

The Meadowlark

April 2009

Volume 38 Issue 4

Puffins on Eastern Egg Rock, Maine

By Laurine Blankenau

Who isn't charmed by these comic-looking birds of outsized bills, clown faces and chunky bodies? For boatloads of tourists near coastal islands off Maine, Atlantic Puffins are indeed a favorite attraction.

When seen up close, the birds quickly convince fans that despite their unusual proportions, stocky doesn't mean slow. Any doubts are overcome by the puffins' speed as they maneuver through the air and underwater, proving they are designed for flight as well as for endearing looks.

From puffin-watching experiences or simply fascination, the birds' fans can appreciate other "fans" who have restored the puffins in locations where they likely would have vanished, maybe forever.

In 1973 National Audubon set in place a means of returning Atlantic Puffins to Eastern Egg Rock where their numbers had dwindled to nearly zero. Through Audubon's management over the years, the birds' numbers have risen from a single pair to 101 pairs in 2008.

Soon to enlighten us about this successful work—the Puffin Project—will be Henry Doorly Zoo's Bob

Lastovica, who interned with the Project on Eastern Egg Rock, Maine, in 2006. On Thursday, April 9, he will present the program at our general meeting. A twenty-minute video will be included; this will be available for purchase at the meeting, along with other puffin items.

Mr. Lastovica has held the position of Supervisor of the Bird Department at Henry Doorly Zoo for 20 years. He is involved with the Costa Rican Butterfly Conservation, Snow Leopard Trust, and the Madagascar Conservation Project. He has worked with many other zoo conservation programs over the years and interned at the International Crane Foundation.

Join us Thursday, April 9, at the Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances (1 block south of 45th & Center Streets), at 7:30 p.m.

A brief business meeting will follow the program, concluding with a social hour, coffee and cookies. The coffee is donated by L'Evento Caffe, with locations at 1110 So 71st St, 158th & Maple, 142nd & Q, 129th & Giles Rd, 172nd & Center, & 84th & Grant (Old

/

Downtown Papillion). Non-members are welcome.

Spring Banquet Thursday, May 14 April Field Trip to Fontenelle

Our annual banquet will be held Thursday, May 14, at Anthony's Steakhouse, 7220 F Street. ASO members, spouses and friends are invited. We begin at 6:00 with a cash bar followed by dinner at 7:00.

Our speaker will be Denise Goodfellow from Bakewell, Australia. An artist, author, guide for ecotourism travelers, lecturer, music teacher and biologist, she has worked for 20 years as a specialist bird guide. She contracts as an interpreter/transcriber on the Lonely Planet's *Guide to Aboriginal Australia*,

Elliott Bedows will lead us on a bird-finding trip through Fontenelle Forest on Saturday, April 25.

We plan to meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Wetlands Center parking lot (past the railroad tracks on Gifford Road) and hike until people are ready to quit. Dress for fair weather or foul. Bring water and a lunch if you intend to bird all day.

The spring date should bring us a lot of good sightings—warblers, flycatchers, vireos and more. New birders are welcome.

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The Value of Citizen Science

By Clem Klaphake

Many of us in the Omaha area have been involved in citizen science for many years. What do we gain from putting in all those hours besides saying "We like to look at birds and count them"?

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology recently pointed out how important this kind of research and data collection is to the big picture of understanding what is happening with our many bird species. I would like to outline many of these endeavors and outcomes of thousands of hours of recording total bird numbers, behavior and breeding locations by people like you and me.

Birders first reported House Finches with red, swollen eyes during 1993-94. Participants in the House Finch Disease Survey and Project FeederWatch tracked the new disease as it spread across the continent. Researchers used this data to demonstrate declines in House Finch numbers in the East and to study regional differences in the dynamics of epidemics.

Evening Grosbeaks were common feeder birds when Project FeederWatch began in 1987. FeederWatchers' counts showed that by 2006, the number of sites reporting Evening Grosbeaks declined by 50 percent. Where they remained, flock size had decreased by 27 percent.

West Nile virus arrived in North America in 1999. Breeding Bird Survey contributors provided data used by scientists to determine the impact of West Nile virus on 20 species across the continent. Seven species from four families (American Crow, Blue Jay, American Robin, Eastern Bluebird, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse and House Wren) declined significantly — American Crows by as much as 45 percent in some areas. Only 2 of the 7 species (jays and wrens) had recovered their numbers by 2005.

Participants in the Great Backyard Bird Count, Project FeederWatch and eBird have documented a dramatic range expansion of Eurasian Collared-Doves since the mid-1970's, when they were first introduced in the Bahamas.

Data from the Breeding Bird Survey, eBird, and Golden-winged Warbler Atlas Project shows links

between Blue-winged Warbler range expansion, hybridization with Golden-winged Warblers, and local extinctions of Golden-wings. This information helps scientists target "safe havens" where Golden-wings can be protected.

Data from Project FeederWatch showed that Common Redpolls don't move continuously throughout winter. Rather, they use different wintering ranges in different years. FeederWatch and Christmas Bird Count data also suggest that Varied Thrust winter populations, within their normal range in the West, rise and fall in a 2-year cycle. In contrast, the number of vagrant Varied Thrushes that turn up in the East and in southern California isn't correlated with that cycle.

Breeding Bird Survey and

Christmas
Bird Count
data are
helping
researchers
predict future
declines of
oak woodland
birds such as
Acorn
Woodpeckers
and Oak
Titmice due
to the spread
of sudden oak
death. This
disease kills
coast live
oaks and is of
special
concern in
areas of
California
that have no
other oak
species.

Data from
Birds in
Forested
Landscape,
the Breeding
Bird Survey,
and
government
studies of
acid rain and
soil acidity
showed a
strong link
between high
acidity levels
and declining
numbers of
Wood
Thrushes.
Acid rain
leaches
calcium out
of the soil.
Birds that
feed
primarily on
soil
invertebrates
may not be
getting
enough
calcium for
reproduction.

So if you
participate in
any of these
citizen
science
projects or
other new
ones in the
future,
remember
you are
contributing
to the
understanding
and possible
survival of a
variety of
bird species.

By Jackie Scholar

Earth Day in the Greater Omaha area will be celebrated on Saturday, April 18, at Elmwood Park (808 So 60th St) from 12:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M.

Once again, ASO will have a booth at the event in order to promote the well-being of birds and their habitat. Members will distribute pamphlets and answer questions people

Earth Day was originally designed to be a day of activities that would educate and inspire people to protect their environment. Last year over 8,000 people attended Earth Day

The keynote speaker will be Dr. Richard Komp, President of the Maine Solar Energy Society, who is traveling around the world with solar energy educational outreach.

Some attractions are an electric car, a natural gas car, and other vehicles for people to see.

Volunteers are needed to help at the booth. If you would like to spend a relaxing day being part of a great event, please contact Jackie Scholar at 551-5045.

The DeSoto NWR will hold its annual spring bird count on Saturday, May 2. The Spring Count, unlike the Christmas Count, will cover only the Refuge.

Everyone at every birding skill level is welcome to participate. There is excellent bird habitat at the Refuge—from waterfowl to warblers and all the taxa in between. If you c

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The annual Sarpy County Spring Bird Count will be held Saturday, May 9. The county is divided into four sections—Fontenelle Forest area, central Sarpy County, Schramm

One person will be responsible for leading a group in each sector. Lots of eyes are welcome. Anyone interested should contact Clem Klaphake either by phone 292-2276 or e

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Habitat Change and The Decline of Bird Populations

Recently the National Audubon Society released a report analyzing changes in bird populations that are most likely related to global warming. Four decades of Christmas Bird Count data reveal a significant northward shift of the "centers of abundance" of 58% of the 305 species counted. The shift averaged about 35 miles for all species, and about 48 miles for land species. During that time period, the average January temperature in the lower 48 states changed from just over 28 degrees F to about 34 degrees F.

There was a steady northward latitudinal trend of bird populations over this time that matches the temperature change. The northward shift didn't happen over a few years' time. It happened at all latitudes, so it wasn't just northern species moving north, it was southern species moving northward as well.

As mentioned, land bird species populations moved northward the most. Among these, common winter feeder birds moved the most, as they are more able to find food from a variety of sources, especially bird feeders. The farther north they move, however, the more vulnerable they are to sudden severe storms that are thought to be more common when the average planet temperature rises. They also displace other species that may be having a difficult time surviving.

Among land birds, grassland species moved the least. It is thought that many of these species could not move because there is not enough grassland habitat left: no place to go. As we continue to lose that habitat, continued population declines are expected because the Plains states are expected to become drier.

While it cannot be proven that global warming is the cause of these population changes, National Audubon scientists and others believe that it is the most likely explanation. A shift of 48 miles for land species doesn't sound like much, but that's the average. Some have moved much more. Humans have the power to

By Bob Fuchs

many bird species that migrate through our region is the excavation of Canadian tar sands deposits in the province of Alberta. Tar sands are a source of very crude petroleum that has been too expensive to justify its exploitation.

With the high oil prices of 2008, tar sands became more interesting as a source of profit. The problem is the extreme environmental destruction that occurs with tar sands excavation. There are 740,000 acres of forests and wetlands that could be destroyed. The resulting sludge ponds kill waterfowl. Current tar sands operations use enough water to meet the needs of 2 million people, and this is expected to increase with more development.

Some birds we see in this state that may be affected include the Olive-sided Flycatcher (on Canada's list of threatened bird species), Evening Grosbeak (70-89% decline in the past 40 years), Lesser Scaup (declining, and in danger from mistaking sludge ponds for wetlands), the Black-throated Green Warbler (declining in Alberta from boreal forest loss), and Whooping Cranes, which nest in Wood Buffalo National Park downstream from the tar sands mines.

Find out more about tar sands mining from the National Resources Defense Council at www.nrdc.org/policy or at the website for the Boreal Songbird Initiative.

What can you do about these issues? Demand action on global warming from your representatives. Ask President Obama not to support Canadian tar sands development through allowing pipeline construction to occur in the United States.

We certainly don't need to develop a poor source of petroleum when we need to reduce the consumption of petroleum for energy.

either accelerate temperature change and Evening Grosbeak habitat loss or slow and possibly stop it. Find more details about this report on the National Audubon Society website.

On the subject of habitat change, another threat to

April Foolishness Bird Haiku Contest

By Fritz Davis

The haiku, a Japanese verse form beloved by Zen poets, is extremely simple. The first line contains 5 syllables. The second line contains 7 syllables. The third line contains 5 syllables. That's it! Three lines, 17 syllables.

This simplicity has caused the form to be used for poetic endeavor by many who are challenged by stricter rules of meter or rhyme. It is used in schools as an introduction to verse. There is even an annual contest for Super Bowl haiku.

Why should birders be shut out of the fun? Indeed, it is very easy, while standing at the window sipping the day's first coffee and waiting for something more interesting than the 34th Dark-eyed Junco of the day to visit the feeder, to count syllables and create haiku.

Here are some samples of the possibilities:

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Red nape, ladder-back.

Drumming beak wakes morning's winds.

Bird, tree, cloud all bow.

Hawkwatchers

Ryan, Jer, Jason:

Eyes beat hawks', charm birds from specks

On the horizon.

Red-tail

Threat flies in. Hawk sits,

Scans. But blue waves drive her off:

Vigilante jays!

A Lister's Life

Controlled rush of wings
Feathers, tail and beak correct:

Life goal accomplished.

We challenge readers of *The Meadowlark* to create haiku about birds, the process of birding, or birdwatchers and submit them to our April Foolishness Bird Haiku contest. A few prizes of nominal value will be awarded at the judges' discretion. The judges will be looking for wit, originality and piquance.

The rules include:

Making Windows Safe for Birds, Cont. from page 5

netting over the window. This won't obstruct the view, birds will continue to fly into the window. They should bounce off relatively unharmed. Fruit-tree netting, pulled tightly over a window, should reduce or eliminate injured birds.

Treating Dazed Birds

Birds don't always die when they strike windows. Sometimes they fly away, apparently unharmed. Other times they fall to the ground, stunned.

If you find a dazed bird, take it inside where predators can't reach it and place it in a dark container such as a shoebox. The darkness will keep the bird quiet while it revives, which should occur within a few minutes unless it is seriously injured. Release the bird as soon as it appears awake and alert.

You might not always see or hear birds striking your windows. Check the ground below your windows periodically. If you find dead birds, move your feeders or modify the windows. Birds face plenty of natural dangers. Let's not subject them to unnatural ones.

These tips from the Great Backyard Bird Count can be reprinted and shared with concerned neighbors and friends—anyone eager for preventing bird deaths from window strikes.

1. All entries must be in the form of 3 lines of 5, 7 and 5 syllables respectively.

2. All entries must be e-mailed to fbdavis2@cox.net and be received by May 1, 2009.

3. Entry of an item is deemed to grant ASO permission to print or publish such item in any of its publications or electronic media.

4. Entry constitutes a waiver of any claims based on computer or Internet communication screw-ups.

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Making Your Windows Safe for Birds

From the Great Backyard Bird Count

You hear a loud thud at your living room window. Looking up, you see a few tiny feathers stuck to the glass. Others drift slowly to the ground. One more bird has been struck down in a collision with a plate-glass window.

Bird-window crashes are an all-too-common phenomenon. These collisions usually involve small birds, such as finches, that fall unnoticed to the ground. Sometimes the birds are merely stunned and recover in a few moments. Often, however, they die. The number of birds killed by collision with windows is staggering—estimates range as high as 100 million per year.

Does this mean you should stop feeding birds? Not at all. It means that if you notice birds striking your windows, you should take steps to eliminate the problem.

Some Solutions

• Move feeders to new locations. Usually bird strikes occur at just one or two windows. Moving feeders away from them may solve the problem entirely.

• Place feeders closer to the glass. If a feeder is just a foot or two from a window, panicked birds may still fly into it, but probably won't have enough momentum to injure themselves.

• Alter the windows' appearance. If you don't want to move your feeders or if relocating them doesn't solve your problem, you'll need to alter the appearance of the offending windows. But to do this, you'll need to figure out why the collisions are occurring. Are birds confused because the window is reflecting the landscape behind it? Is the glass so transparent they think it isn't there? To find out, you'll need to get a bird's-eye view.

See-Through Glass

Go to your feeder and look at your window. Can you see through it? If so, the birds can, too. Is there a plant inside

side of the house, creating the illusion of a fly-through passage? Try making your windows less transparent by changing the lighting inside the house—pull a shade or open or close a door.

You can also make glass less transparent by taping paper to the inside of the panes. This is unsightly, but it's a good temporary measure until you can find a better solution. Commercially available hawk silhouettes are effective at deterring window strikes, as long as you use several. They work not because they look like hawks but because they break up the window's appearance.

Another solution is to put up a commercially available decal that is a replica stabilimentum or white zig-zag from the center of an orbital spider's web. It is thought that spiders create the highly visible zig-zag so birds and large insects will avoid flying into and destroying their webs. Note: Do not attach objects directly to thermopane windows without consulting the manufacturer.

Reflective Windows

Windows that mirror the outside habitat present a different problem. If you see branches or sky reflected in the glass when you look at your windows, you'll understand why the birds are confused. Changing the lighting inside the house or fastening objects to the inside of the glass won't help.

Instead, you'll need to alter the window's appearance by placing something on the outside. As a temporary measure, you can rub a bar of soap on the window (the streaks can be easily removed).

Other solutions include attaching strips of paper or cardboard to the window, hanging ribbons, streamers, colored string, festive garlands, or even mobiles in front of it.

Screens and Netting

Another solution is to place some kind

the house that might be attractive to
birds? If so, try moving it. Is there
another window on the opposite

of screen or

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**Audubon Society of Omaha, Mailing Address: P. O. Box 3542, Omaha
68103-0542**

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

Office: 1941 So. 42nd Street, Omaha NE 68105

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Nancy Williams.... 291-8580

**Natural Areas Mgt. Eric Scholar.....
551-5045**

**Publication Laurine Blankenau. 451-
3647**

Publicity Jackie Scholar..... 551-5045

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Send address changes to Kathy
Schwery, 19612 Ridgeway Road,
Plattsmouth NE 68048.

P. O. Box 3542

Omaha NE 68103--0542

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