
The Meadowlark

December 2007
Volume 36 Issue 10

ASO is a Chapter

*of the National
Audubon Society*

*Serving Eastern
Nebraska*

and Western Iowa

Christmas Bird Counts Saturdays December 15, 22

Omaha Area Bird Count

The above count will be held Saturday, December 15. It will cover the usual four areas: Glenwood, Iowa, Plattsmouth, Fontenelle Forest and Lake Manawa. You will need to sign up for one of the quadrants by contacting **Betty Grenon, Count Coordinator, at 731-2383.**

The quadrant leaders are Rick Schmidt —Glenwood, Iowa; Sue Mattix— Plattsmouth; Clem Klaphake— Fontenelle; and Loren Padelford—Lake Manawa.

Participants may begin at 8:00 a.m. for a half or whole day or as time permits. Everyone, regardless of birding skills, is invited and welcome.

December General Meeting Cancelled - See you in January

Because of all the activity that the biggest holiday of the year involves, ASO will not be holding a regular general meeting in December. Furthermore, we have at times been snowed or iced in (or "out"), and if global warming does not make this likelihood a thing of the past, we could be saving ourselves from the possibility of a last-minute cancellation.

That being said, in lieu of another kind of field trip, you are warmly encouraged to participate in one of the Christmas Counts. These are led under the guidance of expert birders.

The counts are ways for you to assist in recording our winter birds for comparisons to past years for the purpose of protecting species.

We will return for the Thursday,

Warm clothing is essential for cold and possibly snow. Warm footwear is especially vital. Bring a hot drink and lunch if you wish, or join the group for lunch at a local restaurant.

The DeSoto NWR Area Bird Count

The DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge Count will be held Saturday, December 22, under the direction of Jerry Toll, compiler. Alternate snow date will be December 23.

The Count is centered in Washington County, Nebraska, and includes parts of Douglas County. In Iowa it is in parts of Pottawattomie and Harrison Counties. Inclusive in the circle are the DeSoto and Boyer Chute Refuges, Neale Woods Nature Center, Dodge and Hummel Parks, Wilson's Island State Park, Hitchcock Nature Center, and upper Cunningham Lake. There is extensive wildlife habitat in all quadrants.

You will need to sign up with **Jerry (453-9239)** to choose one of the quadrants.

Ames, NE Area Count will be held on Thursday, December 27, under the leadership of Don & Janis Paseka.

Meeting places and times will be determined by the

January 10, general meeting with a program given by Dennis & Karlene Kingery on EarthWatch. The Kingerys have participated in several EarthWatch trips. A way to serve while traveling.

Another early notice: the **January field trip will be a tour of the Robert Bateman/Karl Bodmer art exhibit at the Joslyn Art Museum on Saturday, the 19th, 1:00 p.m.** Reservations will be required. More about the event will be forthcoming in the January *Meadowlark*.

sector captains. Come dressed for the weather and bring a hot drink, snacks or lunch. You may also wish to stop at a restaurant at lunch time.

Those wishing to participate should contact the **Pasekas at (402) 727-9229** or paseka@tvs.online.net a few days before the count to receive directions.

Your help will be appreciated.

The Farm Bill and the Environment

By Kathy Schwery

Why should members of the Audubon

Society be interested in the current rewriting of the Farm Bill? This legislation, which is rewritten every 5 to 10 years, impacts conservation, wildlife, energy policy, and ecosystem restoration. Within the U.S. Department of Agriculture conservation programs, more acres of private land are enrolled in conservation than in all of the acres of National Wildlife Refuges in the lower 48 states.

Because we are birders and we care about the natural environment, we need to encourage our legislators to adopt strong conservation provisions in the federal farm bill. Our agricultural policy has a huge impact on grassland birds and their habitat, as well as that of other wildlife. Programs in the Farm Bill also need to receive increased funding authority. According to the National Wildlife Federation, which keeps close tabs on farm program legislation, nearly three out of four private landowners who apply for conservation programs are denied contracts because of a lack of funding.

Many grassland birds are in trouble, among them the Eastern Meadowlark, Northern Bobwhite, Pintail Ducks, and Lark and Grasshopper Sparrows. National Audubon states that the upcoming Farm Bill will have a strong impact on whether we can increase and protect critical habitat for these birds and other wildlife.

Through the farm programs, marginally productive land can be retired and farmers receive payments in lieu of raising crops. This land can be kept in trees or grass, watersheds can be protected, wetlands preserved and acreage managed to benefit wildlife.

A National Audubon report lists some of the more important conservation programs in the Farm Bill. The Wetlands Reserve Program is our nation's most

recent decision by the Dept. of Agriculture to lower payments to farmers who have acreage in the program. A *World Herald* article stated that as a result, 2.5 million CRP acres are at risk of being converted to cropland or rangeland for the 2008 year. An additional 1.3 million acres could be lost the following year. The result would be more soil erosion, a decline in water quality because these acres acted as buffers, and of course, the obvious loss of wildlife because their habitat is gone. As the Senate works on its version of the Bill, we hope the decision by the USDA not to allow open enrollment in the CRP will be overruled. We also hope our Senators will address the problem of declining acreage levels in the CRP. Farmers should not be allowed to opt out of the program in order to plant corn for ethanol production.

Energy production is an important part of the Farm Bill, and decisions in this area affect wildlife. As was mentioned above, many farmers want to convert their CRP acres to crops, a decision that would negatively impact wildlife. Quoting from a National Audubon report, "Removing acres from conservation programs to grow corn for ethanol is counterproductive for wildlife conservation, as well as for carbon emissions reductions, since corn ethanol plants produce slightly less energy than they consume. Farmers must be encouraged to grow next generation bio-fuels such as switchgrass. If corn, soybeans and sorghum crops deplete the limited subsidies, then there will be little or no money left to promote the far

important program for protecting and reestablishing ecologically important wetlands. The current acreage cap is 2.2 million acres, and National Audubon would like to see this amount raised to 5 million acres.

The Grasslands Reserve Program protects grasslands from development and is critical for the health of grassland bird populations. This program has already reached its acreage cap of 2 million acres, so the amount of acres should at least be doubled.

The Conservation Reserve Program, the nation's largest private land conservation program, currently has 36 million acres enrolled. The Dept. of Agriculture announced there would be no open enrollment for CRP acres in 2007 and 2008, and only limited opportunities for landowners to participate. Another area of concern is the

more promising technology of cellulosic ethanol."

In August 2007 the House of Representatives passed its version of the Farm Bill. According to the National Wildlife Federation, the House bill continues funding for most conservation programs at, or slightly above, current levels. The Bill does include a new program that would give farmers incentives to plant biomass crops for energy facilities. It also would deny crop insurance for 4 years to farmers who break up native prairies. However, it made substantial cuts to the Conservation Security Program and put the "whole farm" conservation program on hold until 2012.

As the Senate works on its version of the Farm Bill, we should encourage our Legislators to reauthorize and expand the existing conservation programs. Clearly, these programs are drastically underfunded. We hope the Senate will promote the growth of next-generation fuels for ethanol and adopt wise policies to protect wildlife habitat. There is much abuse in the farm subsidy program, and

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Bird Seed Sale Volunteers

Our annual bird seed sale is over, and it was truly a group effort from start to finish. When all the bills are paid and the checks counted, we should clear approximately \$4,000.00.

By Kathleen Crawford-Rose

Thanks go out to all the volunteers and customers who make this sale a success each year. We apologize if we miss anyone, but we would really like to recognize the workers who made this sale a success.

Head-of-it-all: Neal Ratzlaff.

Chief assistants: Carole & Dick Rasmussen, Jerry Toll, Kathleen Crawford-Rose.

Computer Program: Bill Swick **Computer Backup:**

Duane Schwery. **Mailing:** Laurine Blankenau, Pauline Dickey, Eunice Levisay, Carole & Dick Rasmussen, Alfa Fiske, Nelli Falzgraf, Wanda Neaderhiser, Essie Grill and Kathleen Crawford-Rose.

Garages and snacks: Neal Ratzlaff, Duane and Janice Bright and Eunice Levisay.

Distribution crew (loading and unloading the seed): Jerry Toll, Crew Chief

Crew: Jo Bartikoski, Elliott Bedows, Laurine Blankenau, Fritz Davis, Nelli & Randy Falzgraf, Clem Klaphake, Mace Hack, Steve Lamphere, Jim McLochlin, Jim Meyer, David Nichols, Mark Ratzlaff, Eric Scholar, Jim & Collette Chiesa, Loren Padelford and Don Westling.

Back Row: Roland Barth, Jerry Toll.

Front Row: Duane Bright, Carole Rasmussen, Clem Klaphake, Dick Rasmussen and Kathleen Crawford-Rose

Clem Klaphake, Jerry Toll and Carole Rasmussen

income limits are too high for those receiving payments. If the Senate would correct these problems, there would be additional money for the very important conservation programs.

America's farmers, ranchers and forest owners, some 1.5 million of them, are participating in the Farm Bill conservation programs. They are providing habitat for birds and other wildlife for future generations, and with assistance from Farm Bill conservation programs, are making the world a better place.

Paper-free Renewal for Audubon

If you are tired of renewal notices that consume precious forests, you may call 1-800-274-4201 and sign up for Audubon's Paper-Free Renewal Program. Instead of mailing you renewal reminders, Audubon will automatically renew your membership each year. You'll simply receive a bill, as with a newspaper subscription.

Of course, you can cancel at any time.

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November Field Trip - Tower Lookout at Hitchcock

By Elliott Bedows

Our field trip to the Hitchcock Nature Center on Saturday, November 3, produced a low number of total individual raptors, and some very brisk conditions.

But for those who stuck around, we were treated to some beautiful birds. Seen were 14 total raptors that included up close and personal looks at both adult Bald (2) and immature Golden Eagles (1). Perhaps the best bird of the day was a very rare light morph Harlan's Redtail, a morph I'd never seen before, which, by the way, is illustrated to perfection on

Project FeederWatch - Doing Research in Your Own Back Yard

If you've "FeederWatched" previously, you need little instruction. If you're new to Project FeederWatch, the rules are simple.

1. Select Your Count Site. Choose a portion of your yard that is easy to monitor, typically an area that is visible from your home.
2. Choose Your Count Days. Select two consecutive days within each Count Period (paper tally sheet) or week (on line). Counts must be at least five days apart (leave at least five days when you do not count between each of your two-

By the time the last hawk of the day, an adult male Northern Harrier, flew past, we left the HHW Tower both satisfied with the birds we viewed and the Hitchcock's folks' treat of a lunch and hot cider. Thanks, folks! Other birds of interest included perched Brewer's Blackbirds (4), a Wilson's Snipe that flew right past the Tower, and about 25 Snow Geese.

On my way to the Hawk Watch as the sun was rising, I stopped at the Missouri Avenue Bridge just north of Crescent and located the following Sparrows: dozens of Harris', 2 Song, 2 LeConte's, 2 White-crowned, 2 Lincoln's, 2 Savannahs and a single Field Sparrow, along with Juncos and American Tree Sparrows in good numbers but less abundant than the Harris'.

On the way home from the Hawk Watch, I drove around Lake Manawa and saw dozens of Pied-billed Grebe, 6 Horned Grebe, dozens of Double-crested Cormorants, hundreds of Ruddy Ducks, 20 or so Scaup, a Canvasback, and 20+ Bonaparte's Gulls among hundreds of Ring-billed.

In all, a pretty satisfying day of birding.

Stop The Catalogs, Save Trees!

In reading the *New York Times* Monday, November 19, what to my wondering eyes did appear but an article, "Environmental Groups Cutting Catalog Stacks," with a web address for removing one's name from 1,000 catalog

day counts).

3. How to Count. Record the maximum number of each species visible at any one time during your two-day count. *Do not add your counts together!*

4. What to Count. Please count:

- all of the individuals of each species in view at any one time
- birds attracted to food or water you provided
- birds attracted to fruits or ornamental plantings
- hawks and other predatory birds that are attracted by the birds at your feeders

Do not count:

- birds that simply fly over the Count Site
- birds seen on non-Count Days

5. Report Your Counts. Submit your data to Project FeederWatch at www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw>

Also report weather data, e.g. average depth of snow at the Count Site and a few other details. Daylight precipitation and daylight temperature are to be noted.

For complete instructions, go to www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw> and click on the Instructions button. If you cannot submit data via the Internet and did not receive a kit and Data Booklet, contact FeederWatch office for forms and instructions (607) 254-2427.

Project FeederWatch -

Doing Research in Your Own

Back Yard

mailing lists.

CatalogChoice.org collects names and contacts the guilty companies. Operated by the National Wildlife Federation, Natural Resources Defense Council and

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Ecology Center, this contact could save tempers and trees in one action. Among companies signing up as official partners of CatalogChoice are L.L. Bean, Lands' End and Lillian Vernon. This from L.L. Bean, "We don't want to waste paper or our customers' time." (You want L. L. Bean or Lands' End? Go to their web site.)

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