



# Meadowlark

MAY/JUNE 2026

VOL 55 ISSUE 3

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## Join us for our May and June programs!

### May: How turkeys' seasonal rhythms connect with ours

*Thurs., May 14*

Carlie Gizel, the Wild Turkey Program Manager for the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission, will explore the surprising facts of turkey behavior and ecology. She'll discuss how turkeys change their activity as day length changes throughout the year, how their life history stages connect with their environment, how their seasonal rhythms interact with our own (such as why turkey season is always in the spring), and how turkey biology shapes the number of turkeys hunted each season.

Plus, learn how you can take part in monitoring turkey populations where you live through the Turkey Brood Survey, in which you can report observations of turkeys you see in your daily life to help biologists keep track of turkeys in our state!

### June program celebrates creativity, connection, kids and birds!

*Thurs., June 11*

The Audubon Society of Omaha Student Art Contest is so much more than its name suggests. It's a mission to get young people to connect with birds. Students not only submit their artwork, they provide a description of the diet and habitat of their chosen species.

Scientific studies show that what kids are exposed to helps wire what they care about later. Interest doesn't have to start with direct observation of wildlife — it can start through creativity.

Get an inside look at the planning and execution of ASO's most impactful outreach program. Meet the judges who pick the Best in Show winners in each of four categories: Realism, Graphic Design, Cartooning and Recycled. See the award-winning artwork and learn the criteria that merit the highest honors.

ASO has been hosting this annual area-wide competition for more than 40 years! Dozens of our members volunteer hundreds of hours each year to help make the Awards Show possible for area youth and their families. And their efforts have paid off!

At the awards program, every piece of art (more than 750 this year) is displayed on panels that line the first floor of Harper Hall at Creighton University. The awards ceremonies pack the Harper Hall auditorium with standing-room-only crowds... not just once... but three times during the day of the show!

Please join us on June 11 to see how the members of ASO are helping create future birders. You will be awestruck by the dazzling array of talent, knowledge and creativity shown by these K-12 students.

Our monthly programs are free and open to the public; they are held in the private meeting room at **DJ's Dugout, 777 N 114th Street**. Meet and mingle with other nature-lovers at the 6 p.m. social hour, followed by the program at 7 p.m. Find program details and register at [Audubon-Omaha.org/Calendar-of-Events](http://Audubon-Omaha.org/Calendar-of-Events)

## Picking out singers in the chorus

Learn new songs this spring

*by Conor Gearin*



*Indigo Bunting by Mike Benkis*

If you learn one new song this spring, let it be the Indigo Bunting's. At first it might sound like a jumble of cheery notes. But listen again and you'll notice a pattern. Each phrase is repeated, so that each song is made up of a few doubled phrases. I might transcribe one song in phonetics like this: *see it, see it; here, here; cheery, cheery*. Once you know how to pick out those doubled phrases from the background of the spring bird chorus, you'll never miss it.

While knowing the song is enough of a treat, it also makes it easier to track down the singer for a better view. If I hear an Indigo Bunting, my instinct is to look high up in trees on a wood-edged edge. Sometimes it takes a minute, but finding the bunting means being rewarded with one of the most vibrant blue plumages in the bird world. Then, keep an eye out for the brownish female to see if you've happened upon a breeding pair here to stay the summer.

Once you've got the song down, you might find yourself impressing even a seasoned birder: first you catch some faint doubled phrases from 100 yards away, then you spot two little dots on a power line with the naked eye, one blue and one brown. "Indigo Buntings, breeding pair," you say, nonchalantly, and the veteran birder next to you hastens to get a fix on them, too.

Once you've learned one new song, much like grabbing another Pringle

*Continued on page 2*

### GREEN CORNER: HOW YOU CAN HELP WILDLIFE AT HOME

*Conservation begins at home; each of us can help restore our unique ecosystem.*

#### Leave fledgling birds be!

If you see a young bird *with* feathers out of the nest, don't pick it up! Fledglings don't benefit from human help, and their parents are usually nearby. Baby birds *without* feathers out of the nest? Call Neb. Wildlife Rehab for non-raptors (402-234-2473). For baby raptors, call the Raptor Conservation Alliance (866-888-7261).

You CAN help fledglings succeed by planting native species for a great backyard habitat that provides everything a young bird needs!

# Field notes from the president

## Linking birds and art

by *Conor Gearin*



Talking to Audubon leaders in our region about how to build a broader coalition for birds and the environment

got me thinking about ASO's Student Art Show.

Browse the wall-to-wall collection of artwork at the show, and you'll find an incredible diversity of artistic styles, materials, and bird species depicted. Our student artists have immense talent, ambition, and creativity. Most of all, they impress me with their enthusiasm — for art and for birds. For bird-art.

When I see artwork by a young person, my first thought isn't whether or not this person will pursue art as a profession when they grow up. I believe we're enriched as a culture by fostering love for artwork and creativity among as many people as possible. Anyone can improve their life by making art. I learned watercolor painting in high school, neglected it for a while, then came back to it as an adult and found that it gave me a new way of connecting to landscapes that I loved, such as the Loess Hills. A quick cell phone picture, while nice to have, doesn't give me the same level of connection as studying a scene and trying to capture it accurately and lovingly. My hope is that our ASO

student artists find those moments of connection throughout their lives, and that we can play a small role in fostering their relationship with art.

Now, let's turn our attention to birds. Do we have the same understanding of a lifelong relationship with birds as we do with art? I think the public perception of birding has changed in positive ways in my lifetime, but it's still a work in progress. Birding is still too often seen as a realm of obsessives, and not as welcoming to newcomers as it ought to be. From talking to people who don't consider themselves birders, I know there can be anxiety about asking questions, getting started with birding before knowing all your birds (which is impossible, by the way), and generally looking silly in front of more experienced people.

I would love for us to look at birding more like we look at art education — something worthwhile for every young person to try. Teach it as something that can enrich your life at any age. Put it aside for a while when you're busy, then return to it full of energy.

After all, when we look at people's everyday lives, we might find a long-lasting connection with birds, just labeled differently. While I've gone about my interest in birds in a pretty straightforward way (studying them in graduate school) I've realized there are many peo-

ple out there who have things to teach me about birds. Hunters who can make effortless IDs of ducks flying overhead. Gardeners who have actually succeeded at attracting birds to their yard through planting native species. Heck, just about any Nebraskan has things to teach me about Sandhill Cranes, because so many have spent time watching them from blinds on the Platte River. Most of those folks wouldn't call themselves "birders," though, despite the in-depth knowledge of birds and the places they live.

If we can look at birding more like making art — something you can do without expert status, something that many people engage with in their daily lives at all ages — maybe we would move a little bit closer to recognizing our shared interests in protecting wildlife and the environment.

## Picking out singers in the chorus

*(Continued from page 1)*

from the can, it'll be hard to stop yourself from another. The Eastern Warbling Vireo is a tiny bird whose song is like a nasally, sped-up version of the familiar American Robin song. So if you know the American Robin, listen for a hoarser, faster version of it that ends on an up note. And look for the singer. Eastern Warbling Vireos have grayish backs and faint yellow bellies. Their movements stand out more than their feathers: they're usually moving quickly among new leaves eating insect larvae.

Well, we've learned two new songs, so let's add on a third. The Nashville Warbler brings a delightful pop of yellow in the spring, and you can find it even in dense neighborhoods. Males have bright yellow breasts and bellies, with gray heads, greenish backs, and a white eyering. Females and immature males have a paler version of those colors. The song usually has a two-part pattern. Cornell Lab of Ornithology spells it out this way: "*see-bit see-bit see-bit see-bit see-bit titititititi*." The first part is slower, and the second part is faster.

As you learn songs, you'll find that what was once an indistinct but pleasant blend of bird voices now becomes an ensemble where you can identify individual singers.

## Field Trip: Marsh Wren Saline Wetland Tour

*Wed., May 6, 7 – 8:30 p.m.*

*Near 40th Street and Arbor Road, Lincoln, NE, 68336*

Saline wetlands are rare, inland or coastal ecosystems that are characterized by salt-saturated soils and water. They are found in low-lying areas where saline groundwater rises to the surface from ancient marine rock deposits. The unique ecosystem hosts salt tolerant vegetation such as saltgrass, sea blite, and saltwort. Numerous bird species, including American Coots, Pied-billed Grebes, Soras, and migratory shorebirds have been seen in this avian hotspot. The endangered Salt Creek tiger beetle lives here and is one of the world's most rare insects!

Dress in layers and wear sturdy waterproof shoes that can get dirty.



*Sandpipers by Sheila Glencer*

Expect uneven terrain. Bring bug spray, sunscreen, and water to drink. There are no bathrooms available at Marsh Wren Wetland. Bring binoculars, camera and a sense of enthusiasm and discovery!

Space is limited to 40 participants, so please be sure to register on our website. Carpooling is highly recommended as the parking lot is not very big. Looking forward to seeing you there!

# 2026 ASO Student Art Contest

Thanks to all students who participated in the 2026 ASO Student Art Contest! We received over 730 entries from 65 different schools — including five schools participating for the first time — along with individual entries. It was great to see our artists show off their creations to their families and teachers at Creighton University's Harper Center for our Art Show and Awards Ceremony!

We greatly appreciate all of

the time spent by our volunteers, guest judges, teachers, students, and family members in making this event a success! The Art Show depends on people devoting many hours to organizing the artwork, judging it, and setting up the displays and awards for the show, which is ASO's biggest annual event. We wish our student-artists all the best and thank everyone who helps support their creativity.

Check out our Best of Show Winners on these pages!



Charlotte S., Grade 5, Meadowlark Award (All ages)



Marley H., Grade 3, Best of Show in Realism, Grades K-3



Ben P., Grade 1, Best of Show: Cartooning, Grades K-3



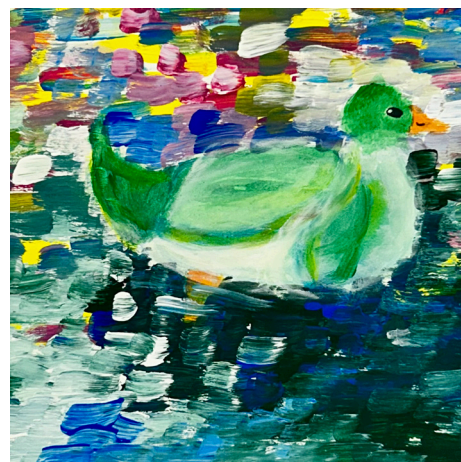
Cora S., Grade 1, Best of Show: Recycled, Grades K-3



Finley J., Grade 6, Best of Show: Recycled, Grades 4-6



Sage P., Grade 3, Best of Show in Graphic Design, Grades K-3



Violet G., Grade 5, Best of Show in Graphic Design, Grades 4-6



Savannah D., Grade 5, Best of Show in Cartooning, Grades 4-6

# Congrats to our Best of Show Winners!



Avery P., Grade 4, Best of Show: Graphic Design, Grades 4-6



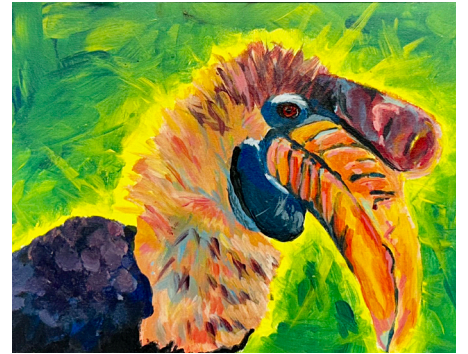
Ezio H.-M., Grade 8, Best of Show: Cartooning, Grades 7-12



Inori T., Grade 4, Best of Show: Realism, Grades 4-6



Clare W., Grade 10, Best of Show in Realism, Grades 7-12



Malia R.M., Grade 9, Best of Show: Graphic Design, Grades 7-12



Elise W., Grade 10, Best of Show in Realism, Grades 7-12



Nellia J., Grade 9, Best in Show: Cartooning, Grades 7-12



Sidney W., Grade 9, Best of Show: Realism, Grades 7-12



Elsie A., Grade 11, Best of Show: Graphic Design, Grades 7-12



June T., Grade 9, Best of Show: Recycled, Grades 7-12



June T., Grade 9, Best of Show, Recycled, Grades 7-12

## The eyes have it – your photos

Send in your bird photos to  
[audubonomaha@audubonomaha.org!](mailto:audubonomaha@audubonomaha.org)

Right: Great Egret by Mark Schubert



## First encounter with the cranes

Essay by Rebecca Carrillo

Crunch, crunch, crunch. In the darkness of the early morning, my tour group and I stayed silent as we trudged along the pebbly path at Rowe Sanctuary. Slowly, we followed the red glow of our guides' flashlights as we headed toward the bird blind. Every spring, migrating Sandhill Cranes make a stop in central Nebraska for food and rest before they head north to their nesting grounds. We were here to see them!

blind's close location offered us a spectacular view. It simply is just something you have to experience yourself!

I moved to Nebraska last year. One of the first things on my to-do list was to see the Sandhill Cranes. There are only two species of cranes found in the United States. One is the Whooping Crane, an endangered species with about 800 birds in the wild. The other is the Sandhill Crane. In contrast, there are more than 1 million Sandhill Cranes estimated to live in North America. While some subpopulations of Sandhill Cranes are endangered in Mississippi and Florida, the migrating Sandhill Cranes hold a status of "Least Concern" under the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Despite the cranes' stable population, environmental conditions can be less predictable. The weekend I went to visit the cranes was exceptionally warm. High temperatures reached over 90 degrees and many people that I spoke with speculated whether the unusual temperatures were affecting the birds. Climate change has affected bird behavior on the Platte before, and there are questions about what migration will look like in the future. Experiencing a sunrise with the Sandhill Cranes was unforgettable, but it was also an important reminder to protect precious ecosystems like the Platte River. I hope everyone can experience seeing these amazing birds, not just next year but for many generations to come.



*Sandhill Cranes on the Platte River by Diana Robinson*

The Sandhill Cranes murmured in the dark as we found our spots at the blind. My eyes strained to see shapes out on the water but it was hard to tell what I was looking at. As the sun began to rise over the Platte River, the small dark shapes began to transform into hundreds of thousands of individual birds. The murmuring in the air turned into a symphony of honks and calls as the birds woke up.

Over the course of two hours, we watched the cranes wake from their slumber and fly off in humongous groups. It is difficult to describe the sound of their wings and the sight of thousands of birds taking flight. Wave after wave of cranes flew off to the nearby fields to eat for the day. The bird

## Resources & Info

### How to join/renew/update

Join or renew your membership online at [Audubon-Omaha.org](http://Audubon-Omaha.org) and select "Get Involved." Save paper and avoid confusion. Your membership with National Audubon automatically makes you a member of ASO.

### Change of address?

Please call National Audubon toll-free at 1-844-428-3826, or send an email to [audubon@emailcustomerservice.com](mailto:audubon@emailcustomerservice.com)

### Stay Connected

Join our email list at [Audubon-Omaha.org](http://Audubon-Omaha.org) under "Get Involved."

### Bequests & gifts

A bequest to Audubon Society of Omaha is a gift to those who will succeed us and secure our natural heritage. Want to honor a loved one and help ASO's local conservation and education efforts? You can make a donation anytime at [audubon-omaha.org](http://audubon-omaha.org) OR you can mail your check along with the name and address of the person to be notified to:

Audubon Society of Omaha  
P.O. Box 3542, Omaha, NE 68103

### We want you – to volunteer

Have you ever been told you're a leader? Eager to share your talents and time for a good cause? Consider serving on our board of directors or joining one of our committees! We are searching for enthusiastic people to help us with our Student Art Contest, Bird Seed Sales, leading programs/field trips and more. Email [cgearin@audubonomaha.org](mailto:cgearin@audubonomaha.org) for more info.

### Take action

Big things are happening, so communicate with your elected officials. Go to [Audubon-Omaha.org](http://Audubon-Omaha.org) for links to contact info.

### Injured bird?

Raptors: Call 866-888-7261 to speak to a Raptor Conservation Alliance volunteer. Non-raptor: Call Nebraska Wildlife Rehab at 402-234-2473.

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Society of Omaha  
P.O. Box 3542  
Omaha, NE 68103  
audubon-omaha.org

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STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH AND ITS CREATURES

# the Meadowlark

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## In this issue

Student Art Show: Best of Show Winners  
Learn new birdsongs this spring  
Upcoming programs & field trip  
Essay: First encounter with the cranes

*The Audubon Society of Omaha is dedicated to the active promotion of environmental awareness to our community through education, conservation, and enjoyment of our natural heritage, especially birds.*

### contact us at:

P.O. Box 3542  
Omaha, NE 68103-3542  
402-445-4138  
website: Audubon-Omaha.org  
email: audubonomaha@audubonomaha.org



Find us on Facebook  
and Instagram.

### Elected Officers

President: Conor Gearin  
Past President: Anne Maguire  
1st Vice President: Mark Harberg  
2nd Vice President: Bennett Amdor  
Treasurer: Melissa Sitze  
Secretary: Katy Simmons

### Elected directors

Bill Bossman  
Derek Comba  
Kyle Finley  
Betty Fullerton  
Sheila Glencer  
Virginia Stauffer

### Committee Chairpersons

DEIB: Bennett Amdor  
Education/Field Trips: Sheila Glencer  
Finance: Melissa Sitze  
Fundraising and Bird Seed Sale:  
Elizabeth and John Fullerton  
Legislative Affairs: Mark Harberg &  
Bennett Amdor  
Marketing and Outreach: Conor Gearin  
Membership: Duane & Kathy Schwery  
Natural Areas Stewardship: Glenn Pollock  
Nominating: Bennett Amdor  
Program: Anne Maguire  
Student Art Contest: Virginia Stauffer  
ASO Administrator: Sarah Shepherd  
Executive Director, Audubon Great Plains:  
Kristal Stoner

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Artwork: Charlotte S., Grade 5, 2026 ASO Art Show  
Meadowlark Award Recipient