

The Meadowlark

Summer 2011

Volume 40 Issue 6

ASO is a Chapter

of the National Audubon
Society

Serving Eastern Nebraska
and Western Iowa

Prairie Festival Sunday, August 28.

By Eric Scholar

The Prairie Festival will be held Sunday, August 28, 2011, at Audubon Prairie (formerly Jensen Prairie) in Omaha from 12:00 noon to 4:30 p.m. The rain date is September 4.

The Audubon Prairie is a surviving remnant of the tall grass prairies that once covered much of our area. In late August some grasses can be six to eight feet tall, giving us a glimpse into the setting the first inhabitants of our country knew. Prairie wildflowers will be abundant, along with butterflies and birds. The monarch butterfly migration should be underway. Songbirds and raptors make the prairie their home.

Activities for the whole family will be part of the day. At 1:00 p.m. a talk along with a hike will be presented by both Audubon's prairie manager, Glenn Pollock, and a person with specialized knowledge of the prairie's wildflowers.

Glenn will explain the extraordinary qualities that allowed prairie plants to survive fire, grazing, drought

and floods and how prairies are managed.

At 3:00 p.m. visitors can join a hike led by experienced birders.

Cold water, ice tea, lemonade and cookies will be served. You are asked to bring lawn chairs if you wish to relax in the shade of our tent. Also, be sure to bring insect repellent and sunscreen. For your convenience, portable toilets will be provided.

To reach the prairie, take 72nd Street to Bennington Road (1/2 block north of McKinley Highway, also known as Hwy 36). Turn east on Bennington and go about 1/2 mile to reach the prairie. (Note: After you enter Bennington Road, stay on the gravel portion; do not go on the concrete portion). There is parking on the road and next to the prairie. Volunteers will be there to direct parking.

Volunteers are needed to carry off this event. If you can help, call Eric at 551-5045 or Laurine at 451-3647. For questions call Eric or Laurine.

Picnic at Neale Woods Sunday, August 7

All members are invited to our annual

• Turn left (west) on Calhoun Rd (first

summer picnic Sunday, August 7, at the Neale Woods Nature Center, starting at 4:00 p.m.

The picnic is pot luck - bring a dish of your choice to share, plus any large serving items needed. Drinks, table settings, flatware, glasses and napkins are provided.

Opportunities abound for hiking. Nine miles of upland trails are open. Don't forget to bring insect repellent along with your binoculars.

Because of flooding, Pershing Drive/River Road will likely remain closed. Use this alternate route:

- Go north on 30th St under the I-680 overpass

left after I-680 west on-ramp)

- Curve to the right (past the gas station) continuing north 1.9 miles
- Turn right (east) onto Ponca Rd (red block building is on SE corner). Continue east 2.1 miles
- Turn left (north) onto North River Rd; go .6 mile
- Turn left onto White Deer Lane, continue .5 mile, then turn left onto Edith Marie Avenue .3 mile to parking lot.

For questions about potential flood problems with the route or any other matters, call Laurine at 451-3647, or Jerry Toll at 453-9239.

Postcard From the President

By Jer Toll

tap into moisture and nutrients as much as 10-12 feet below the surface for 11 months out of the year, storing energy and reducing the need for fertilizer and pesticides and using them more efficiently. This could have the benefit of reducing costs to the farmer, reducing reliance on fossil fuels for fertilizer and pesticides, and making marginal lands around the world more productive.

A perennial wheat-wheatgrass hybrid at the Land Institute can now be made into flour, but yields are as yet too low to compete with annual wheat yields in the U.S. The hybrid is being plot-tested in Nepal where a harsher climate does make it competitive.

The availability of competitive perennial grains may still be decades

The Road Not Taken

I read an article in the April 2011 edition of *National Geographic* about a reevaluation of how we obtain our food. All of our major food crops - wheat, rice, corn, etc. - are annual grasses requiring replanting each year.

For 10,000 years, since the beginning of plant cultivation, annuals have been used because selective breeding occurred with repeated plantings

favoring plants that produced more food and thrived. Potentially useful perennial grasses that could also be used as crops did not benefit from selective breeding because they were not replanted.

Perennials have many advantages over annuals, but their advantages became a handicap, and they became "the road not taken."

From a contemporary economic and conservation perspective, planting perennial crops would be preferable to annual crops because perennial crops would require less husbandry if the yield was comparable. Perennial grasses produce deep root systems that fuel the plants' rebirth each spring, making them resilient and resource efficient.

"We pay a steep price for our reliance on annuals that have high yields and shallow roots," according to Jerry Glover of the Land Institute near Salina, Kansas. The roots of annuals mostly tap into only the top one foot of soil, depleting it and forcing farmers to rely on fertilizers to maintain high yields.

Fertilizers from farms and our yards contribute greatly to the vast algae bloom in the Gulf of Mexico beyond the mouth of the Mississippi River, resulting in a dead zone. To maintain high-yielding annuals, pesticides or tillage is used, both requiring use of fossil fuels, because pioneer plants (weeds) thrive in bare soil left after harvest. Additionally, bare ground allows erosion. No-till and other conservation practices have slowed the loss of top soil in North America, but still the loss of top soil from wind and water continues.

Having continuous cover from a perennial crop could greatly reduce erosion from wind and water and could even build topsoil, depending on harvest practices. The deep roots of perennial grains would

away. But cheap DNA sequencing is allowing plant geneticists to speed the process. What would once take millennia can now be done in a decade.

For a small fraction of the billions spent on corn research annually, a field-testable perennial corn could be produced in as little as 10 years, according to USDA geneticist Ed Buckler, if there were an incentive to do so. Planting annually produces annual profits. Perennial crops are a disincentive.

Ultimately, the drive for research of perennial grains will lie with the consumer and world demand for food.

Spring Creek Prairie Receives \$5,000 Contribution From Audubon Society of Omaha

The Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center near Denton, Nebraska, was the recent recipient of a \$5,000 contribution from the Audubon Society of Omaha. Their leadership in prairie management conservation and environmental education in Nebraska made them an outstanding choice by the Board of Directors of ASO.

As further incentive, National Audubon had received a challenge grant up to \$50,000 in matching funds for which our contribution qualified. National Audubon's efforts are the recipient of the matching

Cont. on page 3

Photo Contest at Banquet

By Eric
Scholar

ASO held its annual photo contest again this year. There were 48 entries in 5 categories. More than one third of the photos were in the bird category. First, Second and Third prizes were

awarded in each category. The judge this year was Tim White, a well-known local photographer who has judged several contests previously. The winners of the 5 categories:

Animals: First prize: Bears—Charles Nolder, Second prize: Bison—Maurine Hoskinson, Third prize: Leopard cub—Charles Nolder. Flowers/Fungi: First prize: Thistle with a bee—Charles Nolder, Second prize: Leaf arrangement—Maurine Hoskinson, Third prize: Grasses—Maurine Hoskinson. Insects: First prize: American Lady butterfly—Loren Padelford, Second prize: Swallowtail butterfly—Duane Schwery, Third prize: Dragonfly—Maurine Hoskinson. Scenics/People in Nature/Humor in Nature

First prize: Herders of the Masai—Charles Nolder, Second prize—Cranes and sunset - Jim Hughes, Third prize—Overlooking Queenstown - Phil Swanson.

Birds First prize: Sharp-tailed Grouse—Phil Swanson, Second prize: Bee eater—Charles Nolder, Third prize: Nashville Warbler—Phil Swanson.

Phil Swanson's photo of Sharp-tailed Grouse was judged Best in Show and voted Most Popular by attendees at the banquet.

Sarpy County Bird Count May 14

Clem Klaphake, coordinator, reports on the Sarpy County Bird Count Saturday, May 14. Sector leaders were Neal Ratzlaff, Don Paseka, Justin Rink, Jer Toll, Mark Brogie, Rick Schmid and Loren Padelford.

"We obviously broke records for total number of species in the Sarpy County Spring Bird Count Saturday, May 14. This is for the smallest geographic county in Nebraska. Our total number of species for that one day was 171.

"The totals for the 4 sectors: Western Sarpy County: 97 species, with 3 counters; Schramm SRA - 101 species, with 4 counters; Mid-County - 116 species, 3 counters; Fontenelle Forest - 132 species with 15 counters.

"Some species totals: Warblers 28 - the only species missed were Connecticut, Cape May, Canada, Worm-eating and Yellow-breasted Chat. Warblers seen but not commonly found were Hooded, Blue-winged, Bay-breasted and Cerulean. What was unbelievable—for many of these species there were multiple birds: 6 Blackburnian; 6 Chestnut-sided, 2 Bay-breasted. The warblers were all over the county with Magnolias as well as Kentuckys in western Sarpy;

"7 Raptors; 4 Terns - Caspian, Black, Forster's and Least; 3 Grebes including the Western Grebe for only the 2nd time on this count; 7 Woodpeckers

including Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Pileated;

15 Scarlet Tanagers - the highest ever; 10 Summer Tanagers - highest ever; and 12 Duck species - pretty good also. Rarest Bird - Eurasian Wigeon (found by Mark Brogie).

"I know many counters added to their

life, state and/or county lists. Thank you to everyone who helped with the count."

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Spring Creek Prairie,

funds, effectively doubling our contribution to conservation both in our state and nationally.

"We genuinely appreciate your commitment to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. Your financial support is critical to our continued progress in fulfilling our mission of conservation and education," said Marian Langan, Director of Spring Creek Prairie.

Spotlight on Nature—Rose-breasted Grosbeak

By Eric M.Scholar

At this time of year if you are out hiking in a forested area, you will inevitably hear the song of this bird. The song is a subdued mellow warbling, resembling a more refined version of the American Robin. Some say it sounds like a robin who has taken voice lessons. Males start singing early, occasionally even when still in winter quarters.

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak is a large seed-eating songbird in the cardinal family. It breeds in cool-temperate North America and migrates to tropical America in winter. Adult birds are around 8 inches long. At all ages and in both sexes, the beak is dusky horn-colored, and the feet and eyes are dark.

Adult male in breeding plumage has a black head, wings, back and tail, and a bright rose-red patch on its breast; the wings have two white patches which make it easily identified in flight. Its underside and rump are white, and the underwing coverts are buffy yellow or

usually caught in flight. The bird also occasionally eats nectar. Although the bird is usually a creature of woods, the insect half of its diet has endeared it to farmers and earned it the once-popular name of potato-bug bird. They will come to backyard feeders here in the summer if they are in or near a heavily wooded area such as Fontenelle Forest.

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak's breeding habitat is open deciduous woods across most of Canada and the northeastern U.S. This bird usually keeps to the treetops and only rarely can be seen on the ground. During courtship the normally gentle male turns into a tiger, taking on other males in spectacular combat. This bird builds a twig nest in a tree or large shrub. It usually lays a clutch of three to six greenish-blue, brown spotted eggs. Normally, only one brood is reared each year.

Northern birds migrate south through the

pink. Males in nonbreeding plumage have largely white underparts, supercilium and cheeks. First fall males lack the rose breast and can look a lot like the first fall Black-headed Grosbeak male.

The adult female, however, resembles an oversized sparrow with her nondescript brown and white markings. The Purple Finch female resembles the female Rose-breasted Grosbeak but is smaller, smaller-headed, and has a distinct mustache stripe, a dark bill, and lacks white in the wings.

The Black-headed Grosbeak male is a distinctive orange and black with the underwing coverts always pale or lemon yellow, but the females of the two birds are similar. The Black-headed Grosbeak female has paler, narrower, and lesser amount of streaking on the underparts, especially in the center of the breast. It is more yellowish-buff rather than white on head and nape, has lemon yellow, not buffy-yellow wing linings, and a dark upper bill. Occasionally hybrids of the two species occur.

The Rose-breasted Grosbeak's stout beak is well adapted to a diet of buds, blossoms and seeds. Insects are also eaten and include such pests as tent caterpillars, cucumber beetles and the potato bug. Insects are

United States east of the Rockies to winter from central-southern Mexico through Central America and the Caribbean to Peru and Venezuela. In winter they prefer more open woodland or similar habitat with a loose growth of trees, such as forest edges, parks, gardens and plantations. The first birds leave the breeding grounds as early as August, while the last ones do not return until mid-to-late May. In general, however, they migrate south in late September or in October and return in late April or early May.

Fire prevention policies instituted in the late 20th century have allowed forests to spread on the Great Plains in places where they would otherwise eventually burn down, thereby allowing the Rose-breasted Grosbeak to extend its range westwards. Increased hybridization with the Black-headed Grosbeak has occurred as a consequence. Indeed, range expansions seem also to have occurred elsewhere, for example in northern Ohio where it bred rarely if at all in the 1900's, but it is a fairly common breeder today. In general, though, it requires mature woodland to breed.

The author wishes to thank Clem Klaphake for providing some helpful suggestions for this article.

Photo by Phil Swanson

*Continued on page
5*

April Field Trip Report

Justin Rink, trip leader, reports, "Five hardy birders and I ventured south to Indian Cave State Park on Saturday, April 30. Due to the howling south

May 12 Banquet

The Spring Banquet, a traditional annual event, held at Anthony's Steakhouse on May 12 capped a year of events for the Audubon Society of Omaha.

winds the night before, we were not disappointed. The morning started out rather cool and windy.

"For me the field trip began last night in the campground. On the evening of Friday, April 29 {I heard} 4 Eastern Whippoorwills and 2 Chuck-Will's-Widows (same place they were located in '08)."

On Saturday they tallied a total of 75 species including Warblers: KENTUCKY (this caught Justin off guard - he wasn't expecting this species), Black-throated Green, Nashville, Northern Parula, Tennessee, Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped and Black-and-white, Ovenbird (everywhere) and American Redstart,

Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Orchard Oriole, Swainson's and Wood Thrushes, Blue-headed and Yellow-throated Vireos, Great-crested and Least Flycatchers, Eastern Kingbird, Eastern Phoebe,

Chipping, Clay-colored, Lincoln's, Harris', White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows, one Pine Siskin, several Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers, one Northern Mockingbird - a surprise!

Justin went on to a shorebird location in Nemaha County just south of Otoe County, where a Peregrine Falcon flushed some distant shorebirds. He spotted a single Sanderling in alternate plumage, and on his way back to Hwy 75, a Lark Sparrow flushed.

Thanks to Justin for leading this trip. The other birders were Clem and Betty Klaphake, Neal Ratzlaff, Nelli and Randy Falzgraf.

Highlight of the evening was an entertaining presentation by Craig Hensley, former Omahan known to many of those present.

Craig's photos of Texas wildlife and his commentary presented the birds, flowers, reptiles and insects of the State where he worked for five years as a Naturalist. Photo contest entries were displayed. Eric Scholar announced the winners, listed in an item on page 3. Officers and directors for the upcoming year were installed.

Our thanks to Helen Bartee for chairing the banquet and to Eric Scholar for conducting the photo contest.

DeSoto NWR Spring Count

By Jerry Toll

The DeSoto Spring Count was conducted on Sunday, May 1. Fourteen volunteers enjoyed a fine day of birding. Despite the count taking place a little earlier in the season than usual, the species count was a little better than average.

Shorebirds were aplenty. The cool wet Spring provided plenty of wetland habitat, and 15 species of shorebirds including an Avocet, 2 Willets, and a Dunlin were found on the Refuge.

There were clouds of sparrows— 15 species total were found and only Grasshopper, Fox and Junco were missed. Warblers were just getting started (see the Sarpy Count 2 weeks later), and only the most common 12 species of warblers occurred.

With all the water, there were 7 species of waders present including 13 White-faced ibis, 10 Snowy Egret, and 1 Black-crowned Night Heron.

It was a day of unusual sightings for the spring count. We added 9 new species to the checklist: Redhead duck, Snowy Egret, Cattle Egret, Broadwing and Swainson's Hawks, Pileated

East Africa Safari

By Nelli and Randy Falzgraf

Our Vantage World Travel trip to Kenya and Tanzania in late March/early April 2011 consisted of 13 persons from Wisconsin, Nebraska, Oklahoma and California. We visited Mt. Kenya and National Parks Amboseli, Lake Manyara, Ngorogoro Crater, eastern and western Serengeti, and Masai Mara.

The major businesses in the area are coffee and tea plantations, agriculture, flower exports (mostly roses and carnations), and tourism. Both countries have high unemployment rates that take in about half of the adults. Swahili and English are spoken.

Our program manager shared his story of pulling himself out of poverty by working many jobs while he was young, persevering and learning marketable skills such as communication, languages, management and technology. He volunteers to help disadvantaged children, and his sincerity interested our group in an orphanage. We stopped at a marketplace where we bought and carried live chickens and groceries to donate to an orphanage near Lake Manyara, TZ, and we stayed to play with the children.

Our tour included over a dozen game drives, and our guides located the "Big Six" (elephant, cape buffalo, rhino, lion, leopard, cheetah) early on. The hardest to find was the black rhino because less than 10 are known in the Serengeti

martial eagle in a tree. The eagle flapped its wings and the monkeys jumped up and down while waving arms. Our guide pointed out a nearby monkey with a baby; perhaps the raptor was a threat to the primate young. In Masai Mara a black-backed jackal pair spied a banded mongoose that scurried to its pack. The pack of about two dozen - some emerging from nearby burrows - gathered together, stood up in unison, and moved as a cohesive unit towards the jackals, that scattered at the sight of a large "creature" after them. Cool.

This tour was about the "Big Six" and cultural connections. We visited an elephant orphanage, giraffe center, Karen Blixen (*Out of Africa*) coffee garden and museum, company that mines and markets tanzanite (mineral used in jewelry), banana plantation, and marketplaces. We also toured Gibbs Farm, Masai villages, Olduvai Gorge (where Louis and Mary Leakey excavated early hominid remains), fishing village near Lake Victoria, business that recycled plastic bottles for crafts, ceramic bead business in Nairobi, KE, that employed over 350 single mothers, wood carving business near Arusha, TZ, employing local tribesmen, and heritage centers in both countries with handmade crafts from several tribes.

Great trip with nice folks!

National Park. Others included serval cat, bat-eared fox, black-backed and golden jackals, spotted hyena, banded mongoose, warthog, Masai and reticulated giraffe, deer (dikdik, Thomson & Grant's gazelle, impala, waterbuck, topi, hardebeest, wildebeest, eland), camels, common zebra, hippo, rock hyrax. We saw troops of baboons and vervet monkeys, but just two blue monkeys. There were house geckos, agami lizards, and lots of Nile crocodiles.

It was not a bird trip, but we were in luck. An East African field guide listed 1,400 species, but we had Kathleen Crawford-Rose's list from their birding trip several years ago, our guides knew animals, and we stumbled upon over 120 bird species when we stopped to view mammals. We were in open and bush country of national parks, often near watery areas, so we saw more water birds and larger birds than smaller ones, plus species that have adapted to humans, rather than most that are wary of human development.

We saw some interspecies encounters. At Serengeti, two vervet monkeys tried to shoo away a

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;

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.

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Memorials

The Audubon Society of Omaha
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receives.

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

Mail to Audubon Society of Omaha,

P.O. Box 3542, Omaha NE 68103-
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**Please send all changes of address to
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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.



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Corres. Sec'y Vacant

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>

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

Elliott Bedows..... 292-5017

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

Kathleen Rose..... 292-8912

Helen Bartee..... 391-3386

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