023 Audubon Society of Omaha's Student Art Contest was bigger than ever. Students and their families attending the show were excited to see their work hanging in the atrium of the Harper Center on the Creighton University campus.

Ribbons and prizes were presented to more than 300 students, winners of excellence and merit, during the awards ceremony held in the auditorium. It was great to see all of the art AND all of the students who attended.



Bennett I., 4th grade  
BEST OF SHOW K-4: Realism



Bentley B., 4th grade  
BEST OF SHOW K-4: Graphic Design



Kiersten H., 6th grade  
BEST OF SHOW 5-8: Realism



Anna K., 6th grade  
BEST OF SHOW 5-8: Realism



Lillian S., 8th grade  
BEST OF SHOW 5-8: Graphic Design



Ava S., 12th grade  
BEST OF SHOW 9-12: Realism



Dakota S., 10th grade  
BEST OF SHOW 9-12: Realism





Aleita J., 2nd grade  
BEST OF SHOW K-4: Recycled



Calia R., 2nd grade  
BEST OF SHOW K-4: Cartooning



Harrison C., 4th grade  
2023 Meadowlark Award



Matilda B., 5th grade  
BEST OF SHOW 5-8: Recycled



Claire, 5th grade  
BEST OF SHOW 5-8: Cartooning



Brianna N., 12th grade  
BEST OF SHOW 9-12: Recycled

Peyton L., 12th grade  
BEST OF SHOW 9-12: Graphic Design

Shown here are the winners of Best of Show – a small representation of the entries. Best of Show winners received \$20 gift cards donated by Blick Art Materials. Thanks, Blick!

BIG thanks to all who volunteered during the different phases of organizing and putting on this event: Sue Brusnahan, Andrew Callison, Charlie Callison, Wayne Fithian, Lindsay Hueftle, Elle Laddusaw, Sarah Laddusaw, Lin McGloins, Steve Geddes, and Jaye Welch. And special thanks to the Art Show Committee: Anne Maguire, Julia Rawnsley, Jackie Scholar and Katy Simmons.

Most of all, thanks to the students, teachers and parents who made the art happen. We couldn't do it without you!



# Semiannual Sale Funds ASO & Keeps Our Feathered Friends Well-fed

by Betty and John Fullerton

Thanks to all who ordered bird seed during Audubon Society of Omaha's winter sale. Volunteers distributed 25,700 pounds of products to 186 loyal customer-supporters who, in turn, distributed them to untold numbers of appreciative birds in Eastern Nebraska and Western Iowa.

Your orders drive ASO's local educational programs and conservation activities. Our semiannual bird seed sales are ASO's largest fundraisers every year, netting \$18,700 in profit this fiscal year.

This endeavor couldn't be accomplished without our dedicated volunteers who worked in the warehouse, made deliveries, or brought refreshments. Volunteers included: Charlie and Steven Callison; Roger Carroll; Mark Cave; Jeff Cleve; Jim Commers; Amy Campagna; Alistair Cullum and Katy Simmons; Ken Czyx; Kyle Finley; Tim Kautzman; Anne and Jim Maguire; Andy Miller and Melissa Sitze; Christine Prescott; David Nichols; Michael Schaffer; Duane and Kathy Schwery; and Bob Wells and Coleen Stice.

Thanks again to all who ordered and volunteered this winter. Be on the lookout in September for information on our fall 2023 bird seed sale.

Audubon Omaha's twice yearly bird seed sales are ASO's largest fundraisers of the year. Profits support our local educational programs and conservation activities.



## Looking for a Bird Buddy? by Dan Murphy



Let's be honest: What happens in Vegas doesn't always stay in Vegas. And that's a good thing. Especially when it comes to Bird

Buddy, a smart bird feeder introduced at this year's Consumer Electronics Show.

**MYBIRDBUDDY.COM** proudly proclaims that "The future of birdwatching has landed," with an innovative line of feeders that snap photos of everyone who drops in for a fly-by feeding. Sporting a powerful AI-driven camera, Bird Buddy can notify you when your visitors arrive, identify more than 1,000 species of birds, and assemble the pics into an immaculate collection you can share with other birding buddies through a mobile app.

Kyle Buzzard (yes, that's his real name), Bird Buddy's co-founder and chief hardware office, tells the Associated Press that, "We try to gamify

the collection so it's really a fun game you can play — almost like a real-life Pokémon Go with real animals and wildlife in your backyard."

But, wait ... there's more. Starting at \$199, the basic blue or yellow feeder offers a high-resolution camera, bird species recognition and history, a built-in microphone, and bird arrival notifications. Add-ons include a detachable solar panel (to power your Bird Buddy), a wall mount, a fence mount (currently so popular it's out of stock), a suet ball holder, and a water fountain. Operation requires access to your home Wi-Fi network, which sends the stream to your mobile device. Bird Buddy's engineers are researching local storage solutions, but, in the meantime, you can recharge the battery using the USB-C cable included in your package — or plug it into a power source to keep it running constantly.

Built to last, Bird Buddy can operate in temperatures as cold as -5 degrees or as hot as 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Just detach the feeder and take it inside to

protect it from extreme weather. What about squirrels, you ask? Bird Buddy's architects designed its structure to withstand raids from these dastardly perch pirates, but nothing is squirrel-proof. The best the designers could do is make Bird Buddy sturdy enough not to break due to repeated depredations.

Currently in the top one percent of all crowdfunding projects, Bird Buddy was hatched as a Kickstarter project in 2020. Since the company starting shipping feeders in September 2022, every single Bird Buddy in its inventory—100,000 in all—has been sold. The high-flying feeder firm is now accepting pre-orders for a projected shipment sometime in 2023.

Starved for companionship? Consider dipping your beak into a Bird Buddy.

**NOTE:** *Please remember to mount any bird feeder away from windows to avoid bird strikes, and clean it regularly to prevent avian flu.*



# Special Plants Prosper on Our ASO Prairie by Drew Granville

Prairies are large open grasslands that once stretched across hundreds of millions of acres of Central North America. According to annual rainfall amounts and their distance from the Rocky Mountains, prairies fall into three categories — tallgrass, mixed, and shortgrass. Tallgrass prairies were most impacted by colonization and lack of fire and are now among the world's most endangered ecosystems. Today, less than 4% of tallgrass prairies survive, and about 2% of those are in Nebraska.

Audubon Society of Omaha's prairie (formerly called Jensen Prairie) is a 20-acre public remnant tallgrass prairie at 6720 Bennington Road, near 72nd and McKinley Streets. Virgin prairie makes up the front 10 acres, while the back 10 constitute a prairie restoration. Among the flora are a diverse range of iconic Eastern Nebraska tallgrass prairie grasses and forbs (herbaceous flowering plants other than grasses), such as Big Bluestem, Butterfly Milkweed, Golden Alexander, Stiff Sunflower, Prairie Phlox, Flowering Spurge, and Round-headed Bush Clover. Nebraska Game and Parks' Nebraska Natural Legacy Project documents three plant species — Dwarf Larkspur, Bluntleaf Milkweed, and Prairie Coreopsis — as "special concerns."

Dwarf Larkspur (*Delphinium tricorne*) is a blue-flowered buttercup native to Southeastern Nebraska counties, mostly along the Missouri River. Normally growing in deep woods or along woodland edges, Dwarf Larkspur can sometimes (rarely) be observed in moist prairies. The more common Prairie Larkspur (*Delphinium virescens*) also grows at the Audubon Society of Omaha prairie, but it produces white flowers.

Bluntleaf Milkweed (*Asclepias amplexicaulis*) is a rare tallgrass prairie specialist species found in some Eastern Nebraska counties. Flowers displayed in an open cluster on long stalks far above clasping leaves distinguish this notable plant from the 16 other milkweed species present in Nebraska.

Prairie Coreopsis (*Coreopsis palmata*) is a yellow wildflower that can be common on prairies in extreme Eastern Nebraska counties. Unlike Plains Coreopsis (*Coreopsis tinctoria*), Prairie Coreopsis lacks a red ring around the center of the flower and is not widely available in wildflower seed mixes available at retail. Deeply divided into three narrow lobes, characterized by a longer central lobe, Prairie Coreopsis leaves are unlike the leaves of any other plant in Nebraska.

All three of these plants are defined as Tier 2 species in Nebraska, and they all have the potential to be listed as "threatened" or "endangered." Tallgrass prairies live a delicate existence and require active maintenance through prescribed fire and invasive species removal. If you hike in one of these incredibly rare habitats, please leave everything as you find it: the few remaining tallgrass prairies are an irreplaceable part of Nebraska's ecological heritage.



Left: Dwarf Larkspur (*Delphinium tricorne*); Middle: Bluntleaf Milkweed (*Asclepias amplexicaulis*); Right: Prairie Coreopsis (*Coreopsis palmata*). Photos by Drew Granville, taken at the Audubon Society of Omaha Prairie

## RESOURCES & INFO:

### HOW TO JOIN/RENEW/UPDATE

Join or renew your membership online at [auduon-omaha.org](http://auduon-omaha.org) and select "Get Involved." Save paper and avoid confusion. Your membership with National Audubon automatically makes you a member of Audubon Society of Omaha.

### CHANGE OF ADDRESS?

Please call National Audubon toll-free at 1-844-428-3826, or send an email to [audubon@emailcustomerservice.com](mailto:audubon@emailcustomerservice.com)

### STAY CONNECTED

Join our email list at [audubon-omaha.org](http://audubon-omaha.org) under "Get Involved."

### BEQUESTS & GIFTS

A bequest to Audubon Society of Omaha is a gift to those who will succeed us and secure our natural heritage. Want to send a gift on behalf of someone? Mail your check along with the name and address of the person to be notified to:

Audubon Society of Omaha  
P.O. Box 3542, Omaha, NE 68103  
We'll send them a thank-you note letting them know of your gift.

### CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS:

Planning is already under way for our Fall Bird Seed Sale, and we could really use YOUR help. Please consider volunteering for our biggest fundraiser. Please contact John Fullerton at 402-493-4362 (h), 402-957-5901 (c) or [efullerton00@gmail.com](mailto:efullerton00@gmail.com) if you can help with this major fundraiser.

### AMAZONSMILE DISCONTINUED

AmazonSmile program, which allowed customers to support a charity of their choice while shopping online, will be replaced with programs on disaster relief and food banks. Thanks to all who participated in the program.

### INJURED BIRD?

Raptors: Call 866-888-7261 to speak to a Raptor Conservation Alliance volunteer. Non-raptor: Call Nebraska Wildlife Rehab at 402-234-2473.



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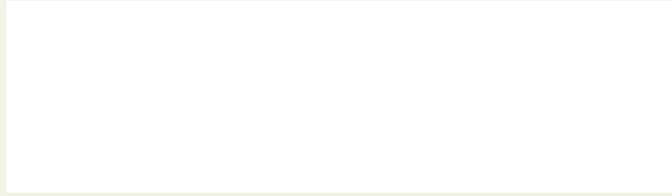
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STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH AND ITS CREATURES

the Meadowlark

MAY/JUNE 2023  
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Photo by Mike Benkis

*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.*

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