



Meadowlark

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Join us for our Jan. & Feb. programs

Learn about forestry in Hong Kong and Sandhill Crane migration



Sandhill Crane by Frank Schulenberg

On Jan. 8, join us for “Green Spaces in Dense Places – A Nebraska Forester in Hong Kong!” Community Forester Graham Herbst will share his adventure on the other side of the planet, exploring one of the most populated cities in the world during a tumultuous time. Aside from all the cultural differences, Hong Kong has a population density over six times greater than Omaha, which creates unique challenges and opportunities in green space management and wildlife habitat. Graham will share his experience with urban park space, prominent tree species, island wildlife, and Hong Kong’s historic stone wall trees.

Graham Herbst is the Community Forester for Eastern Nebraska with the Nebraska Forest Service and a Board Certified Master Arborist. He is a Nebraska native who brings creativity and passion to his role promoting proactive urban forest management. Graham holds a BSc in Horticulture (UNL) and a MS in Urban Studies (UNO).

Then, please join us on Feb. 19 to learn about Sandhill Cranes with

Mike Higgins! Sandhill Cranes are big, striking birds standing over four feet tall with a wing span of more than six feet. They’re chatty birds with over eighteen calls. Their unison call can be heard more than two miles away. And they dance! It looks like pure joy, but biologists tell us it’s for pair bonding and defense. More than half a million cranes stage on the Platte River for several weeks each spring. What a gift to be three hours from such a majestic migration!

The presenter is Mike Higgins, a retired physics teacher who taught at Omaha North High School and Creighton Prep. He first witnessed the Sandhill Crane migration about 30 years ago, when he headed to Kearney on a whim, driving from field to field watching thousands of birds feeding, calling, loafing, and flying. Recently he’s had the chance to observe the migration from river blinds at Rowe Sanctuary, The Nature Conservancy, and Crane Trust. He’s hooked. When it’s not migration time, he’s learning more and planning his next trip.

Our programs are free and open to the public. They are held in the private meeting room at DJ’s Dugout, 777 N. 114th St. Join us for social hour at 6 p.m. Food and drinks are available for purchase. The programs begin at 7 p.m. Register at: Audubon-Omaha.org/calendar-of-events

Winter survivors: Spotting more birds in midwinter

by Conor Gearin



Trumpeter Swan by Mike Benkis

Recently I found myself watching the film *Dinosaur* (2000) — a Disney-animated movie that my three-year-old adores. When winged dinosaurs flew in picturesque flocks over a majestic lake, I was surprised to hear a familiar braying call. It took a moment to place it, but I realized that the moviemakers had given these long-necked dinos the voices of their modern long-necked counterparts: Trumpeter Swans. While this mostly boils down to movie producers wanting a good animal sound to use, the link between fossil species of dinosaurs and living birds is quite real. When the days are short and weather bleak, it’s a nice source of wonder to remind myself that the birds toughing out Nebraska’s chill have ancestors that survived the asteroid impact 66 million years ago, who then had descendants that survived ice ages, global droughts, and all manner of calamities. Birds are tough, and winter is one of the best times to see them showing their stuff!

The Trumpeter Swan is just one of many species that call Nebraska home in January and February. Though they’re able to make themselves cozy in near-freezing water, Trumpeter Swans have needed human help to persist. The species almost disappeared after decades of overhunting. Conservation successes in boosting Trumpeter Swan

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GREEN CORNER: HOW YOU CAN HELP WILDLIFE AT HOME

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

Providing wind protection

Build a simple windbreak with evergreen branches or shrub trimmings to block wind and give birds a cozy shelter near feeders!

Diversify your feeders

Use a ground platform feeder to attract a variety of bird species, adding diversity and charm to your backyard birdwatching

Enjoy indoor birding at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge!

February 28, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Park entry fee: \$3 per vehicle

Join the Audubon Society of Omaha for a family-friendly day of exploration at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge! Meet inside the Visitor's Center for ranger-led activities that will include some indoor bird watching over DeSoto Lake and at the bird-feeding station. Enjoy self-guided touring of the exhibits and viewing of the artifacts from the Bertrand Steamboat that are on display. Take an independent auto tour of open road areas to complete your experience of habitat, wildlife and history.

DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is located about 30 miles north of Omaha in Missouri Valley. The refuge provides essential habitat for resident, migratory and endangered bird



Snow Geese at DeSoto NWR, by Larry Koester

species that rely on floodplain forest, grassland, wetland, sandbar and riverine habitats. The site offers a unique opportunity to see this section of the Missouri River, plus get a glimpse of what pre-settlement Iowa and Nebraska may have looked like. In addition to nature study

and bird watching, DeSoto NWR is also home to an archeological collection of artifacts excavated from the buried wreck of the Steamboat Bertrand.

Bring your family, friends and binoculars and spend the day with us!

Field notes from the president: Helping from where you are

by Conor Gearin



Dear readers,
I'm writing to you from parental leave after the birth of our second child. When our first was born, I soon realized that birds helped me connect to the larger world even when I was homebound with a newborn. Though it was winter, I could hear Blue Jays, Northern Cardinals and more through the windows. Once our son was old enough to be bundled up for short walks, I got to visit small parks nearby with him and see birds surviving winter in our urban landscape. It was just a few months until our son started pointing at birds flying across his field of view, babbling excitedly. Birds, I realized, would help me raise my son along with everyone else who was helping. At three years old, he knows several species by sound. Now we're beginning the adventure again with our youngest.

Though going on leave means scaling back my commitments, ASO helps me feel connected even while I'm mostly focused on parenting. I'm able to write, stay in touch with people over email and Zoom, and occasionally run out to an event. Even in a more limited way, I'm grateful to take part and help however I can.

There is no ideal age for people to engage with ASO. We welcome people of all ages, and many of our events are kid-friendly — especially our upcoming Student Art Show. The stereotype is that birdwatchers are retirees. While the enthusiasm and service of older people is a crucial part of ASO, it's not the whole story. Just like raising a child, supporting an Audubon chapter takes a village. If you are a busy parent like me, if you're a young person, if you feel in any way that you might not fit into the "birding scene" despite your interest in birds or the environment — please just

reach out! We are always looking for new volunteers to contribute in whatever way they can now, wherever they are in life. You might be surprised to find that we had been looking for someone with exactly your talents and gifts. We are enriched by people in different stages of life who bring unique abilities and perspectives to their roles with ASO.

What I've learned so far through a career entirely in nonprofits and education is we sometimes fail to connect enthusiastic people to the opportunities that will let their skills shine. As ASO's president — even on leave! — I want to keep doing my part to make those connections and to continue supporting new generations of conservationists.

Feel free to get in touch with me anytime at cgearin@audubonomaha.org. Find our volunteer form on our website: <https://audubon-omaha.org/how-to-help/volunteer.html>

Thank you!

The 2026 Student Art Contest is here!

Calling all creative kids!

We invite K-12 students to participate in the annual Student Art Contest held by Audubon Society of Omaha. Our goal is to introduce young people to birds and promote the importance of wildlife in our community. This contest is free to enter and open to the public.

Who

All K-12 students

What

Original student artwork featuring birds. Many prizes will be awarded in these categories: Realism, Graphic Design, Cartooning, and Recycled.

How and Where

Starting Jan. 2, look for rules, entry forms and more on our website.

Entry deadlines

Submit entries at the Audubon Society of Omaha office, located at 4339 S. 90th Street, on:

- Thursday, Feb. 19, 3 - 6 p.m.
- Friday, Feb. 20, 3 - 6 p.m.
- Saturday, Feb. 21, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Art Show and Awards

Saturday, April 11: The Art Show begins at noon, giving attendees an opportunity to view all artwork submitted. The awards ceremonies start at 1 p.m. After each age group's awards ceremony, student artists will take their art home.

Why an art contest?

Studies show that drawing is superior to activities such as reading or writing because students process information in multiple ways: visually, kinesthetically and semantically. A focus on birds provides teachers, parents and students an opportunity to discuss conservation of our environment, which helps birds and all wildlife.

Wanna help?

There are many tasks we need volunteers' help with to hold this event. Please consider volunteering to:

- Collect and organize art
- Wrap and package prizes
- Hang student artwork for the Art Show
- Help with hosting the Art Show



Norah L. Gaines
Norah G., 2nd grade, 2025 Best in Show for Realism (K-4)

To volunteer, please contact Sarah Shepherd at sshepherd@audubonomaha.org. If you have questions, contact us at vstauffer@audubonomaha.org.

Fall Bird Seed Sale report and Winter Bird Seed Sale preview



Volunteer Blair Laddusaw loads the order of Amy Campagna of Hitchcock Nature Center

Thanks to 263 ASO customers, we sold 40,718 pounds of quality bird seed totaling **\$56,099**. We raised **\$18,490** to support local conservation efforts and education. We gained 25 new customers. Thank you for your donations, which totaled **\$2,183!**

Our 30 strong, dedicated and diligent volunteers are the lifeblood of our semiannual bird seed sales. They

helped by unloading the semi-trailer of bird seed, loading our customers' orders, making deliveries and/or providing food. Thanks to Ruth Bentzinger, Bill Bossman, Roger Carroll, Mark Cave, Derek Comba, Alistair Cullum, Ken Czyn, Dorian Dunham, Kyle Finley, Michelle Foss, Christine Fullerton, Sheila Glencer, Mark Harberg, Marilou Jasnoch, Kayla Johnson, Tim Kautzman, Blair Laddusaw, Anne & Jim Maguire, P.J. McDonnell, Andrew Miller, Amy and Ash Morkniel, David Nichols, John Pollack, Josh Sheldon, Sarah Shepherd, Melissa Sitze, Noah Sundberg and Jerry Toll.

Coming up: Winter Bird Seed Sale

Watch your email inbox in early January for information about our 2026 Winter Bird Seed Sale. Your orders drive ASO's local educational programs and conservation activities. Our twice yearly bird seed sales (Sept/Oct and Jan/Feb) are ASO's largest fundraisers of the year.

Legislative update

By Mark Harberg

The Nebraska Legislature's next session begins in January 2026. Here are three new bills with potential environmental impacts that could come before the legislature in this session:

LR158 will conduct an interim study to determine the feasibility of the State of Nebraska assuming the administration of the designated Wild and Scenic River stretch of the Niobrara River from Valentine to Newport, Nebraska. A public hearing scheduled for Sept. 19, 2025, was canceled. Senator Storer, the resolution sponsor, is currently working with the Natural Resources Committee on next steps.

LR234 (introduced by Senator Jared Storm, District 23) proposes an interim study to examine the impact of the net-zero plans and goals of public power utilities.

LR235 (introduced by Senator Dave Wordekemper, District 15) proposes an interim study to examine the approval process, personnel involved, and costs associated with controlled burn permits.

How to identify Red-tailed Hawks

Article and photos by Bill Bossman

We have all seen a hawk from a distance — either perched or flying overhead — and wondered what kind of hawk it is. Maybe you are on a hiking trail and see a bird at the top of a tree on the other side of a lake or ravine, and a closer view is impossible. Maybe you are driving down the road at 65 mph and only catch a brief glimpse as you pass by. Is there any way to identify those birds without getting closer or using a spotting scope? The hopeful answer is, “Yes, most of the time you can.” The Red-tailed Hawk is the most common species of hawk throughout most of North America, especially in Eastern Nebraska, so the first question to ask yourself is this: “Am I looking at a Red-tailed Hawk, or something else?” Fortunately, with a little knowledge and patience, you can learn to confidently determine whether or not your bird is a Red-tailed Hawk. But what if you discover it is not a Red-tailed Hawk? Well, then it’s back to studying the field guides and maybe reaching out for advice from others.



Typical Red-tailed Hawk in flight.

Key Field Marks

Several key field marks can be used to identify a Red-tailed Hawk. The usefulness of each of these marks depends on your view of the bird. The photos accompanying this article may help you to visualize what to look for when studying a hawk out in the field.

If you see a perched bird from the front, look for a bellyband of darker feathers on a light-colored belly. Almost every Red-tailed Hawk will show a visible bellyband. When a perched bird is viewed from the back, look for whitish feathers on a dark-colored back. These white feathers typically form a V



Red-tailed Hawk showing dark belly band shape across the bird’s back. This mark is called the “scapular V.” One bird writer referred to this mark as “backpack straps” — so if it helps, picture the bird carrying a backpack.

If the bird is in flight, look for the dark line of feathers on the leading edge of the underside of the wings (known as patagial bars.) Those markings are a clear sign you are looking at a Red-tailed Hawk. The bird’s name implies the presence of a red tail, but not every Red-tailed Hawk has a red tail. The tail of a first-year bird is brownish with dark, narrow bands. The young birds will molt at the end of the first year and acquire the iconic red tail of an adult. An additional field mark that can be used to distinguish Red-tailed Hawks from other hawks is the Red-tailed Hawk’s bare legs, or tarsi. Two closely



Dark patagial band on underside of wing



Immature Red-tailed Hawk with bare legs, thinly banded tail, and scapular ‘V.’

related species, Ferruginous Hawk and Rough-legged Hawk, as well as Golden Eagles, have legs that are feathered down to the feet.

Sub-species and Color Morphs

There are a half dozen or so subspecies of Red-tailed Hawk, mostly found in distinct regions of the country. In Nebraska we often see several subspecies. In addition, many subspecies have light and dark plumage variations, or color morphs. Learning these subspecies will help when looking at a strange bird in the wild. The Harlan’s subspecies breeds in northern Canada, and is the only Red-tailed Hawk without a red tail. These birds are mostly dark with monochromatic, black-and-white mottling. The Krider’s subspecies breed from central Canada down to South Dakota.



Krider’s subspecies of Red-tailed Hawk

They have mostly white heads and undersides with large patches of white on the back. Several sub-species also have dark morph birds that are sometimes nearly all black.

Closely examine the large hawks you encounter and try to see if they meet some or most of the hallmarks of a Red-tailed Hawk. Very often you will realize that the bird is indeed a Red-tailed Hawk.

The eyes have it – your photos

Send in your bird photos to audubonomaha@audubonomaha.org!



Bald Eagle by Mark Schubert

Winter survivors: spotting more birds in midwinter

(Continued from page 1)

numbers further north have made them a more common midwinter sight and sound in the Omaha metro area. Along the Platte and Missouri Rivers and lakes within the river valleys, listen for their iconic brassy hoots. Wetland conservation in Nebraska, particularly the Sandhills, has helped the species return to historic summer breeding areas in our state, making Trumpeter Swans more of a year-round resident than they have been in decades. Other waterfowl species to watch for include Northern Shoveler, Ring-necked Duck, Common and Hooded Merganser, and Common Goldeneye.

For songbirds, midwinter is a time for scrounging seeds and dried fruits wherever they can find them in the landscape. Red-breasted Nuthatches, wandering southward due to limited food sources this year in Canada, have been popping up in the Midwest seeking out conifer seeds. Black-capped Chickadees manage to find a banquet of dormant insects and their eggs in what might look like barren winter bark to us humans. Winter finches such as Pine Siskins appear in a flurry at bird feeders, seeking out favorite dishes such as nyjer seeds, and then vanish as fast as they came.

If your familiar feeder birds

disappear for a bit, try not to worry too much. In winter, mixed species flocks of songbirds move from place to place seeking out food and staying one step ahead of predators such as Sharp-shinned Hawks (a.k.a. “Sharpies”) that fly swiftly in wooded backyards seeking out smaller birds. And if you think about it, witnessing the hunting prowess of a Sharpie is just as much a part of backyard birding as the songbirds themselves. If songbirds are flourishing in your backyard, eventually you’ll see other parts of the food web appear to join in the fun. I’m thinking of another Disney film that begins with an Elton John composition called “The Circle of Life ...”

Well, I’ve clearly got kids’ movies on the brain. I’ll leave you with the observation that birds are magnificent survivors, but they’ll appreciate any help from us, especially in the fiercest weather of the year. It’s a good time to reflect on the importance of habitat and how some species depend on continued good stewardship of wetlands, grasslands, and other ecosystems in short supply. At home, providing water (with a heated fountain), cleaning bird feeders, and offering natural food sources and shelter all help birds make it through to the spring and the next breeding season — and they’re surefire ways to make your yard a winter bird hotspot.

Resources & Info

How to join/renew/update

Join or renew your membership online at Audubon-Omaha.org and select “Get Involved.” Save paper and avoid confusion. Your membership with National Audubon automatically makes you a member of Audubon Society of Omaha.

Change of address?

Please call National Audubon toll-free at 1-844-428-3826, or send an email to audubon@emailcustomerservice.com

Stay Connected

Join our email list at 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 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? Or do you want to be a leader? How about leading a birding field trip to the destination of your choice? Please contact Sarah Shepherd at sshepherd@audubonomaha.org and let us know you’re interested in getting involved with your local Audubon chapter.

Take action

Big things are happening, so communicate with your elected officials. Go to 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.

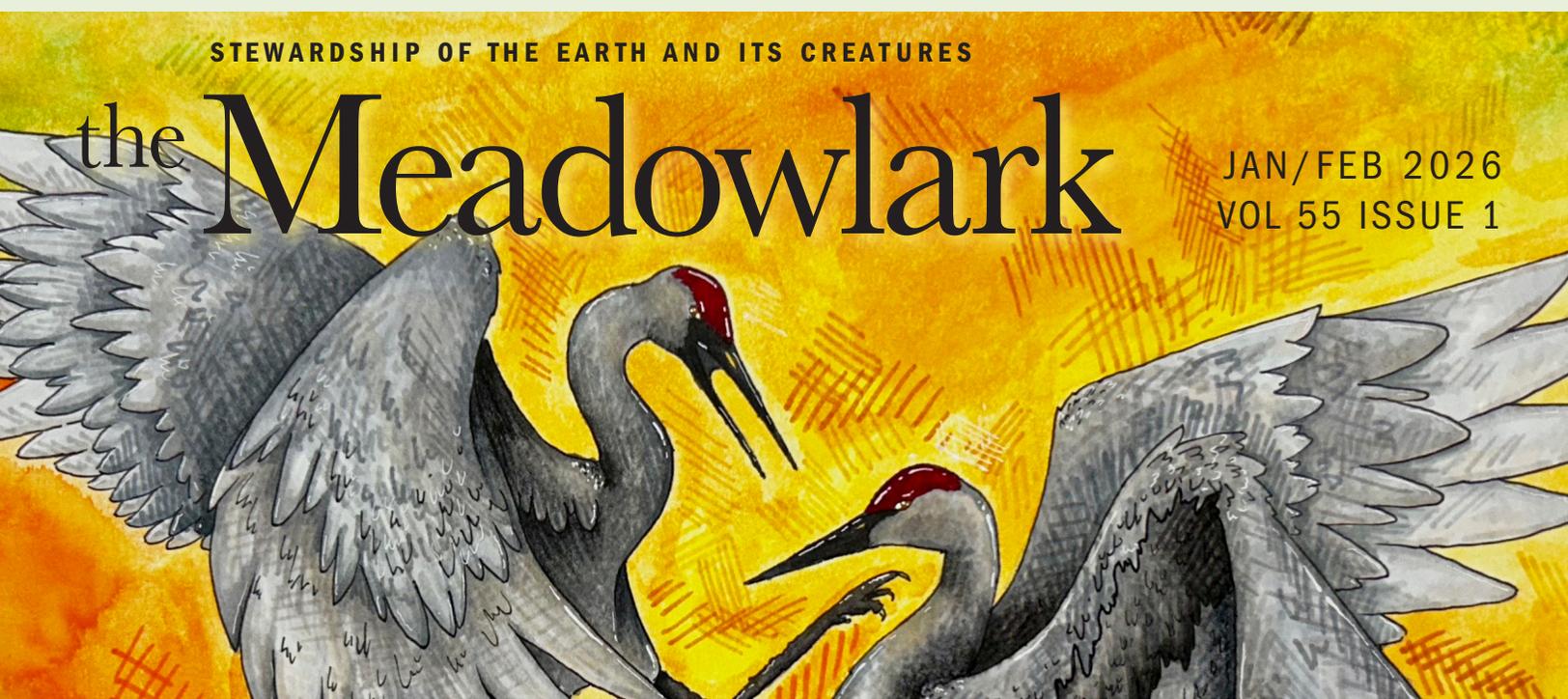
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Society of Omaha
P.O. Box 3542
Omaha, NE 68103
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STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH AND ITS CREATURES

the Meadowlark

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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

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Kristal Stoner

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Artwork: Jupiter S., 11th grade, Best in Show for Realism (Grades 9-12), 2025 ASO Student Art Show