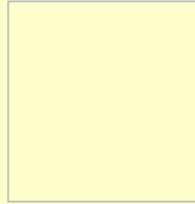


A Bird's Eye View

Audubon Society of Omaha
A Chapter of National Audubon Society



Volume 30, No. 1 January 2001

Black-capped Vireos, Military Explosives, and German POWs

By Clem Klaphake

At the general meeting January 11 we will all have an opportunity to become more knowledgeable about an avian species that has been on the endangered species list since October 1987. This species, the Black-capped Vireo, primarily breeds in Oklahoma and Texas today. Its numbers have been gradually declining for a variety of reasons.

Jeff Marcus will present findings from his research as a biologist with the Nature Conservancy at Camp Barkeley just outside of Abilene, Texas, studying one of the most northerly breeding sites of Black-capped Vireos. Camp Barkeley, a former WWII Army post and German prisoner of war camp, is an area dominated by cattle ranching, oil drilling and rattlesnakes.

Currently the site provides survival training for Air Force pilots and a survival opportunity for the rare Black-capped Vireo. The Camp is considered important for the conservation of the species at the fringe of its current range.

The Black-capped Vireo has become endangered because of *Molothrus ater* parasitism and loss of habitat—low-growing deciduous shrubs intermixed with open space. This habitat has changed due to fire suppression, clearing

of oak savannah for cattle grazing, and other land uses.

In 1999 Jeff Marcus took on the task of mapping territories, capturing and banding birds, and monitoring reproductive success. Nests were observed using miniature video cameras to capture predation.

Come hear Jeff's presentation to find out what these video tapes revealed. After his presentation on the vireo, he will provide an update on Audubon Society of Omaha's participation in last year's Adopt-a-Colony volunteer program with the Tern and Plover Conservation Partnership. If you are unable to attend this meeting and wish to talk to Jeff about these results, you may reach him at 402-472-8878, or at jmarcus2@unl.edu

Join us at 7:30 p.m. on January 11 in the Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances St (1 bl. south of 45th & Center) to hear Jeff's presentation on the endangered Black-capped Vireo. A short business meeting will follow the program, concluding with coffee, cookies and conversation. Field guides for many nature-related topics, T-shirts and other items will be for sale before and after the program.

January Field Trip to Visit Dodge, Hummel Parks

On Saturday, January 20, we will look for winter birds at two parks north of the city. We will begin our hike at 8:30 a.m. in the parking lot on the access road to Dodge Park near the entrance.

To reach the Park, take Dick Collins Road east at 30th Street and follow the river about one mile north of the I-680 bridge. We will be looking for eagles along the river and, weather permitting, some of our winter visitors in Hummel Park and surrounding areas.

Plan to eat lunch at a restaurant in the area at about noon. Prior to lunch, bring something hot to drink and dress appropriately for hiking in the snow.

Beginners as well as others are always encouraged to join us and learn from experienced birders. Bring field guides and of course binoculars. In the event

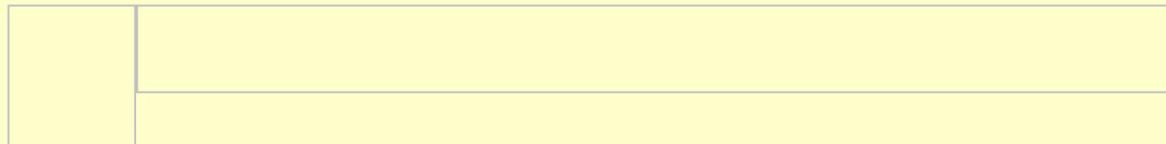
January Field Trip to Visit Dodge, Hummel Parks



2

Scholarly Notes

by Eric Scholar



sumed they had been wiped out from eastern Nebraska decades ago, except for an area in the far southeastern corner of the state. This spring male Prairie Chickens

time to bring you up to date on happenings over the past year at Audubon Nebraska, which ASO is an integral part. Two major areas of activity at the state level are at Rowe Sanctuary and Spring Creek Prairie.

Rowe Sanctuary

Most of you are familiar with Rowe Sanctuary and its association with the Sandhill Cranes. In crane season, February through April, the staff and volunteers handle many calls and requests for trips to the viewing and photography blinds. In last year's crane season, Rowe grossed over \$77,000.

In late spring and early summer, when the cranes are absent, Rowe has offered two one-week outdoor a visit and

were observed courting and booming on the property. Henslow's Sparrows were also observed at Spring Creek recently, a noteworthy occurrence. Sightings such as these point out the exceptional value for wildlife provided by this area and its special habitat.

Over the past summer, a wide variety of programs served people of diverse age groups, backgrounds and abilities. This included a visit and

Audubon Nebraska serves an essential role in conservation and wildlife management activities in Nebraska, ideals we cherish. For this reason it deserves our support.

You are all encouraged to enjoy this site and learn about its special and rare properties, discover and view its wildlife, and attend some of the fine events planned for all Audubon members in Nebraska.

I hope everyone

had a merry holiday and is ready for a happy new year.

This seems a good



New Audubon Membership Options Now Available

As an ASO member, you may request any or all of the following options:

- No magazine be included with your membership,
- No phone calls from NAS to solicit donations be made to you,
- No NAS mailings other than the magazine and one renewal notice be sent,
- Your name and contact information not be shared with outside organizations.

Contact the Membership Dept., National Audubon Society, 700 Broadway, New York NY 10003, or chadd@audubon.org. Or call Audubon Nebraska at 402-797-2301.

January Events

3 (Wed) Board Meeting

8 (Mon) Conserv/Legisl Meeting

education programs. overnight
Enrollment has tripled camp by a
over the past four group of
years as the popularity visually
of the programs has impaired
grown. students
from

In late summer habitat Nebraska and
management becomes Kansas. This
the primary focus, program was
when woody vegetation given front
must be cleared from page
sandbar islands and coverage in
banks. the Lincoln
Journal Star.

In September the A week-long
Sanctuary held a dinner nature camp
on the banks of the was also
Platte to educate offered in
community leaders partnership
about Rowe and with Bright
announce their plans to Lights, an
build a nature center organization
overlooking the river. providing
This event was summer
attended by many area enrichment
community leaders. programs to
Lincoln area
students.

Spring Creek Prairie

Several other
educational
programs

Spring Creek Prairie is were held at
valued as a tall grass Spring Creek,
prairie wildlife including a
sanctuary. An ongoing Wildflower
inventory of flora and Day which
fauna has noted one of attracted
the most exciting more than 50
discoveries to date, the people who
presence of attended
guided

Greater Prairie wildflower
Chickens. It was as hikes.

During the
months from
August
through
October,
habitat
management
gets into
high gear.
This year
Arnold
Mendenhall
was hired as
the Prairie's
first
professional
habitat
manager. The
main
restoration
project
accomplished
this past
summer was
the
protection
and
enhancement
of the main
aquatic
features.

11 (Thur) General Meeting

17 (Wed) Nature Study

20 (Sat) Field Trip

20 Birding Class Begins

Two dams were rebuilt in August and water control structures were installed. These will help establish vegetation beneficial to wildlife.

Finally, hundreds of people attended the annual Spring Creek Prairie Festival held in partnership with the Wachiska Audubon Society.



Wildflowers to Bloom at Nature Study Wednesday, January 17

The Omaha Raptor Team

A Committee of ASO



By Alison O'Connor

By Nelli Falzgraf

It's dark under a blanket of snow, so photosynthesis can't occur. But seeds of daisy fleabane and annual mustards germinate, and perennials like spring beauties and pasque flowers sprout. Day length seems to cue life to the changing seasons. How do plants buried under snow detect that?

Dr. Peter Marchand of the Center for

It is hard to believe that another year has ended and we are beginning a new one. The Omaha Raptor Team was able to end 2000 with the introduction of its newest member, Lucy, the Burrowing Owl. We will wait to see what 2001 holds in store for the team and if we have any feathered additions. We were truly blessed with a great number of programs this last year, and it would be impossible to say which was our

from the Sun Ridge Village Retirement Home. I don't know who had more fun at this program, the audience or O.R.T.'s team members. As you can see by the picture, Fireball is always making new friends.

Northern Studies in Vermont has shown that the changing densities of a snowpack affect light transmission. As the snowpack compacts and becomes denser due to melting and refreezing, it allows less light to pass through. This happens because ice grains of the snowpack absorb and scatter incoming light.

As the days lengthen and average temperatures increase, even more melting occurs and the snowpack becomes very dense. The many tiny ice grains then clump together, leaving less surface area for refraction and absorption. Interestingly, this causes light transmission to increase. Sunlight then more easily penetrates the snowpack to reach life undercover, awakening plants to the dawn of spring.

After we tend to the urban tasks of shoveling snow and stoking the furnace, let's gather at the Rookery with photographer Essie Grill for slides of Midwest wildflowers and previews of spring.

The meeting is at 7:00 p.m. Wednesday, January 17, 11809 Old Maple Road. Open to the public.

Please phone Jim Kovanda (731-8249) if there is inclement weather.

The February 21 study topic will be gulls.

favorite. I've included a picture here of Fireball, our red-phase Screech Owl, and Sherry, with some of the residents

We look forward to 2001 and are excited to see what it holds in store for us. We also appreciate the donations received so we can keep our feathered volunteers cared for and fed. Without these, our birds of prey wouldn't be able to do what they do best: educate. Thanks to everyone who helped us get through 2000!



Birding Classes Offered

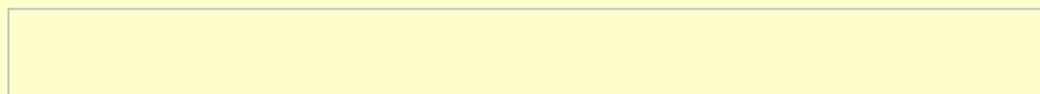
January-February at Heron Haven

ASO will offer Introduction to Birding I and II at Heron Haven through Metro Community College Saturdays, 9-12:00, starting January 20. It includes a program with live raptors as well as an outdoor birding session.

The first 4 week class introduces beginners to the fun of birding and what to look for in identifying birds.

Birding II expands the birder's horizon with in-depth details of the birds to be found in Nebraska.

Registration for either or both classes should be made after January 1 through Metro's non-credit program .



Environmental/ Legislative Action By Ione Werthman

It's Not Over—

It's Just Starting!

The election is officially over, but truly it's just starting. You and I know that the votes will be counted soon by the news media under the Florida Sunshine Law (Freedom of Information Act), and we will know who really won.

Whatever the results, the next 17 days, before President-Elect George W. Bush takes the oath of office, could prove to be crucial for the environment and set the tone for the next four years of environmental action.

Have you phoned the White House asking President Clinton to declare the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge a national Monument?

Please, *please* call as soon as possible—202-456-1111—between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. EST and leave a message. Keep trying to get through. This campaign to save the Arctic Refuge from oil drilling is a mass effort by the majority of national environmental groups across the country.

Only President Clinton has the power to grant the Arctic Refuge permanent protection from an ecological death sentence of oil drilling, but he must do so before Inauguration Day, January 20, 2001.

President-elect Bush has repeatedly promised the oil industry that he will allow oil rigs into our

the power to push multimillion dollar highway projects in the Arctic Refuge.

An article in *Time*, December 18, asks, "How Green was Bill (Clinton)?" According to the article, he rated B- on clean air; C+ on global warming; C+ on hazardous chemicals; A on preserving more public land in the lower 48 states than any other president, and a B+ on protecting aquatic life in the Florida Everglades, California's coast, the Hawaiian coral reefs and in the Atlantic, (the swordfish). The Arctic NWR should be his "last hurrah."

Blowing in the Wind

During the campaign, both Gore and Bush addressed the rising costs of energy, Gore pushing a variety of conservation measures while Bush boosted more domestic production to ease the crunch. There's no doubt that we, along with the rest of the world, face some difficult challenges in the future for energy sources.

Prices for fuels have skyrocketed due to skyrocketing demands. Because the energy industry is being deregulated in America, wholesale natural gas prices in California are now 16 times the winter norm.

This past December, for example, energy shortages on the West Coast were so severe that Californians were

For the record: the utility companies in Nebraska, being publicly owned, have not been deregulated....yet! Maybe the answer is "blowing in the wind."

Ten years ago when I served on an energy commission for then Governor Ben Nelson, we explored several alternatives for energy in Nebraska, including wind.

A recent article by Martin P. Kleinschmit in the December issue of the Center for Rural Affairs newsletter, reminded me of that study. His comments reached the same conclusions as we did in 1991.

Kleinschmit said,

.. "Wind travels for free! Wind energy displaces imported foreign oil and other fuels.

.. "Wind energy in Nebraska could recapture some of the \$130 million dollars we spend on coal from Wyoming each year.

.. "Nebraska's wind resource could power the entire state and have energy left over to export.

.. "Wind energy provides more jobs per dollars invested than any other energy technology and takes less time to construct than most conventional energy plants.

.. "Modern wind energy units interface well with existing electrical systems.

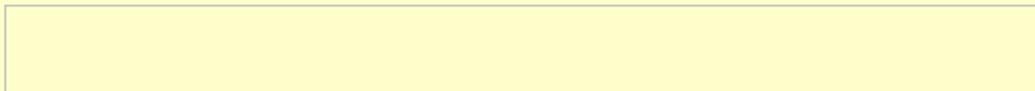
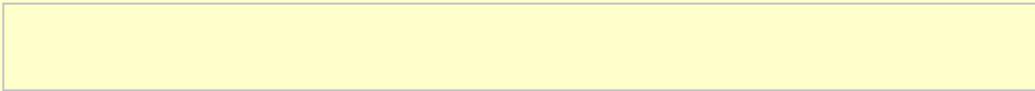
.. "Wind energy does not interfere with rivers and streams and the creatures...in them. Unlike nuclear power

nation's largest wildlife nursery. In January Alaska's two powerful anti-environmental senators will control the crucial Energy and Appropriations Committees, and in the House, the oil lobby's main champion, Rep. Don Young of Alaska, is now taking over the all-important Transportation Committee, giving him



asked to pull the plug on holiday lights in generator is retired, order to save fuel for heating and cooking. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission had to step in to regulate the industry. "Technology has now made it possible to store wind energy using compressed air, elevated water, or hydrogen generation during low wind periods." According to the *U.S. News & World Report*, average wholesale power prices rose from \$12 a megawatt hour in mid-1988 to \$120 a megawatt hour last June and to \$1,000 this past December on the West Coast.

Continued on page 5



Conservation/Legislative Action,

Continued from page 4

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the world's winds could supply more than 10 times the total world energy demand. The Department of Energy's Wind Powering America initiative has set a goal of producing 5% of the nation's electricity from wind by 2020.

To learn more about wind energy, contact the U.S.. Department of Energy, www.eren.doe.gov/wind.

Happy New Year! Join us in 2001 for our Conservation/Legislative Action Committee meetings, January 8, February 5, and March 5, 7:30 p.m. at the Audubon Office, 11809 Old Maple Road.



"2001:

A Crane Odyssey"

Mark your calendars for the Rivers and Wildlife Celebration to be held March 16-18 at Kearney.

Widely recognized nature photographer Michael Forsberg is among the presenters scheduled for our learning and enjoyment.

You won't want to miss the cranes or Audubon Nebraska and Rowe

Backyard Bird Count Announced for February 16-19

More and more of you are signing up for the Great Backyard Bird Count, to be held this year February 16-19, 2001. With your help, the 100,000 participant mark may be topped this year!

This annual project is sponsored by National Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, with funding in part by Wild Birds Unlimited and Ford Motor Company.

You are asked to count the numbers and kinds of birds that visit your feeders, local parks or other areas during any or all of the four count days. To participate, you will count the highest number of

Low-Emissions Hybrid Autos Save

at the Pump

Good news for consumers and the environment are "hybrid" cars, which are powered by both gasoline and electricity, and are cleaner, more efficient vehicles to drive.

Two on the market are Honda's Insight (2-door) with an EPA estimated city gas mileage of a whopping 61 miles per gallon, its highway mileage 70. Toyota's 4-door Prius' estimated mpg is 52 in town and 45 on the highway. (While the Insight's aluminum frame has some environmental minuses, Honda's next hybrid is designed with a non-aluminum frame.)

Customers have found the hybrids' mileage to

Sanctuary's annual gala welcoming the cranes to the Platte for their spectacular stopover. Watch for details in the February issue.

each bird species seen at one time (to ensure they are not counted more than once) and track the time you spend counting. Then you will submit your data to www.birdsource.org. No fees, no registration necessary. Instructions for participating may be found at www.birdsource.org.

If you do not have access at home, you may wish to ask a friend to process your findings for you, or try your local library.

Because of previous counts, new light has been shed on weather patterns and bird movements.

Your data will be used to help keep the birds coming to our yards, parks and wild places. Your data will help detect signs of trouble for certain species.

With your help, this year special attention will be given the Red-headed Woodpecker and Northern Flicker because of population decreases.

be less than the EPA's estimate, the speculation being that test methods designed for gasoline powered cars are not useful for the hybrid.

The hybrid car needs no plugs or special charging stations. It runs like a vehicle with automatic transmission, though it has no transmission, never shifting gears but going faster as more pressure is applied to the accelerator. It shuts down completely when stopped, with no idle, and has no vibration, making it a good birding car. The Prius' rear windows even go down all the way!

Ford Motor Company's first hybrid vehicle, not yet on the market, is an SUV, and Dodge has a hybrid SUV in the making. Other American automakers will soon be following suit.

Birdline

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

Report your sightings after listening to the tape.

6

**A Birder's Dream
Becomes Reality**

**Audubon at Work -
2000**

By lone Werthman

By Jason Berry

for the past six months, Eunice

Birders often dream of far away, exotic destinations for vacation. After realizing this dream and being blown away by the birding, one might dream of living in a birding paradise. I too dreamed while I typed away at the office. And in 1999, the dreams came true.

My wife and I returned to Guatemala for her to finish medical school. I had lived there and wanted to return. My plan was to work with the local bird observatory or Audubon Society. But there were no birding observatories and the Audubon Society changed its name and affiliation with NAS in the United States.

In the U.S. I had enjoyed the support of the informal birding community. Here I stood in the gorgeous cloud forest but with no one to debate the differences between the confusing female hummers. I was knee-deep in a coastal marsh but with no rare bird hotline to report the first country record of Fulvous Whistling Duck.

The lush montane jungles of the Pacific foothills teemed with resplendent Quetzals, Azure-rumped Tanagers, and Blue-tailed Hummingbirds, but who was I going to share this birding excitement with? The birding community was nonexistent.

Then while looking at a particularly beautiful Pink-headed Warbler, it came to me. Why not open Guatemala

up to birding by creating an organization catering to birders' needs?

Now, almost two years later, with lots of hard work and birding behind me, no birder need visit Guatemala and feel as lost as I did. The Guatemala Birding Resource Center provides local (we found a few) and visiting birders with resources such as checklists, field guides, binoculars, a library, tours and information. Tours focus on Mundo Maya endemics, e.g. Horned Guan, Azure-rumped Tanager, Rufous Saberwing, and Black-capped Siskin.

Proceeds from the tours go to support the work of two recently hired GBRC associates researching life histories of the many unstudied birds of the country. This past high season saw more than three tours a week, countless rare bird sightings, and satisfied birders from all over the world. GBRC is a success, the dream come true.

Although most of you will never have the need to found your own organization, there are other ways to deepen your birding experience.

Levisay, Marian

Payton, Kathy Schwery, Garry Mick and Betty Allen have volunteered three hours of their time each week to staff the Audubon office. With a new year starting, our Society needs to expand the shifts from 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and from 1:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

It makes for good P.R. when we meet the people who may want to go on the trails. Many of the hikers bring small children which, in turn, adds to the family concept of Audubon. If you would volunteer to help three hours one day a week, call the office, 445-4138, and give us your name. The hours can be very flexible.

Challenge Grant Received

ASO has received a \$2,500 challenge grant from the Suzanne and Walter Scott Foundation for the building of an outdoor aviary in our bird garden at Heron Haven for display of two raptors during the summer months.

Total cost of the project is about \$7,000. An anonymous gift of \$2,000 has been received. Donations from members and other sources are now being solicited.

Wachiska Woods

In November, Wachiska, our sister Audubon chapter in Lincoln, purchased twenty acres of mature bur oak woodland adjacent to the northern boundary of National Audubon's Spring Creek Prairie near Denton, Nebraska. To be known as Wachiska Woods, the site has many large bur oaks more than 100 years old, an old alfalfa field to be restored to native grasses and more oak trees, and a spring that seeps from a 25-foot-tall siltstone bank reputed to be a buffalo jump where Native Americans drove bison over the cliff.

Arlys Reitan, Wachiska's Campaign Director, said, "This seems to be a good fit for Wachiska for several reasons. First, for the last five years, one of our main projects has been prairie preservation, including outright purchase or use of conservation easements. Secondly, members and the public have enthusiastically embraced the notion of protecting what open space we can from rapid encroachment by development; and third, this seems to be an excellent

You can take your interest in birding way to show by example what other one step further and volunteer for entities in Audubon can do to bird counts or for national or enhance and further the cause and international conservation goals of National Audubon." organizations.

My story isn't so much about Guatemala or GBRC, but about making our birding dreams come true. Who knows, maybe the next Hermit or Worm-eating Warbler you band will be seen on one of our tours.

Notes from Nature

By Jerry Toll

At the November meeting of the Nature Study, George Allen posed a question (paraphrased):

When I ride a motorcycle, my eyes water. Do birds' eyes water when they fly?

As it turns out, they don't. Through an adaptation, their vision is unimpaired during flight.

Here's how it works. Birds have a nictitating membrane, the so-called inner eyelid that dogs, cats, and Vulcans show when they sleep. Its function is to protect and clean the external surface of the eye.

It sweeps transversely across the eye from the nasal passage area towards the ear. As it does, it releases lacrimal fluid—tears—on to the surface of the eye through a duct located between the nictitating membrane and the surface of the eye.

In this manner, the lacrimal fluid lubricates and protects the surface of the eye

excess tears are produced to protect the eye. The resource used doesn't elaborate on which, if either, system of lacrimal distribution is pervasive in the higher orders of the animal world. However, if memory serves, the ability of humans to express emotion through the production of tears is unique to our species.

Other interesting factoids about avian eyes: In all species except owls and dippers, the nictitating membrane is transparent or slightly opaque. They blink the membrane rapidly and frequently.

The nictitating membrane is something I don't recall seeing except in owls. It's something to look for next time we get a chance to study a bird closely.

It has been suggested that the nictitating membrane is used by aquatic birds to compensate for the differences in refraction of water. This has not been adequately studied; however, the evidence suggests this is not the case.

Vision is a bird's primary connection to its environment. The ability of birds of prey to see objects at great distance and in excellent detail is well documented. Indeed, the physiology of all birds' heads is primarily designed to accommodate large eyes in a small skeletal structure.

For that reason, the eyes are fixed in their orbits, do not need to be spherical, and have evolved to best accommodate the genus. To accommodate fixed eyes, a bird's neck is very slender and flexible, allowing a wide range of movement of the head. A bird can rotate its head as rapidly as a mammal can rotate its eyes.

The shape of a bird's eye fits into three broad categories: disc-shaped, globose, and bell-shaped. The shape

is determined by needs of the specific Family. For example, a hawk would need a disc-shaped eye to see details at close range, while a quail would need a broad field of view to watch for predators. A hawk has a disc-shaped eye that can identify a vole a thousand feet away.

I have observed peregrines hawking moths and small insects at the Tower, who are attracted to the strong lights illuminated at night from below. I have seen them accomplish this feat by closing their eyelids, effectively shading their eyes from the glare.

These are just some of the ways birds' eyes have evolved. This reflects the many subtle, complex and varied adaptations of each species.

For the record or if you wish further reading on the subject, see "Form and Function in Birds" Volume 3, Chapter 10, by McLelland and written by Graham R. Martin.

Which bird has the largest eyes of any living creature and not, let's say, a mammal?

Which bird has the smallest eye in relation to body size?

Answers

next

If you find a bird of interest, contact Recovery volunteer at

by maintaining a constant thin layer of fluid between the two surfaces where friction would occur without wasting excess fluid.

Additionally, the leading edge of the nictitating membrane as it sweeps across the cornea acts as a squeegee polishing the cornea, limiting the amount of lacrimal fluid left on the eye, and sweeps foreign objects off the eye before it.

Mammals possess eyes that rotate in the socket. The entire eye needs to be lubricated, requiring the production of larger amounts of lacrimal fluid.

The eyes of reptiles, amphibians, and birds are fixed in the skull and have very limited movement in the socket. Only those surfaces exposed to the elements require lubrication.

Humans possess tear ducts on the edge of the eyelid. Their production of tears is distributed across the exposed surface of the eye.

Thus when the exposed surface is dried out, as in riding a motorcycle,

National Audubon Society

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The *Audubon Magazine* and your membership card will be sent to this address:

Name

Street

City State

Zip Code

Memorials

The Audubon Society of Omaha greatly appreciates your gift and the recipient receives.

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.

Introductory Membership

(1st & 2nd Year) - \$20

Renewals: 3rd Year - \$25;

4th Year - \$30 thereafter

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

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Omaha NE 68164

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