

The Meadowlark

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.

September/October 2018
Volume 47, Issue 4



ASO is a chapter of the National Audubon Society, serving eastern Nebraska and western Iowa.

September 13 IDENTIFYING SPARROWS BY RICK SCHMID

Join us on Thursday, September 13, for a presentation by Rick Schmid about birds that take a lot of patience to accurately identify: sparrows. The meeting will be in preparation for ASO's upcoming field trip on October 20, which will focus on finding and learning how to identify sparrows (more details on page 4).

The meeting will be held at the UNO Dodge Campus

in the Weitz Community Engagement Center, room 127 at 7pm. This is a free public event, so feel free to invite friends.

BIRD SEED SALE October 13 & 14

by Betty Fullerton

Do you feed birds? Would you like to contribute to the financial success of Audubon Society of Omaha? Each fall we have a major fundraiser offering high-quality seed in a wide range of mixes and sizes at reasonable prices. In September, an order form is mailed to all members and past customers. Your order can be mailed, as in past years. Or this fall you may also order and pay by credit card on our website, <http://audubon-omaha.org/>. All orders need to be placed by October 3. We offer 3 locations for pick-up on October 13 & 14: Bellevue, central Omaha and northwest Omaha.

Our high-quality seed products come from our long-time supplier, Des Moines Feed Co. Please consider ordering some seed products as the profits from this sale are used to fund Audubon Omaha's education and conservation programs.

Volunteers are needed to help with the numerous tasks involved with this sale. In September we need volunteers to prepare the mailing. In October we need volunteers for unloading the Des Moines seed delivery and for loading customers' seed on the October 13 & 14 pick-up days. Please contact Jerry Toll at 402-453-9239 or geritol48@cox.net or John Fullerton at 402-493-4362 or FullertonJ@cox.net, if you are available to assist with this major fund raiser.

If you have friends or neighbors who would like to be added to the mailing list, contact Betty Fullerton at 402-493-4362 or FullertonJ@cox.net or Kathleen Crawford-Rose at 402-292-8912 or katcr@cox.net with their names and addresses.

October 11 THE AMAZING JOURNEY OF BOLT



Photo by the staff at Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium

Learn about the resilient bald eagle named Bolt. After being found with a mysterious electrical burn, a team, including presenter Dr. Trent Shrader, performed a skin graft surgery, which eventually led to the bald eagle being released back into the wild.

The meeting will be held at the UNO Dodge Campus in the Weitz Community Engagement Center, room 127 at 7pm. This is a free public event, so feel free to invite friends.

Field Notes from the President: By Matt Miller

Hello fellow ASO members,

In this article I want to talk about forbs, grasses, and interstitial space. I will start with forbs: a forb is a flowering plant that is not a grass. Forbs in all environments are essential in providing important elements such as food, water, and cover for many wildlife species. When it comes to birds, forbs are crucial. Most species in their first couple of weeks of life need the protein-rich insects that are found on or close to flowering plants, helping the young birds to develop and grow quickly. In woodlands and prairies, most bird brooding periods happen in conjunction with broad leaf plant blooms. In addition, August and September are great months to see late prairie and woodland forbs blooming. A lot of yellow, purple, red, and orange-colored flowers set the stage for very interesting and beautiful hikes.

Grasses are my second topic. There are many variations when

it comes to grasses. I believe that generally a grass is defined as a plant with jointed stems, slender sheathing leaves, and flowers borne in spikelets or bracts.

Grasses play a huge role in our state because a lot of times these are the food source for cattle and other grazing herbivores. Grasses in natural environments in most cases establish a good root to soil depth, making them essential for soil health.

Good populations of grasses in a habitat help keep soil in place and not subject to erosion. The structural component of grasses also allows for great cover for nesting and over-wintering birds. Well established grasses allow not only birds but other animals to hide their offspring, all the while using the cover to move in and out of an area.

My final topic includes both grasses and forbs in the same light. Interstitial space is a term I learned at a prairie seminar probably 10 years ago. Interstitial space is defined as the spac-

ing of often bare soil among a healthy stand of a mix of forbs and grasses. This spacing is vital for woodland and prairie ground nesting species to allow their broods to move and hunt freely among lower aspects of their habitat. Bringing together forbs, grasses, and interstitial space to a woodland, savanna, or prairie habitat is essential to the survival of many species that call these habitats home.

These three habitat components are at their best when on-the-ground habitat management is in place. Prescribed fire, grazing, and local eco-type inter-seeding areas are all important things land owners can do to improve their woodland, savanna, or grassland.

So the next time you are hiking, hunting, or birding, look for some different forbs, grasses, and that interstitial space. If you find those three in abundance, you have found a place worth protecting.

*Yours in conservation,
Matt Miller*



AmazonSmile

Would you like to benefit Audubon Society of Omaha while shopping on Amazon? AmazonSmile is a simple and automatic way for you to support your favorite charitable organization every time you shop, at no cost to you, using your existing Amazon account. When you shop at smile.amazon.com, you'll find the exact same low prices and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price to Audubon Omaha.

To shop at AmazonSmile, simply go to smile.amazon.com from the web browser on your computer or mobile device. Before you begin shopping on your first visit to AmazonSmile, you can select Audubon Society of Omaha as your designated charitable organization to receive donations from eligible purchases. Amazon will remember your selection, and then every subsequent purchase you make at smile.amazon.com will result in a donation. The AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price of your eligible AmazonSmile purchases. Donations are made by the AmazonSmile Foundation and are not tax deductible by you.

Omaha Youth Birding Group – Mark Your Calendars

by Tisha Johnson

Saturday morning, August 25th

Sunday afternoon, September 9th

Sunday afternoon, October 21st

Saturday afternoon, November 18th

(The time and location where will meet will be posted on our website days in advance. See below to bypass the website and receive an email)

Omaha has several wild places, many of which you have yet to visit. This fall decide to be deliberate in your quest to inspire the younger generation. They may not have had enough time being out in nature to discover a new surprise every time they're outside. We can teach them how to really observe when they go out with you or their immediate family. This is a neat way to be their cool, adventurous adult. Bring a relative or friend with a child, teen or grandchild, ages 7 and up. Isn't everyone, youth and adults, looking for a group in which to belong? Expand your social reach in a unique way. Join our field trip group whenever you are available. As a bonus, we are offering a free membership to Audubon with the completion of two field trip events. Audubon's annual membership includes an informative and beautiful National Audubon magazine.

Birders in Nebraska anticipate fall migrations. As you know, migration can be prompted by different factors among different species. Some leave their northern nesting habitats when food sources are ice-covered, or insects no longer fly. Some, though, seem to be prompted by the days getting shorter. While there is historical data that is filtered down to the exact week that specific species migrate, this is also dependent upon the

weather north of us. Are any of you weather channel addicts? Now when you tune in, think about the birds.

My favorite field trip this time of year is an ebird hotspot where we bird using the heavy weaponry. I like to view ducks with scopes that magnify to 60x and entice me to scan and search the water till my eye aches looking for the one unexpected duck who missed his own species flock and took up with another. Birding during waterfowl migration is often a 'never know what you'll see' time of year.

Speaking of migration, did you know about the Hawkwatch at Hitchcock State Park? Every year volunteers and a paid biologist work from a 40 ft. tower, sometimes shivering, counting raptors as they fly over. Our own Bob Wells who guides our group

is one of those volunteers who has learned to identify raptors by the way they flap their wings, the distance between the head and shoulders, the wing shapes and color. If you would like to get a sense of how this is done, join us this fall as we view the raptors.

We want to familiarize you with new natural resource recreation areas you have yet to visit. So that you can increase your birding experiences and maximize your enjoyment from birding, visiting nearby sites is the way to go. I would like to extend help to you in locating a birding hotspot near you. Call Tisha Johnson at 402-885-0990 for this service. If you would prefer not to access our website to check the updates, you can be contacted directly via email. Please send this request to the same phone number.

ASO Field Trips 2018

by Rick Schmid

Saturday, September 8 (all day)

Waubonsie WMA, Waubonsie State Park, Riverton WMA in Southwest IA. Field trip will be mostly driving with some walking at Waubonsie State Park. Focus will be on migrating passerines and shorebirds.

We will meet in the Center Mall parking garage right outside the ASO office at 6:45am and leave promptly at 7:00am. We will return to the ASO office around 6:00pm. We will stop to buy lunch, but participants may also bring a lunch if they prefer.

Saturday, October 20 (8:30am – 1:30pm)

Prairie Queen Recreation Area in Papillion, NE. Field trip will be

mostly walking. Focus will be on sparrows.

We will meet in the parking lot by the boat ramp on the northwest side of the lake at Prairie Queen Recreation Area at 8:30am. This parking lot can be reached by going east on Cornhusker Rd from the intersection of Cornhusker Rd and South 132nd St. Participants should bring water/snacks and plan on a late lunch.

November 17 (all day)

Loess Bluffs NWR, Mound City, MO. Field trip will be mostly driving with very little walking. Focus will be on waterfowl and raptors. Details to follow in the next newsletter.

December 15 (flexible timing)

Omaha Christmas Bird Count.

BE SURE TO VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR OTHER BIRDING OPPORTUNITIES

YEAR OF THE BIRD

by Laurine Blankenau

The National Audubon Society has named 2018 as the Year of the Bird, stating emphatically that

the time is now to save the birds, if they are to be saved. Their survival is at the point of crisis, and

the culprit in the bird numbers' precipitous decline is no secret. It is climate change, the science of which has "careful and thorough." For this gigantic task and to emphasize the need for immediate action, a \$10 million gift was given by the Overlook International Foundation.

The alarming fact is that *three quarters* of bird species are severely threatened by global warming. One threat is the shifting of their ranges, which can "expand, contract, or shift" in both summer and winter. Alarming statistics for Nebraska species which are threatened include the Long-billed Curlew, Chestnut-colored Longspur, Merlin, Ferruginous Hawk, Ring-necked Duck, Townsend's Solitaire, Hooded Merganser, Gadwall, Prairie Falcon, and many more.

The total number of species at risk is a whopping 314, and of these, 126 are listed because of climate change. Some species are more adaptable to the changes and some less so, with sad results. Looking a few decades ahead and if rising temperatures continue as expected, more than half of species in our continent could lose half of their present ranges. Unthinkably, these include our beloved and iconic Sandhill Cranes, as well as Bald Eagles and American Kestrels. (If you wish, you can search for the complete reports for our area.)

As a result of these predictions, more than 100 organizations including National Geographic, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, BirdLife International, and millions of people around the world have become part of the effort to arouse public interest and work to save avian species.

Our members care greatly about the threats to birds. We also tire of being asked to contact legislators and sound off about upcoming bills that threaten our climate. Now National Audubon offers the

Sparrows

by Rick Schmid

Photos by Phillip A. Swanson

"All birds look like sparrows to me. There are big sparrows, small sparrows and gaily colored sparrows. But they all look like sparrows. Last summer, I realized this was a know-nothing attitude, so I bought two bird books. They were filled with every conceivable kind of sparrow."

— Andy Rooney

LBJ (Little Brown Job) is a term often used by bird watchers to describe a little brownish bird that they don't have the patience to identify. Most birds passed off as LBJs are likely to be sparrows. Don't let yourself fall into the LBJ cop-out trap. The North American sparrows are beautiful, subtly-colored, distinctly patterned birds that merit the time and attention for proper identification.

The classification of North American sparrows also includes "sparrows" called towhees and juncos.

In Europe and Asia, birds we call "sparrows" would usually be called "buntings".

Most sparrows are not sexually dimorphic (i.e. the adult males and females look alike). Most undergo a complete molt after breeding and are in fresh plumage in the fall and winter. As the pale edges of their feathers wear off over the winter, the birds take on a brighter appearance in the spring prior to breeding. Most species do not molt in the spring, and those that do, molt only partially.

During the breeding season, sparrows eat mostly insects. They switch their diet to seeds in the winter, when insects are not available. Sparrows are migratory in that northern species move south during the winter, but none of the North American sparrows are neotropical migrants. Mexico and the southern U.S. are as far south as they go. It is possible to see various species of sparrows year round in Nebraska.

Join us at 8:30am on Saturday, October 20 at Prairie Queen Recreation Area in Papillion NE as we search for sparrows and learn how to identify them. We will look for the species pictured below and several others.



Harris' Sparrow



Le Conte's Sparrow



Dark-eyed Junco

means to reach them rapidly and easily. They give us convenient, printable forms for contacting our legislators. We can make our principles known in an effective, hassle-free manner for us, the constituents.

Because elected officials need to be convinced by numbers, we need to speak and plead and reason. **To honor the Year of the Bird and have vocal power without stress, access National Audubon's website on line and you will find their helpful advice.** Sign up for Audubon's Action Network and "be heard like no lobbyist here in Washington, D.C." The web site is *National Audubon Society Year of the Bird. It will lead you to data about bird populations and much more.*

Our state senators also enact legislation that affects our climate and birds' survival, and our voices are needed about the bills. To reach your senator through the Capitol switchboard call: 1 402 2471 2316. Governor Pete Ricketts' number: 1 402 472-2244; Mayor Stothert: 402-444-5000. These numbers appear in The Meadowlark on our web site.

Major threats to our birds from climate change:

- Habitat loss because of increased cropland and decreased grassland
- Higher ocean levels with stop-over shorelines under water.
- Arctic thawing and fewer prey numbers
- Warming temperatures too rapid for birds to adapt.
- Urban development and less open country
- Free-roaming cats and window strikes.

For some climate problems, congressional actions are necessary. As I write, the Endangered Species Act is threatened and needs congressional protection, but individually we can take steps to lighten the weight of our footsteps upon Mother Earth.

Where possible, let the sun do the work. Solar power is the cleanest and easiest on the climate and a great ally in generating power. In sunny climates, solar panels on the roof may be ideal. We may or may not find them useful. Costs to the environment are to be considered. It wouldn't be smart, for example, to cut down trees to achieve an unshaded roof. Also there is an environmental cost in making and installing panels. But passive solar devices are available that in winter soak up heat and in summer prevent the sun from invading the indoors. A good contractor can assess and recommend whatever is available on the market. Readers know the obvious so I will state them briefly: insulation in the attic, low-energy appliances, window shades that block the sun, and low-hanging awnings.

A good choice to reduce the harm of fossil fuels in the atmosphere is alternate power. It may be available through your power company or another company and comes at a small monthly cost.

Climate control can occur at the gas pump, which leads to the topic of irrigation and its enormous use of water. Corn growing fulfills a demand, which insures supply, and corn drinks lots of water.

The good news is that intelligent and effective means are available and used by a number of irrigators to reduce the amount of water used. The quality of the water is another factor where improvement is occurring. The Nature Conservancy assists farmers with both of these means of going easier on water.

About fertilizer used for corn growing, it does require fossil fuels in its production. But there is reason for hope because chemical companies are rigorously working to create a climate-friendly fertilizer, one using no fossil fuels. We wish them success.

We may not be corn growers, but we fill our gas tanks. Reducing the miles we travel and driving lighter gas-use vehicles have results that

travel from the pump to the cornfield and the chemical plant.

We've heard this too many times to count, that a dream lawn can be a bad dream for birds. Native Nebraska trees and shrubs know how to survive here without excessive watering, as do native grasses. Hardscaping for difficult places can be attractive and water-saving. We can avoid products that harm pollinators and replace them with pollinator-friendly ones. Your local County Extension Office will guide you to the right products, assuring more pollinators, more plants that survive, more oxygen produced. *And more carbon dioxide pulled out of the atmosphere.*

Meat production affects the climate, and some means of raising livestock are climate-friendlier than others. Keep in mind when buying your steak: grass-fed cattle producing it are kinder to the environment. Methane gas in the animals' waste is an atmospheric poison, though a number of farmers use a system for turning the waste into fertilizer.

Think of our pets. Urban cats abound, as do cat lovers. I love cats though I no longer own one. I miss it and if I acquire one, I will keep it indoors. The toll taken on birds by our pets out of doors is staggering. Cat owners may be unaware of this, but for them and for all of us, it's good to remember: the kitty will still love us even if it's kept indoors.

To conclude and as stated above, National Audubon gives us easy methods to contact our legislators with one click. Your name will be pre-printed. Lawmakers in the Nebraska Unicameral and our city also need to hear from us. Their phone numbers are listed above.

The time is now to save our birds and protect our air, lands and water. Keep in touch with National Audubon about actions needed, and join in the work to save our birds.

Facts are taken from the National Audubon's website.

ASO Acquires 10-Acre Cemetery Prairie Near Blair

by Laurine Blankenau

The Audubon Society of Omaha is pleased to announce the acquisition on June 22, 2018, of the only known Missouri River Valley Loess Hills prairie in Nebraska. Saved from the plow and other incursions, the 10-acre cemetery prairie remains as it was when Native Americans were its only human inhabitants. Its present name, due to be changed to reflect ASO's ownership, is the

Cuming City Cemetery and Nature Preserve, located about three miles north of Blair, Nebraska, off Hwy 75. Its namesake, the town of Cuming City, disappeared in the 1870's. This site will be extremely valuable to botanists and others dedicated to preserving remaining native prairies and plants. Glenn Pollock, Natural Areas Management Chair for ASO, arranged the transfer of the 10-acre

site from The Nature Conservancy to ASO for the minimum required payment of the transfer (\$1.00). Along with ASO President Matt Miller, Glenn will direct the management of the prairie.



Photo by Virginia Stauffer



Photo by Virginia Stauffer



Photo by Kathleen Crawford-Rose

THE ASHES

"You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet are the ashes of your grandfathers. So that they will respect the land, tell the children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. Teach your children what we have taught our children, that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. If men spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves.

This we know: The earth does not belong to man: man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like the blood which unites one family. All things are connected."

Quote from "This Earth Is Precious" by Chief Seattle

Addresses to Remember

President Donald Trump, The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington DC 20500-0001, Comments: 202-456-1111

Senator Deb Fischer, U.S. Senate, Washington DC 20510; Phone: 202-224-6551; Fax: 202-228-1325; Lincoln Phone: 402-441-4600; Omaha Phone: 402-391-3411; Omaha Address: 11819 Miracle Drive 68154

Senator Ben Sasse, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510; Phone: 202-224-4224; Lincoln Phone: 402-476-1400

Representative Don Bacon, U. S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515; Washington Capital Switchboard: 202-225-3121; 13906 Gold Circle, Suite 101 Omaha, NE 68144, 402-938-0300

Representative Jeff Fortenberry, House of Representatives, Washington DC 20515, Phone: 202-225-4806; Lincoln Phone: 402-438-1598

Governor Pete Ricketts, Capitol Bldg, Lincoln, NE 68509; Phone: 402-471-2244

Mayor Jean Stothert, Omaha/Douglas Civic Center 1819 Farnam St., Omaha NE 68183, Phone: 402-444-5000 Hot Line: 402-444-5555

Lincoln Capitol Switchboard: 402-471-2311

Washington Capitol Switchboard

Senate: 202-224-3121; **House:** 202-225-3121

Bequests

A bequest to Audubon is a gift to those who will succeed us; a gift to secure our natural heritage.

Memorials

The Audubon Society of Omaha greatly appreciates the memorials it receives. When sending a 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

DONATE DIRECTLY FROM IRA, TAX-FREE

IRA owners age 70-1/2 or older are able to make a direct transfer of a distribution from their IRA trustee to a qualified charity, up to 100,000 annually. This amount is not taxable and may be excluded from the IRA owner's taxable income. If this is done, no additional tax deduction is available for these funds. Contact 402-505-9494 for more information. (Be sure to discuss with your professional tax preparer)

Memberships

For membership in the National Audubon Society (which automatically includes membership in the Audubon Society of Omaha), go to omahaaudubon.org and select "Get Involved." The drop down menu will allow you to choose "Become a member" or "Renew." The membership fee is \$20. You will receive the Audubon magazine and our local newsletter, the Meadowlark.

If you do not wish to join the National Audubon Society, you may opt to join our local chapter (ASO) only. This can be done online by following the steps given above and selecting Join/Renew ASO. Local memberships can also be obtained by filling out the form below and sending it, along with a check for \$20 made out to the Audubon Society of Omaha, to the following address:

Audubon Society of Omaha
19612 Ridgeway Road
Plattsmouth, NE 68048

With membership in the Audubon Society of Omaha, you will receive our local newsletter, *The Meadowlark*.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip code _____

Telephone _____

Email _____



If you find an injured bird of prey, please contact a Raptor Recovery volunteer at 402-731-9869.

Find ASO on social media:



@AudubonOmaha

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Phone: 402-445-4138 – omahaaudubon.org
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Elected Officers:

President Matt Miller – 402-681-4625
1st Vice President Bob Wells – 402-393-4683
2nd Vice President Virginia Stauffer – 214-676-6289
Corresponding and Recording Secretary
Shannon Engberg – 402-598-2127
Treasurer Betty Fullerton – 402-493-4362

Elected Directors:

Alex Wiles – 559-349-7359
Galyn Langar – 402-595-8543
Jackie Scholar – 402-551-5045
Mike Benkis – 402-305-9210
Ruth Bentzinger – 402-630-3756
Mark Cave – 402-290-7832

Standing Committee Chairpersons:

Conservation Bob Fuchs – 402-553-8242
Education Clem Klaphake – 402-292-2276
Field Trip Rick Schmid – 402-319-1828
Finance Nelli Falzgraf – 402-292-9687
Membership Kathy Schwery – 402-296-4788
Natural Areas Management Glenn Pollock – 402-571-6230

Program – Alex Wiles 559-349-7359
Publication Helen Bartee – 402-657-3845
Publicity Jackie Scholar – 402-551-5045

Other Activities:

Bird Seed Sale Chairs
Betty and John Fullerton – 402-493-4362
Art Contest Chair
Virginia Stauffer – 214-676-6289
Historian – Eric Scholar – 402-551-5045
Youth Birding Field Trips Tisha Johnson – 402-885-0990
Interim Exec. Dir. Audubon NE – Bill Taddicken – 308-465-5282
ASO Administrator – Stacey Coury – 402-445-4138
NAS Board Member – Michele Crist – 208-863-1918
Pan-Flyway Director – Karim al-Khafaji

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omahaaudubon.org
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Ridgeway Road, Plattsmouth NE 68048, or
email: djschw@windstream.net.