

April 2007
Volume 36 Issue 4

ASO is a Chapter
of the National
Audubon Society

Serving Eastern
Nebraska

and Western Iowa

All About Snakes

Whether you love them or hate them, find them frightening or fascinating, snakes have always been associated with humans. Ancient civilizations such as the Greeks thought snakes had healing powers, and thus the Caduceus, symbol of medicine, contains two snakes wound around a winged staff. The pharaohs of Egypt wore the likeness of a poisonous asp on their headdress in the belief that it would protect them. Early in America's history, one version of our flag showed a rattlesnake and the phrase "Don't tread on me."

But snakes have also been symbols of evil like the snake that tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden and the ones driven out of Ireland by St. Patrick. Television and the movies, most recently *Snakes on a Plane*, have played up our fear of snakes to make a dramatic point. In fact, many people have no positive perception of snakes. The truth is that snakes are beneficial to man and hold an important place in the ecology of whatever part of the

**By Nancy
Leonard**

world they occur. They are important in controlling the populations of small mammals, like mice and other rodents. In turn they are a source of food for hawks and other predators. Their venom has been used in medical research.

Nebraska has 29 species of snakes, including 4 poisonous species. Our April program will allow us to enter their world. Dennis Ferraro, a herpetologist at UNL, will speak to us on Nebraska's snakes—their distribution, habitat, identification, field recognition and natural history.

Please join us on Thursday, April 12, 7:30 p.m. at the Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances (one block south of Center Street) for an interesting talk.

We will have a short business meeting and social time after the talk. Non-members are always welcome. We hope to see you there.

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Park and Early Spring Migrants

By Elliott Bedows

The April field trip will be held Saturday,

April 28, when we will go to Indian Cave State Park, Richardson County, to look for early spring migrants.

For those wishing to carpool, we will leave from the southeast corner of Southroads Mall in Bellevue at 6:30 a.m. and will begin our field trip at ICSP at 8:00 a.m. It is currently planned as a

half-day event on Thursday, April 12, with an afternoon option to travel to Squaw Creek NWR for some afternoon shorebirding.

All are welcome and carpooling is encouraged. I

will be leading the trip with, hopefully,

social time another co-
after the talk. leader, to be
Non- determined.
members are You may wish
always to bring
welcome. We snacks, drinks
hope to see and a lunch.
you there.

Spring Banquet Date - May 10

You Are Invited

Spring banquet time rolls around again, and this year a treat awaits us on Thursday, May 10, when *World-Herald* columnist and gardener Jan Riggenschach will be our speaker.

The beauty and health of her extensive gardens near Glenwood, Iowa, showcase Ms. Riggenschach's amazing way with flowers, vines, and shrubs. Her photos and talk will inspire us to emulate her success, if only to a tiny bit.

Photo contest entries (see item, page 3) will be on display at the banquet, with winners selected.

A reservation form is included on page 7. Please fill out and return by May 4.

DeSoto and Sarpy County Bird Counts - See Page 3

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Current Currents

By Elliott Bedows

A Visit with Karen Orenstein

On March 14, 2007, our Chapter was privileged to host Karen Orenstein, the National Outreach Coordinator for the National Audubon Society. Board members had the pleasure of both dining with Karen and listening to her

Audubon Society of Omaha—the level of organization, knowledge, and political engagement of the board. I very much look forward to us working together."

Although global warming is deemed the high

National Audubon Society environmental priority, the following list contains

hest

present a detailed overview of the current direction National is planning to take in addressing our most pressing environmental concerns.

It may come as no surprise that the foremost issue facing National, if not the entire planet, is global warming, which by now and with the help of dedicated groups such as the Union of Concerned Scientists, clearly has been linked with human activities. And on a per capita basis of all nations in the world, the U.S. is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, which represent the greatest current threat to our planet.

In that regard, National Audubon is launching a grassroots campaign, at the urging of President John Flicker. Karen's objective was to meet with Nebraska Chapter leaders to initiate these efforts. Upon returning to Washington from her Nebraska trip (her favorite part of the trip was Crane watching at the Rivers and Wildlife Celebration), she wrote the following:

Elliott: "I am finally settled back in Washington. As promised, I am attaching electronic versions of the materials I handed out last week. I am including an additional handout produced since our visit that discusses both House and Senate legislation that Audubon supports on global warming. Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) has introduced the Safe Climate Act of 2007, HR 1590, the House counterpart to Senators Sanders' and Boxer's Global Warming Pollution Reduction Act. Both bills are the gold standard for what needs to be passed by Congress to avert the worst impacts of global warming."

Editor's note: Elliot has electronic copies of all of these in .pdf format and will be happy to forward them to interested parties. Contact him at ebedows@cox.net.

Karen added: "I also want to mention that I had a chance to discuss Senator Nelson and his support for a renewable electricity standard (RES) with an RES expert from the Union of Concerned Scientists. He was pretty confident that with grassroots pressure, Senator Nelson will get on board Senator Bingaman's (D-NM) bill for a 15% RES by 2020.

"Thank you again for hosting my visit—

other issues that are on Audubon's front burner.

“ **America's Arctic** - Imminent threats to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge are less likely in the immediate future, though Audubon will remain vigilant in protecting this American treasure. Groups involved in that issue (including Audubon) are going on the offense to designate the Coastal Plain of the Refuge as wilderness. Audubon now extends our focus to include other North Slope issues, including ways to provide protections to Teshekpuk Lake (a special place in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska that is threatened by oil drilling).

“ **Clean Water/Wetlands** - Recent decisions by the Supreme Court have grave implications for protecting wetlands and water quality. The decisions undermine the protection of wetlands, which play a key role in protecting against floods, drought, and hurricanes. Wetlands also are carbon sinks that can help to mitigate global warming. Congress can, through legislation, redress the balance in favor of wetlands and clean water, which are vital to public health, wildlife, and the environment as a whole.

“ **Conservation Funding** - The annual appropriations process includes funding for a variety of Audubon concerns, from National Wildlife Refuge management to Audubon at Home programs to Endangered Species Recovery programs. Competition for available federal funds is always high.

“ **Ecosystem Restoration** - Another sweeping category that includes Everglades, Great Lakes, Coastal Louisiana/Mississippi River restoration campaigns as well as regional issues like Long Island Sound and San Francisco Bay. These long-term projects require commitment, sustained funding, a partnership of state and federal agencies and dedicated activists who will go the distance and involve yearly appropriations of funds to succeed.

“ **The Farm Bill** - As grassland species continue to decline at alarming rates, Audubon is looking at a number of key provisions in the upcoming reauthorization of the Farm Bill that impact wetlands protections, agricultural

Entries Wanted for Photo Contest

By Eric Scholar

Entries are being sought for ASO's photo contest, to be displayed at the Spring Banquet Thursday, May 10.

The categories are Birds, Other Animals, Wildflowers, Insects, Scenics/people in Nature/Humor in Nature. Photos must be from nature— zoo shots or photos of pets are excluded. Entries are limited to two per person per category. They may range in size from 5x7 to 16x20 and must be matted or framed.

First and Second prizes will be awarded in each category, along with Best of Show. Most Popular will be voted on by those attending the banquet.

Entries must be received by Tuesday, May 1. To arrange for delivering your photos, please phone Eric Scholar at 551-5045.

Volunteers Needed for Earth Day!!!

The Audubon Society of Omaha will have a booth distributing information about birds and conservation at the Earth Day Celebration in Elmwood Park on Saturday, April 21, from 12:00 noon until 6:00 p.m. Earth Day is being sponsored by Whole Foods Market, The Reader, and The Papio Missouri NRD and is presented by the Earth Day Coalition, of which ASO is a member.

Would you consider giving some of your time on that day to answer

Volunteers Needed!

ASO Greater Omaha Student Art

Contest Saturday April 14, 2007

By Jackie Scholar

The Audubon Society of Omaha is conducting the Greater Omaha Student Art Contest to encourage children to learn about the birds of the Midwest by reading about them and drawing a particular bird.

Children from Kindergarten through grade 12 are eligible. The event will be held in the Bellevue University Gordon Lozier Center, Bellevue, from 11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., April 14: awards ceremony 2:00 p.m. Details are posted on www.audubon-omaha.org

Volunteers are needed to put on this event. Get to know other Audubon members and contribute to ASO. Volunteers are needed for the following activities:

1. Hanging the artwork at Bellevue University

Friday, April 13 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon.

2. Staffing tables during the showing of the artwork at Bellevue University

Saturday, April 14 11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Any help will be greatly appreciated! We can't be successful without your help. Call Jackie Scholar at 551-5045 or email her at Jackie@bellevue.edu

Zoo Day with Audubon

questions that people have about birds and conservation issues?

The event draws thousands of people and serves a worthwhile purpose. Please call Jackie Scholar at 551-5045 if you can help with the booth for any amount of time on that day.

Audubon has been invited to staff a booth at Henry Doorly on Saturday, April 28, Zoo Day, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

We need volunteers to take an hour or so to help at the booth. It is pleasant work in pleasant surroundings, and the entry fee is waived.

Please contact Patty Albright at 323-1966 if you can help.

Visit,

Continued from page 2

practices as they affect bird habitat, conservation easement programs and more.

Public Lands - This includes a package of issues including threats to America's National Wildlife Refuges, logging threats to high-value wildlife habitat in the pristine Tongass National Forest (Alaska), and rampant oil and gas drilling threatening wilderness-quality lands in Wyoming, Colorado, Montana, and through the Intermountain West.

DeSoto and Sarpy County Bird Counts

Dates for the above counts are DeSoto - Saturday, May 5; and Sarpy - Saturday, May 12.

To help with the DeSoto count, contact Steve Van Riper, DeSoto - 642-5411, or Jerry Toll - 453-9239.

To help with the Sarpy Count, contact Clem Klaphake, 292-2276 or ckavian@cox.net. Even giving a half day of your time would help.

The May *Meadowlark* will include more information.

We Only Have So Much Water!

by Kathy Schwery

No issue in Nebraska is more contentious than that of water usage. How to balance the interests of all users — irrigators, recreation, wildlife, cities, and industry — is becoming increasingly difficult.

A history of inaction in our state has led us to the point where overuse of water by irrigators, combined with years of drought, is now causing significant declines in our natural aquifer. Ground water levels have dropped as much as 50 feet in some of the western and

Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska, allocates water from the Republican River among these states. Irrigators in Nebraska must reduce their pumping in order to meet the water requirements of Kansas, or the State of Nebraska will face penalties. Another multi-state compact, the Platte River Recovery Program, will bring about further reductions in water use in the Platte. Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska will be required to offset the impact of recent water development on critical minimum

southwestern areas of our state. Surface water, impacted by too much pumping of groundwater, is also affected. Rivers and streams are drying up, and even mighty Lake McConaughy now holds less than a third of its former amount of water.

Natural Resources Districts are charged with the management of underground water in Nebraska, but managers of NRD's, elected by irrigators, have been reluctant to limit water use. For many years irrigation farmers controlled the Nebraska Legislature, and this affected attempts to set water policy. According to an *Omaha World-Herald* article, irrigation is used on a third of Nebraska farms, and two-thirds of this land is spread among the state's largest farms—those over 1,000 acres.

Years of drought and the huge increase in irrigated farmland in Nebraska have taken a toll on wildlife, including birds. Our beloved Sandhill Cranes, which use the Central Platte during migration, are squeezed into an ever-smaller area of the river. The Platte, which the Nebraska Wildlife Federation describes as a "river dying of thirst," is choked with vegetation and is merely a trickle of its former self. Fish and amphibians, as well as wetland birds, suffer when rivers dry up.

Irrigation has made thousands of acres of Nebraska's semi-arid land farmable, with corn and soybean fields replacing pasture and grassland which used to provide habitat for birds and other animals. Grassland birds are disappearing, but in a happy little footnote to our water problems, the Piping Plovers are doing well on the sandbars in Lake McConaughy.

The Nebraska Supreme Court has ruled that all Nebraskans own the underground water in our state. In times of shortage, the state has the power to limit withdrawal of water. However, placing restrictions on irrigation is difficult, and farmers often expect monetary compensation if the use of "their" water is restricted.

Adding to the difficulty of finding a solution to Nebraska's water problems is the Republican River Compact. This settlement, worked out with the States of

flows needed by fish and wildlife.

The Recovery Program will provide for management and protection of 10,000 acres of wildlife habitat along the Central Platte and ensure increased flows in the Platte at times beneficial to wildlife. Governor Dave Heineman wants the Legislature to allocate millions of tax dollars to help meet the obligations of these two agreements. Presumably the money would be used to "pay irrigators not to irrigate," thus allowing enough water to remain in the Republican and Platte Rivers to meet the needs of Kansas and of wildlife.

Scaling back irrigation in Nebraska would replenish streams and rivers, restore Lake McConaughy to its former size, and allow our aquifer to recharge. It would place recreational interests and wildlife needs on an equal footing with irrigation. According to a recent *World-Herald* article, "Nowhere in America is more water pumped from the ground for crops than in Nebraska. And no other western state has waited until now to slow the drought-driven push by irrigation farmers—a tiny fraction of Nebraskans—to overuse groundwater." In fact, in many areas of Nebraska, new irrigation wells are still being drilled.

Looming over this discussion on limiting irrigation is the prospect of increased ethanol production. Corn prices have more than doubled from a year ago because ethanol plants are purchasing the corn. This will cause farmers to plant more corn, on more acres, and to use more water in the process. Even Conservation Reserve acres are being taken out of government programs so that corn can be planted on them.

To this writer, it seems that using 2,036 gallons of water to grow each bushel of corn is unsustainable. (That's 15 inches per acre to produce 200 bushels of corn.) The water in Nebraska belongs to all of us, and when such a large amount is used for farming, it is to the detriment of wildlife, neighboring states, and our future water supply. A system that requires all water users to pay

Papillion Creek and Its Watershed

Improvement of Water Quality and the Stream

By Marian Maas, Ph.D.

Rainwater falls on our roofs, driveways, sidewalks, streets, parking lots, and our thick bluegrass lawns. Most of these surfaces don't allow for the raindrops to be absorbed into the ground, and are called impervious surfaces. Instead of filtering down through deeply rooted vegetation and a porous soil, each raindrop joins another, and soon there is a steady stream of water flowing into the storm drain, carrying with it the pollutants and trash that are found in our urban areas.

Where does this stormwater go? It is sent to the nearest receiving stream via the sewer system and pours into the stream through large stormwater outfalls. The Papillion Creek and its various tributaries receive the runoff from the urban areas of Omaha; the surrounding communities; and adjoining commercial, industrial and agricultural lands.

Types of pollutants swept into the streams include sand and salt compounds from winter street treatments; brake fluid, oil, gasoline, and other petroleum products from thousands of vehicles; excess fertilizer and lawn chemicals from urban lawns, golf courses, and commercial grounds. The list goes on: grass clippings, bacteria from pet wastes and failing septic systems, chemicals and other toxics leaked or spilled at industrial work sites, loose trash and plastics; and sediment eroded from un-vegetated ground and construction sites. Combined sewer overflows in the

applied for the grant through the Water Quality Cooperative Agreement Grant Program from EPA, Region VII, in Kansas City.

Work activities of the EPA grant, which runs through September 2007, include a land-use survey, water quality monitoring, data analyses, public outreach, and lastly, the recommendation of Best Management Practices for sub-basins. All activities are hoped to ultimately improve water quality in the watershed of Douglas, Sarpy, and Washington Counties.

Urbanizing of the watershed has increased water quality issues for streams in the Papillion Creek and placed it as one of three priority areas in the four states of Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and Missouri. Streams in the Omaha metropolitan area receive high levels of stormwater runoff from industrial, commercial and residential areas, all of which contribute contaminants.

In addition to water quality problems, the streams of the Papillion Creek system have been straightened and channelized, losing much of the natural stream aquatic habitat. Fish and macroinvertebrates no longer have protected coves and logs to provide protection of spawning beds, colonization sites for streambed insects, or protection from the fast current for juveniles. Sediment has increased, and diversity of vegetation along streambanks has been reduced.

eastern portions of Omaha also contribute significantly to the bacterial problems during storm events.

To help people understand the many ways we can reduce stormwater runoff and improve water quality in the Papillion Creek streams, the Papillion Creek Watershed Project was created by a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. As the Project Manager, I

The philosophy of watershed managers has been to make the streams a conveyance system, thus losing the natural habitat and the species that depend on them.

Continued on page 6

Water, Continued from page 4

for the amount they use seems to be the most equitable way to begin solving Nebraska's water problem. Former Senator Chris Beutler proposed such a measure last year. Growing crops such as switchgrass, which need very little water, would also greatly reduce water use.

Currently too many farmers want to plant corn on every available acre, because corn can be used to make ethanol, but very soon the technology will be available to produce ethanol from switchgrass. More research is needed regarding other low-water-use crops, non-

irrigated farming methods, and more efficient irrigation systems because all of these would help solve the problems of Nebraska's overuse of water.

Solutions to our water problems are possible. It will take negotiation, cooperation, and a willingness to put the needs of all users ahead of personal financial gain. Let's hope that the people of Nebraska can work out an equitable solution whereby the needs of wildlife, the health of our rivers, and the sustainability of the Ogallala aquifer are as important as a robust farm economy.

Bookbreaks

By Nancy Leonard

Although I have not outgrown my desire for a white, snowy Christmas, by mid-January I am restless. By Valentine's Day I want to see flowers in my yard, not just in a vase. By St. Patrick's Day I am ready to bundle up the winter clothes, break out the sandals, and search the back yard for anything small, green and growing. I am ready for Spring! Spring means change, a chance to begin again with purpose and vision. It is no wonder that so any religions have important spring festivals. Spring is hope and life. In our

much of the cacti in this corridor would have vanished. In a warming world, the cacti may bloom before the birds arrive. Without nectar, many birds will be too weak to continue their migration and will not be able to breed. One thing leads to another.

As with any trip, you hope for good companions. In addition to professors and forest rangers, the author's most engaging companions are a group of nomadic Asian mushroom pickers. Led by a charismatic woman named Koy,

own lives, we equate springtime with youth, fertility and vigor.

While fidegeting through our last (I hope) set of snowstorms, I read Bruce Stutz book, *Chasing Spring*. The author had just had heart surgery and was feeling like his "most verdant years" had passed. In a journey to mark his new beginning, he decides to pursue spring across the United States. He borrows a 1984 white Chevy Impala which he names Dick, short for Moby Dick (the car being as big as a whale); packs it with camping supplies, peanut butter and jelly and a full flask; and heads off in search of spring.

February finds him in Punxsutawney, PA, where hundreds gather to consult the local oracle. Then it is off to a very different sort of celebration—Candlemas—the Church's celebration of first light. Amazingly, Phil and the Candlemas folk sayings agree that if the day is sunny and bright and shadows can be seen, then winter will return. This weaving together of past and present makes the book a delight to read and a treasure trove of trivia, such as the origin of the name of the month of February.

Stutz travels a long and winding road with a series of stops along the way that allow him to help the reader understand various issues facing spring as we have known it. In North Carolina he shows us Duke University's experimental forest where researchers are trying to measure the impact on trees of increased CO² emissions. In Arizona he and a University of Arizona botanist explore the "nectar corridor," a trail of blooming desert plants that depend on the arrival of hungry nectar seekers such as hummingbirds and bats for their survival. The cacti and the bats have evolved a relationship over the course of 40,000,000 years. Without the nectar seekers,

they travel from place to place harvesting various mushroom species and wild berries. When Stutz, crawling on his hands and knees through the undergrowth, literally comes face-to-face with the morels, the reader can almost smell their "sweet must."

The chase comes to an end in Alaska on June 21, the summer solstice. As Stutz watches the caribou herd cross a remote part of ANWR's coastal plain, he wonders what the future has in store for them, for us and for the world we share. This is not a technical or scientific book. It reads like a travelogue, but one that asks interesting questions and hints at some answers. More than anything, it is a chance to go on a journey and be reminded of the joys of our world and how fragile it is.

Papillion Creek **Continued from page 5**

Additionally, farming with row crops to the edge of the stream banks in the upstream reaches reduces riparian areas and native grasses and results in the loss of habitat and sediment carried from the fields into the streams. Lastly, there is no access to the streams for fishing, wading, or simply walking down to the water's edge for relaxation and appreciation of the natural resource. A stream system that flows through the entire metropolitan area is therefore unavailable for the public to enjoy.

There are many ways that individuals and neighborhoods can slow down stormwater runoff and facilitate its infiltration into the ground. These filter out pollutants, recharge groundwater and aquifers, and reduce the volume of runoff pouring into local streams. Many of these can provide habitat for birds, butterflies and other wildlife as well as add aesthetics and attractiveness to the urban landscape. I will set forth these methods in the next issue of the *Meadowlark*.

To be continued

Addresses to Remember

President George W. Bush

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Pennsylvania Ave NW

Washington D.C. 20500-0001

Comments: 202-456-1111; fax:
202-456-2993

Senator Ben Nelson

U.S. Senate, Washington DC
20510; 202-224-6551; fax 202-228-
0012; Lincoln: 402-437-5246;
Omaha 391-3411; Omaha address:
7602 Pacific St, #205, 68114

Senator Chuck Hagel

U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C.
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Omaha Address: 9900 Nicholas St,
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224-5213

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Representative Lee Terry
U.S. House of
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Phone: (202) 225-4155 ; Fax: (202)
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U.S. House of Representatives,
Washington, DC 20515 Phone:
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Mail to Audubon Society of Omaha

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Plattsmouth NE 68048

PO 3

7XCH

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the memorials it receives.

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

Mail to Audubon Society of Omaha, P. O. Box 3542
, Omaha NE 68103-0542

Governor Dave Heineman

Capitol Bldg, Box 94848 Lincoln,
NE 68509

Phone: (402) 471-2244; Fax: 471-
6031

Mayor Mike Fahey

Omaha/Douglas Civic Center

1819 Farnam St, Omaha NE 68183

Phone: 444-5000 Hot Line: 444-
5555

Banquet Reservation

Johnny's Steakhouse on L Street

Thursday, May 10, Cash Bar 6:00 p.m. Dinner 7:00 p.m.

Name _____

Address _____

Number and Street City Zip

Enclosed is \$_____ for _____ persons.

The cost is \$20.00 per person. Make check payable to ASO. Mail to Laurine Blankenau, 3808 Grebe, Omaha 68112

Reservations must be received by May 4.

**Audubon Society of Omaha, Mailing Address: P. O. Box 3542, Omaha
68103-05**

Phone: 451-3647 - <http://audubon-omaha.org>

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**1st Vice President Jackie
Scholar.....551-5045**

**2nd Vice President Nelli
Falzgraf.....292-9687**

Treasurer Patty Albright.....323-1966

**Past President Nelli Falzgraf.....292-
9687**

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Secretary Pauline Dickey.....932-8205

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Program Nancy Leonard.....330-3888

Publication Laurine Blankenau.....451-3647

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ASO State Board Rep. Mace Hack.....934-5040

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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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