

A Bird's Eye View

Audubon Society of Omaha
A Chapter of National Audubon
Society

October 2001 Vol. 30 No. 8

The Other Alaska:

Birds of The Old Growth Forests

By Clem Klaphake

We have been hearing a lot lately about the attempts to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Despite the fact that much of this Refuge has been officially designated as a wilderness area, there is much political and economic debate about oil drilling—drilling that would have very little impact on our energy needs.

However, Alaska is a big state, and at the October 11 general meeting, we will have the opportunity to hear Jackie Canterbury discuss some other issues directly affecting birds in the southeast area of the state.

Jackie's presentation will be about the old-growth forest of the Tongass area of Alaska and how the rainforest, its biodiversity and birds, interact.

Currently Jackie is an Adjunct Professor of Biology at Wesleyan University in Lincoln. She worked in Alaska in education, serving a remote area covering 21 schools. More recently, she was employed by the Forest Service as a wildlife biologist for a 3 million acre wilderness area (Misty Fjords National Monument Wilderness) in southeast Alaska. Her specialty there as a wildlife biologist was the study of Neotropical migratory birds.

While in Alaska, Jackie was active in conservation issues, serving as president of the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council and president of the Tongass Conservation Society. She has coauthored *The Book of the*

Tongass and has written

If you want to learn more about Neotropical migratory birds and the old-growth rainforests of Alaska, come to the Thursday, October 11, 7:30 p.m. general meeting of the Audubon Society of Omaha at Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances Street, and hear Jackie Canterbury's slide presentation on the topic. A short business meeting will follow the program, concluding with coffee, cookies, and conversation. See you there.

Chapter Retreat at Platte River Crane Trust Sat, Nov. 3

Audubon members across the state are invited to attend a Chapter Retreat at the Platte River Whooping Crane Trust headquarters on Saturday, November 3, given by Audubon Nebraska to share and air chapter activities and concerns.

The meeting will run from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m, with lunch provided to those who register. No fee will be charged. National Audubon is planning to send two representatives, one from the grassroots campaign public policy office in Washington, D. C, to add advocacy issues to the agenda.

The Trust Headquarters can be reached from the I-80 Alda Exit #305, a few miles west of Grand Island. From the Exit, go south 1.5 miles, then east (left) 1.5 miles past a small lake to the new Trust building on the right. A reminder....some great birding should be available nearby.

Please phone Audubon Nebraska at 402-797-2301 or email csommerich@audubon.org as soon as possible to register.

Bird Seed Orders Due Oct. 5

We hope to see you on our Bird Seed Sale dates, October 20 and 21! Questions? Call our office at 445-4138.

For the Birds

by now most of you have heard

of David Sibley or have bought his best selling *Guide to the Birds*. His book has become the fastest selling bird book in history and is attracting fresh recruits to birding all across the U.S.

But there is more to the man than simply being an expert birder and illustrator. I think his basic philosophy duplicates that of many of us in ASO. *Time* Magazine of June 4, 2001, had an excellent article about him, speaking about the large increase in the number of birders in recent years, estimated to be somewhere between 50 and 70 million in the U.S. The article also mentions the way in which the joy of birding is increasingly tinged with anxiety—especially with George W. Bush in the White House. Too many species are becoming harder and harder to find.

The birds that thrive in human habitats are doing fine, but some 15% of the 800 species that live in or pass through North America are in serious decline.

Sibley mentions that among the birds on his growing "worry" list are the America Tree Sparrow, the Bobolink, the Upland Sandpiper, and the Loggerhead Shrike. He mentions that like the proverbial canary in a coal mine, birds have long been leading indicators of the health of an ecosystem.

In *The Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson used the plight of Bald Eagles and other birds to dramatize the dangers of pesticides. The

Why then are so many species declining? Some may be picking up DDT on their migratory trips to South America, where the pesticide is still used, and some chemicals remaining on the U.S. market may be hazardous.

However, as Sibley sees it (and many of us also), the main culprit is relentless urban sprawl and the concomitant destruction of bird habitat. How many of us go to places where there were once birds and now nothing but shopping malls?

I am not a native Omahan, but when I moved here, Boys Town was out in the country. I am sure many of you remember more open spaces. To quote Sibley, "It's discouraging to see this steady whittling away of habitat, one lot at a time."

Sibley says (and this is where we come in) the birds can still be saved if the millions of birders band together to become a political force for conservation. Sibley points out that many birders think nothing of driving 400 miles on a weekend, burning gas and polluting the sky all the way, to add one more bird to their life list. (Ring a bell?)

The most important thing bird lovers can do, he says, is create bird habitats in their own back yards. The typical suburban lawn is a pretty sterile place, doused in chemicals to kill the insects birds feed on. Birds like cover and an undergrowth teeming with bugs. Sibley suggests planting more shrubs and trees and letting at least part of a lawn go completely wild. He also suggests that birders can speak out more about habitat

for an autograph. He asked her what her favorite bird was, and she quickly replied, "The Scarlet Tanager." Sibley sketched one on his note pad for her.

Miranda has seen only one Scarlet Tanager in her life, but if birders can get their conservation act together, she may see many more.

ASO/Sierra Club Forum on Threatened Land

By Kathy Schwery

ASO will cosponsor an educational forum with the Sierra Club on the evening of November 1, entitled "Weatherman Draw—Sacred Land Threatened by Energy Development. Some Places are too Special to Spoil." This event will take place at First United Methodist Church, 69th and Cass Streets, at 7:30 p.m.

Continued on page 3

Calendar

Oct 1 (Mon) Conserv/Legisl Meeting

Oct 3 (Wed) Board Meeting

Oct 7 (Sun) Hawk Watch

Oct 11 (Thur) General Meeting

Oct 17 (Wed) Nature Study

Oct 20 (Sat) Field Trip

Oct 20-21 Bird Seed Sale

Nov 1 (Thur) Forum with Sierra Club

Nov 3 (Sat) Chapter Retreat

resulting public destruction, something concern led to a U.S. he intends to do. ban on the most hazardous chemicals, The interview for the including DDT, and magazine article took intensive conservation place in New York's efforts saved the Bald Central Park and ends Eagle and California with an 11-year-old girl Condor from (Miranda Holman) extinction. approaching Sibley

Hawk Watch at Hitchcock Oct. 7

By Dick Rasmussen

Our October field trip, which was covered in the September *Bird's Eye View*, will be a hawk watch on October 7 led by Clem Klaphake at the Hitchcock Nature Area just north of Crescent, Iowa. A \$2.00 per person fee or \$20.00 a year is charged.

We will meet there at 9:00 a.m. Bring binoculars, scope if you have one, bird guides, and food and drink if you wish. In addition to the many species of raptors we hope to see, you will have an excellent view of the whole Missouri valley. Refer questions to 292-9687 or 292-2276.

On September 8, 11 lucky participants made the trip to Indian Cave State Park. It was a beautiful day, and though we didn't see many migrating birds, it was a great day for butterflies.

We Need Your Help at Heron Haven

By Alison O'Connor

So many of us worked hard to turn the old Gillies Bar into the educational center we have today. Now we need to call upon ASO volunteers again.

This facility is too large for a handful of people to care for. Therefore, at our last Board meeting, we decided a committee was necessary for regular cleanup and maintenance.

Care for the facility, both inside and out, is

Sparrow Mini-Course

at Nature Study Oct. 17, 20

By Nelli Falzgraf

Why study little brown birds? They're not all brown, and even the brown ones have distinct patterns. In the Midwest, they're one of the dominant birds from late fall to early spring—that's half the year. Many come to feeders when it's too cold for us to be out and about, bringing exuberance to a bleak winter landscape.

Sparrow means flutterer, and alludes to the quick flaps of short-winged birds like woodpeckers, jays and finches. Wings with a low length-to-width ratio allow for maneuverability and slow flight, advantageous in wooded, shrubby and close habitats.

Dr. James Rising in *A Guide to the Identification and Natural History of The Sparrows of the United States and Canada* writes that the New World sparrows are "found in the Americas, Eurasia, and Africa, and show their greatest diversity in the New World,

where they almost certainly evolved.

Please join Dr. Elliot Bedows for a two-part lecture and field lab. He will incorporate research of James Rising and David Sibley, including news of species splits. It's jointly sponsored by ASO Nature Study and FNA Birding Club.

We'll meet at Bellevue University Student Center at 7 PM Wednesday, October 17, for an indoor program and at Neale Woods at 8:15 AM Saturday, October 20, for an outdoor trip. From Neale Woods we'll carpool to Nathan's Lake and Boyer Chute to look for LeConte and Sharp-tailed Sparrows.

Bring binoculars and field guides. There's a nice picnic area in Boyer Chute to enjoy a sack lunch.

To reach Bellevue University from the I-80 exit, take the Kennedy Freeway south; exit at Cornhusker Road. Drive east (left) 1.4 miles or pass six stop lights; turn south (right) at Galvin Road. Bellevue University is at the southwest corner. To find ample parking, look in the current Qwest DEX Yellow Pages, page 36 of the green section, or call 292-9687.

Forum on Threatened Land, Continued from page 2

Weatherman Draw, which is under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management, is a sandstone canyon southwest of Billings, as sacred. Anthropologists agree that the ancient rock drawings are priceless and should be protected.

something all volunteers can help with on a regular basis.

Heron Haven is really starting to be utilized for educational programs. We owe our visitors an education center that reflects the pride of ASO.

Appointed to direct this clean-up committee is Paul Kardell. He can be reached at 289-9864. We certainly would appreciate any assistance our fine members can offer.

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Environmental/ Legislative Action By lone Werthman

With the total destruction of the World Trade Center, the attack on the Pentagon, and the thousands of lost lives in America this past week, coming back to reality to write an environmental column is hard to do. But life must go on, and environmental issues did not go away. I hope your letters to our Senators and President requesting no drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge have reached their destination.

Two other "must do's" are high on our list.

Missouri River

The Corps of Engineers has now released another document listing six dam operation alternatives for the new Master Manual EIS on the Missouri River. Four of these alternatives are loosely based on the U.S. Fish & Wildlife's biological opinion. We say "loosely"

management of about endangered ferret.

2.4 million acres of National Grasslands in the northern Great Plains that includes Nebraska, North and South Dakota, and Wyoming. The new plan currently contains some good elements for building and maintaining wildlife habitat, including these:

1. The creation of a greater diversity of grass heights and densities to provide forage for game and nesting birds; for ground nesting birds;
2. Specific locations that will be managed to recover North America's most endangered mammal, the black-footed ferret;
3. Increased management for woody draws and riparian areas critically important to wildlife.

Dave Sands, Director of Audubon Nebraska, wrote on the subject in the Sept. 4 issue of *Midland Voices, Omaha World-Herald*. He said that ranchers and prairie dogs both deserve a break, that while 95% of the land in Nebraska is under private stewardship and 99% of prairie dog towns is estimated to have been lost, payments should reward landowners who agree to host prairie dogs on their land.

For the record, 11 of the prairie states are now developing plans to conserve prairie dog towns because U.S. Fish & Wildlife has ruled that federal listing of the prairie dog as a threatened species is warranted.

Montana. The Bureau has leased the mineral rights for the area to the Anschutz Exploration Corporation, which plans to begin drilling for oil in the canyon.

But to the numerous Indian tribes who revere the canyon's ancient rock drawings, the place is known as the Valley of the Chiefs. They use the canyon for worship and regard the area

The Native American tribes had been hopeful that a compromise could be worked out whereby drilling would take place on other areas of their reservation, while sparing the canyon. Thus far, that has not happened.

Come to the information night and learn about the Valley of the Chiefs and what you can do to help preserve this special area from oil drilling.

because for some reason the Corps did not incorporate an alternative with the "exact" recommendations made by the USFWS in their biological opinion.

The Corps is now holding 14 public workshops and hearings at various points along the river. Unfortunately, none are being held in Omaha. The only hearing in the state is in Nebraska City on November 8. On that date the Corps will hold an open house workshop in the afternoon, then a formal public hearing in the evening. At the evening hearings, each person will have 5 minutes to give one testimony. The Corps will also accept written comments (letters, faxes, and e-mail) until February 28, 2002. At ASO's next Environmental/Legislative meeting October 1, these six dam operation alternatives will be analyzed. Join us. 7:30 p.m. at Heron Haven, 11809 Old Maple Road.

National Grasslands

The U.S. Forest Service has just released a new plan that will govern the

However (there is inevitably a "however"), the plan fails to recommend that any roadless areas in Wyoming and North Dakota be designated as "wilderness," which would prevent roads for oil and gas drilling, motorized vehicles, and habitat fragmentation. And no benchmarks provide for the regeneration of riparian areas and woody draws to assure wildlife habitat health for these grasslands.

A letter to Supervisor Don Bright, Nebraska National Forest, 125 No. Main St, Chadron, NE 69337, would help greatly. Urge him to include measurable benchmarks for restoration of riparian and grassland health and designation of suitable roadless areas as wilderness.

Over 2 million comments have been submitted asking the Bush Administration to uphold the Roadless Forest Rule. Now it is time to add the grassland roadless rule. For more information visit www.nwf.org/grasslands.

Also important to the fragile prairie ecosystem is the prairie dog, which in many ways is the key species in the prairie ecosystem because it furnishes burrows for homes of other creatures such as Burrowing Owls, badgers, rabbits, snakes, insects, and food for the

Department

According to the Sept. 2 *Omaha World-Herald*, "Next year the electricity you use to turn on a light might come from a giant windmill near Valley, Nebraska." Valmont Industries is making a prototype of wind tower for OPPD that will sit on a 207-foot tower on Valmont's property with the electricity generated being fed into OPPD's system for general use. If successful, OPPD will look into installing additional wind turbines.

OPPD's methane gas plant being built at the Douglas County landfill has received a \$50,000 grant from the Dept. of Energy to help defray equipment costs.

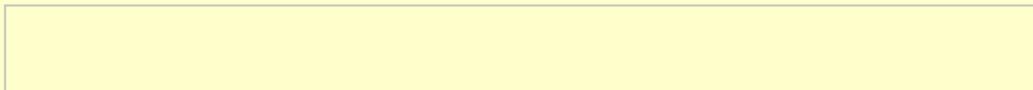
Lastly, the EPA is planning to tighten regulations on a valuable resource: manure. The EPA is shifting its regulatory focus from nitrogen levels in soil to phosphorus levels. Studies show that phosphorus in manure when over-applied to land can end up in streams, rivers and lakes, causing algae that can be harmful to fish and wildlife.

In a Sept. 16 *World-Herald* article, crop consultant Tom Vrbka in Wahoo

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The Omaha Raptor Team

A Committee of ASO

By Alison O'Connor

up only to be with a mate. Others surprise us with their social aspects. The Burrowing Owl is one such species, that not only appears to enjoy the others' company, but in the wild, depends on it. Though many of these birds held for education in captivity live alone quite contentedly, others don't manage solitude well.

Lucy, the Burrowing Owl we introduced to you last year, was one such bird. Lucy needed a playmate—no easy task because numbers of Burrowing Owls are declining in the wild, and when found with an injury, it's usually fatal.

We're constantly being asked by members We started with a blood test to determine gender,

of our audiences if they are permitted to pet our birds. To their disappointment, we have to say no. As a rule, birds of prey are not responsive to a lot of touching by humans.

not being certain of Lucy's. (Both genders of Burrowing Owls, unlike most raptors, are basically of equal size.) To our surprise, we found our little Lucy is a Boy!

Among themselves, many raptors are solitary, pairing

Because we don't have a propagation permit, we needed not only to find another Burrowing Owl, but it had to be a boy.

We turned to our friends at Henry Doorly Zoo's Wildlife Safari Park, who were willing to help. Pictured here is volunteer Alison O'Connor with Gary Pettit from the Safari Park, with Gary holding Lucy's new playmate.

I'm glad to report that Lucy and `Elvis' quickly became best buddies. Elvis is looking forward to meeting the public at programs, and, who knows, maybe we can get him to sing a little rock and roll!

Environmental/Legislative Action,
Continued from page 4

Emotions have their narrative; after the shock we move inevitably to the grief, and the sense that we are doing it more or less together is one tiny scrap of consolation.

Ian McEwan, British writer commenting on the terrorist attack.

wrote, "There are agronomists who say that manure is still the best fertilizer there is! But the manure in some cases isn't where it needs to be."Farmers of a generation ago knew and used manure wisely as a fertilizer. (I know—I grew up on a dairy farm.)

Younkers Holiday Benefit Sale Fundraiser will be held November 10. With each \$5.00 you donate to ASO between now and then, you receive a \$5.00 off coupon to use during the sale, one coupon for each item you buy—no limit to number of coupons.You may shop two weeks ahead (and be rung up when sale prices are set), have items held to pick up on the 10th from 6:00 to 10:00 am. For lowest prices of the season, complimentary food, door prizes, and a silent auction, send for coupons now!

Here is my donation of _____to the Audubon Society of Omaha, 11809 Old Maple Road, Omaha NE 68164. Send me _____coupons to Younkers' Holiday Benefit Sale.

Name_____

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But with the advent of commercial fertilizers that were easier to apply, farmers backed away from manure as their main source of fertilizer. Research is now under way to find other uses for manure, including energy. That's new? Early settlers in the Midwest used bison and cow chips for fuel 150 years ago.

Remember — October 1, 7:30 - Heron Haven. Conservation/Legislative meeting.

Prescribed Burning—

It's a Natural for Prairie Management

Once again we experienced a hot dry summer here in eastern Nebraska, and once again there was quite a bit of media coverage on the forest fires in the west. Thankfully, no major fire was begun by a prescribed burn as happened last year.

The advantages of prescribed burning as a forest management tool was covered. However, we in the prairie states also benefit from prescribed burning when managing prairie remnants such as our own ASO Prairie Preserve (originally Jensen Prairie)

There are those idealists who think a hands-off approach is the best way to preserve a prairie, as in "let nature take its course."

This approach is appropriate when preserving large isolated intact ecosystems such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

However, if the wish is to simulate and try to recreate the biodiversity once found there, it will not work because a preserve surrounded by land used for economic purposes will continue to degrade. It must be managed by thoughtful land managers who have learned to work with nature.

Fire is a major influence that shaped the formation of the Great Plains. The Eastern Tall Grass Prairie is considered a derived grassland because tall grass prairies such as are found in our region can

the desired results. Ranchers use prescribed burning in the spring because they want to maintain grass production for grazing. Yearly spring burning favors the production of warm grasses like bluestem but is detrimental to the broadleaf flowering plants. This practice is used extensively in the Flint Hills region of Kansas.

Those managing for biodiversity use a mosaic approach in their burn regimen. They burn plots in different seasons. They burn less frequently, closer to a three-year cycle. They divide the managed area into plots so that not all plots are burned simultaneously, and they vary the burn application for each plot. This practice encourages biodiversity of native species for various reasons.

All native prairie plants are adapted to fire but respond differently. By changing the timing from season to season and year to year, no one group of plant types is favored over other types.

The insects and all other living things that inhabit the prairie can be maintained. Most biota in soils and on the surface is integral to the community and is a measure of its health. By providing unburned plots to serve as refuges, the community will recover when the plant habitat returns.

The biota in the soil is generally unaffected. Soil temperature changes little except in the top inch or so

remain exposed for a long period.

The control of invasive nonnative plants is an important component of maintaining a diverse prairie. A flexible prescribed burn schedule enables the manager to target specific problems.

For example, a late spring burn when the non-native cool weather grasses are already green will set them back, allowing the warm-season grasses to compete when they begin to grow.

The seeds of most native plants are adapted to fire, but fire reduces the high production of seeds typical of invasive annuals.

Seasonal timing has an effect on what will be accomplished. A spring burn provides nutrients to warm season grasses and controls invasive annuals. A summer burn tends to retard both desirable warm and undesirable cool season grasses.

However, 80% of lightning strikes occur in June and July, so it is thought that perhaps the smaller, cooler, naturally occurring fires typical of summer reigned historically. This helps to explain the natural diversity of our prairie. Fall burns are good for controlling woody vegetation.

The effects of a prescribed burn cannot be generalized to other types of ecosystems. An eastern deciduous forest will respond differently from a western coniferous forest.

support woodlands.
It is thought that the burning of the prairie by Native Americans and the natural high incidence of lightning strikes in the region historically kept the Eastern Woodlands from encroaching into the prairie states.

during a burn. A burn does increase the absorption of solar radiation until the plant community recovers. It also affects the absorption and evaporation of moisture in the soil. For these reasons, winter burns are not recommended because the soil surface will

In fact, a prescribed burn in the Sandhills will respond differently from a burn at ASO's Prairie Preserve. Different soil types, plant community, or annual rainfall are just a few of the variables that need to be considered.

There are two basic ways to manage prairies with fire, depending on

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