

A Bird's Eye View

**Audubon Society of Omaha
A Chapter of National Audubon
Society**



December 2001 Vol. 30 No.

10

Restoring Lewis and Clark's 'Bald Pated Hills:' Prairie Restoration in the Loess Hills

By Clem Klaphake

What did the Loess Hills look like in 1804 when

Lewis and Clark came up the Missouri River and spent considerable time traveling along the north-south range of this physical feature of western Iowa and eastern Nebraska? What does prairie restoration mean in reference to what we see in the Loess Hills today and what we believe was there 200 years ago?

Thirty years after Lewis and Clark's expedition through the Missouri River valley, the artist George Catlin said of the Loess Hills, "The prairie, whose enamelled plains that lie beneath me in distance soften into sweetness, like an essence, whose thousand thousand velvet-covered hills. . .go tossing and leaping down with steep or graceful declivities to the river's edge, as if to grace its pictured shores. . .this prairie, where Heaven sheds its purest light and lends its richest tints."

At our December 13 general meeting, Chad Graever, Park Ranger at the Hitchcock Nature Area north of Crescent, Iowa, will discuss his research on Loess Hills prairie restoration. He will give a brief introduction to the Loess Hills grassland ecology and an overview of his research at the Hitchcock Nature Area. As many of you

know, this is the site of an annual hawk watch.

Chad received his B.S. degree in Biological Research from Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa, and currently is expecting to receive his M.A. in Biology from the University of Nebraska-Omaha in May 2002. He is currently a board member of the Iowa Prairie Network, serves as co-chair of the Stewardship Committee of the Loess Hills Alliance (LHA), is a member of the Comprehensive Planning Committee of LHA and the Loess Hills Wildland Fire Crew and has extensive training in wildland and prescribed fire.

Since January 1998, Chad has been the Park Ranger at the Hitchcock Nature Area. Prior to this assignment, he was a naturalist for Mills County and Pottawattamie County Boards.

Come to the general meeting December 13, 7:30pm at Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances St, to hear an informative talk on Loess Hills prairie restoration and the role fire plays in accomplishing this goal.

A short business meeting will follow the program, concluding with coffee, cookies and conversation.

Birders Invited to Take Part in 102nd Annual Omaha Area and DeSoto Christmas Bird Counts

Audubon calls upon volunteers in Green (292-0451), Cedar Island. Omaha to join with birders across the Betty Grenon, Count Coordinator,

western hemisphere and participate in one of its wintertime traditions, will receive instructions about the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC), held on **Saturday, December 15**, in the **Omaha area**.

The **DeSoto Count** will take place **Saturday, December 22**, and will include Boyer Chute. Contacts for this count are Mindy Sheets, 642-4121, and Jerry Toll, 453-9239. **Any level of birding skills is helpful for both counts.**

You may choose between four sites in the Omaha area: Lake Manawa, Fontenelle Forest, the area near Glenwood, Iowa, and Cedar Island, on the Platte.

Leaders for the four sites are Loren Padelford (292-5556), Lake Manawa; Clem Klaphake (292-2276), Fontenelle; Neal Ratzlaff (397-0135), Glenwood; and Ruth

To discover more about this Count and its long tradition, read the following excerpts from a National Audubon press release.

Continued on page 3

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Scholarly Notes

by Eric Scholar

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Fall Retreat

I had mixed feelings about going to Grand Island for the chapter retreat on Saturday, November 3. I had just returned the evening before from a meeting in Miami related to my work and was tired from hearing talks for five days straight.

present. At the end of the conference call, most members still seemed confused as to those policies. I hope he will clarify these in the future.

chapter attend future retreats, as I felt this one was very productive.

[Redacted]

I would have preferred to sit home and watch football on television but felt it was important to attend the meeting, it being the first Audubon Nebraska meeting I would attend since becoming president of ASO. Also I had committed myself to it, so I went, along with six other board members.

I found the afternoon sessions especially useful. We were all asked to propose issues they wanted to be discussed. We then combined some of them and discussed the three voted to be most important: membership recruitment, chapter development assistance, and fundraising ideas.

Rivers & Wildlife Celebration March 15-17

If the snow ever flies this winter and your find yourself dreaming of spring breaking through, of cranes on the Platte, and waterfowl stopping on their spring journey to the North, keep in mind the greatest wildlife spectacle our state has ever offered and Audubon's celebratory event in March.

We do indeed have a great weekend in store for us on the above dates in Kearney for crane and waterfowl trips, well-known speakers including Kenn Kaufman, and other exciting programs. More information to come next month.

Because mass mailings will not be sent, those wishing a registration brochure must contact Audubon NE, Box 117, Denton NE 68339, 402-797-2301, Nebraska@audubon.org; or Rowe Sanctuary, 44450 Elm Island Rd, Gibbon NE 68840, 308/468-5282, rowe@nctc.net.

It turned out to be a very productive and worthwhile day. Also present were members of the Wachiska

On the first point, one issue brought up was the need to attract younger members and how to go about it. A few suggestions were made by the chapter members.

On the second point, chapter development

- 3 (Mon) Conserv. Meeting
- 5 (Wed) Board Meeting

December Events

Audubon Society and Big Bend Audubon Society.

First, the staff members of the State Office had everything well planned. Proper planning of an event wastes less time and accomplishes the most. This is the second event I've attended that was hosted by Audubon Nebraska, the Rivers and Wildlife Festival being the first, and they deserve much praise for their excellent planning.

The morning was spent on National Audubon issues. We first heard an update on the ANWR drilling by Desiree Groves from National Audubon. She mentioned that the bill could come before the Senate at any time. She urged us to continue contacting Senators Nelson and Hagel to urge them not to support the bill.

We then had a conference call with Alan Bayersdorfer, National Audubon's V.P. of Membership. He spoke via speakerphone explaining National's membership goals and policies and fielded questions from those

assistance, most members felt that communication with the State Office was poor or lacking, and suggestions were made to improve it.

One suggestion was to have State Office staff visit the local chapters on occasion. With regard to this, Dave Sands agreed to attend the ASO Board meeting on December 5, so anyone who might have questions to propose to Dave is welcome to attend.

The third issue was fundraising. The various chapters mentioned those ventures that had been successful for them. The Wachiska Chapter has had much success with their birdathons and their wildlife habitats fundraisers.

I hope that with their advice, ASO can successfully utilize these as fundraising projects in the future, and anyone interested in participating should contact me.

The meeting ended at 5:00p.m., as was planned. We spoke of having more of these retreats in the future, although the frequency was not decided upon. I highly recommend that anyone who cares about improving the

13 (Thu) General Meeting

15 (Sat) Omaha Area Bird Count

22 (Sat) DeSoto Bird Count

25 *Happy Haliday*

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Bird Counts,

Continued from page 1

The CBC began over a century ago when 27 conservationists in 25 localities changed the course of ornithological

ASO Web Site Features Student Art Contest

By Laurine Blankenau

The Student Art Contest now has a place on ASO's web site. A click on audubon-omaha.org will bring up in attractive color and format the rules, categories, deadlines and other details, plus an entry form.

The credit for this professional presentation goes to ASO member Jim McLochlin. Jim, who developed our web site and posts our Newsletter

history. On Christmas Day 1900, the small group of conservationists initiated an alternative activity to the holiday practice typical of the time period, the "side hunt."

The side hunt was an activity in which teams competed to see who could shoot the most birds and small animals. Instead of hunting, ornithologist Frank Chapman proposed to count the birds they saw, thus founding one of the most significant citizen-based conservation efforts which has lasted for over a century.

Apart from its attraction as a social, sporting, and competitive event, CBC reveals scientific information on the winter distributions of bird species. The CBC monitors the status of resident and migratory birds across the Western Hemisphere. The data, 100% volunteer generated, have become a crucial part of the U.S. Government's natural history monitoring database. In its 102nd year, CBC is expanding its geographical range and accumulating valuable scientific data.

"The Christmas Bird Count is the longest running volunteer-based bird census, spanning three human generations," said Geoff LeBaron, Director of the Christmas Bird Count. The CBC has evolved into a powerful and important tool, one probably inconceivable to any of the 27 participants on the first Christmas Bird Count. Accumulated data from the CBC has be

the overall health of the environment. With the growing value of the Count, it seems likely that today's participants cannot fathom the value of their efforts in the next century."

Today over 50,000 volunteers from all 50 states, every Canadian province, parts of Central and South America, Bermuda, the West Indies, and Pacific islands count and record every individual bird and bird species seen during one 24-hour calendar day.

Last season Bird Studies Canada became involved in the CBC. With Bird Studies Canada's involvement, a record high of 1,880 individual counts made up the CBC last year. Over 54 million individual birds and 2,485 species were counted, with 689 in North America alone. Count results from 1900 are available at Bird Source <www.birdsource.org>

The designated compiler for each count will enter data at Audubon <www.audubon.org> or Bird Studies Canada <www.bsc-eoc.org>, where the 102nd Count results will be viewable in near real-time.

Founded in 1905 and supported by 600,000 members in more than 500 chapters throughout the Americas, the National Audubon Society conserves and restores natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife and their habitat, for the benefit of humanity and the Earth's biological diversity.

every month, owns his own web site development business, Omaha Web Solutions, which is profiled at <http://www.omahawebsol.com>>

Jim serves as ASO's bluebird trail coordinator. He also maintains extensive information on the Bluebird Box web site such as classified postings from Cornell/NABS mailing lists, tables, charts, and articles from books and newsletters.

ASO Scholarship for Environmental Studies

ASO is offering a \$1,000 scholarship to second-or third-year students at area four-year colleges (UNO, Bellevue, Creighton, and the College of St. Mary) to encourage college-age persons to participate in ASO activities.

Applicants are asked to submit a one-to two-page essay explaining why they qualify and to state their goals and need, along with a college transcript and two letters of recommendation.

A recipient will be chosen by a committee and will be expected to participate in ASO activities.

Environmental/ Legislative Action By lone Werthman

Missouri River Remains in Headlines

yes, I testified for ASO in Ne-

braska City November 8 for changes in the Missouri River Master Manual. I was thankful I didn't receive any boos this time, as I did 12 years ago when the Corps of Engineers held their first public hearing on this issue.

Either the Corps is getting better at conducting the hearings or the opposition is learning to be polite. Needless to say, the issue is not finalized, and your help is still needed.

Early in 2002, the Army Corps of Engineers will decide on a new plan for operating the Missouri's six big dams which control the river's flow. If changes are not made this time around, it will be another 25 years before anything can be done, and some of our wildlife will have become extinct.

The Least Tern, Piping Plover, Pallid Sturgeon

By a compact signed by both states in 1945, during the growing season, 75 percent of the North Platte River water was to come to Nebraska via canals for irrigation and finally to feed into Lake McCaughy.

However, a *World-Herald* article, November 14, 2001, headlined, "The settlement sets stage for 2nd water fight." In other words, we're not finished. That headline, of course, refers to the fight on the water problems of the Central Platte River and the threatened endangered species of the Central Platte corridor.

Again, the battle started over 15 years ago has so far stopped the building of the Two Forks Dam in Colorado, halting over six diversion plans by Nebraskans to deplete the Platte water for irrigation, and relicensing of Kingsley Dam.

Republican River

We are not yet finished with river water lawsuits. As we know, Kansas in 1998 sued Nebraska over

Republican River water flowing from Colorado through Nebraska then

habitat for wildlife and endangered species.

Are we on the way to making the Lower Platte the next "dry" Platte River, as happened in Central Nebraska? I am reminded of comments in a paragraph in the book on the history of the Catholic Church in Nebraska. In the early 1800's, when the Church divided the state of Nebraska into dioceses, it drew the line between the Omaha and Lincoln dioceses at the Platte River because "the River was too treacherous to cross."

For the record: Saunders County is battling MUD by filing documents with the State and doing everything it can through legal means to halt the project.

and all wildlife of the Missouri River need our help to achieve a better managed river for the 21st century. Look for an Action Alert soon with guidelines to help you express your opinions to the Corps on the need to install a natural seasonal rise of water on the River below Gavins Point dam in the spring and fall to restore the more natural historical flow of the river.

So, the lawsuit between Nebraska and Wyoming has finally been settled. Hurrah! After 15 years of litigation and \$40 million of Nebraska taxpayers' money, Nebraska now has a mechanism to monitor Wyoming's water use of the North Platte River.

Interior Department to the table to resolve the water flow problems of the Central Platte, hopefully for many years to come.

Will we then be finished with water issues on the Platte? Guess again! Since 1994, Metropolitan Utilities District has been in the process of obtaining a permit to build a \$268 million water treatment plant with a 100 million gallon daily water capacity on the Lower Platte between Douglas and Saunders counties.

Because MUD wants to disturb the riverbed of the Platte and build a pipeline under it, the Corps of Engineers and EPA are in the process of determining the effects this treatment plant will have on ground water depletion for farming, area wells, wetlands, and the Platte surface water itself.

The Corps and EPA are also determining the plant's potential harm to

Nebraska is allegedly using more water from the Republican River than was allowed under the terms of a ratified 1943 interstate Republican River compact between Colorado, Nebraska and Kansas.

All three sides are now talking. Nebraska blames Colorado for keeping too much of the water while Kansas says the same for Nebraska.

Governor Johanns has called on the governors of Colorado and Kansas to talk. He said recently,

"We won't lose anything by talking. If it doesn't lead to anything, then it goes to trial."

I am reminded again of a statement by one of our Nebraska governors in the early days of dam building,

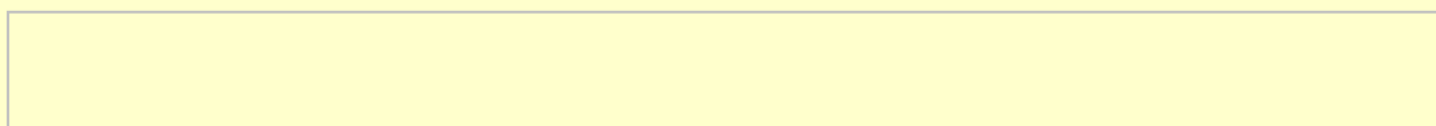
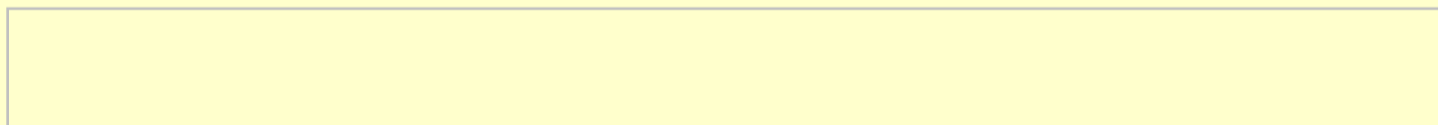
"We should build dams on all our

Continued on page 5



The On Other Fronts in PlatteNebraska: River

The Platte River



Conservation/Legislative Action, Continued from page 4

rivers in Nebraska so that no water leaves our state."

One wonders if Colorado and Wyoming have the same philosophy.

P.S. Did you know that Nebraska ranks 10th in the nation in the number of rivers and streams within our boundaries?

Join us on December 3 for our monthly Conservation/Legislative Action meeting, 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. at the Audubon Office, Heron Haven. 11809 Old Maple Road, for more legislative and conservation issues. Become an

Nature Study with the Bird Club

By Nelli Falzgraf

Shown at left are persons focused on the October 17 Sparrow mini-course at Bellevue University. Twenty-seven participants represented ASO Nature Study Association Birding Club.

The next Nature Study topic will be gulls, by Rick Schmid of the FNA Birding Club, January 16, at the Rookery.

ASO has been invited to share a festive winter's eve with the Bird Club at the

settle before a flickering fire; kick back to a video entitled "Arctic Dance: mother of American conservation; partake of hot chocolate, apple cid goodies. We'll top off the evening with congenial conversation.

Join us at the FNA Buffett Forest Room of the Learning Center Thursday, Blvd North, between Chandler and Child's Roads. For questions call Howard / 292-9687.

November Field Trip Yields Good Despite Few Waterfowl

The fair weather discouraged waterfowl from arriving at Lake Manawa by November 17 in great numbers, but the day's balmy temps were fine for humans, as the 16 participants can verify.

We did see Redheads, Buffleheads, Ruddy Ducks, Cormorants, Canadas, Pied-billed Grebes and a Herring Gull. In an area near the river, Fox, White-throats, Tree, Song, and Harris' Sparrows were among the finds, plus a Bald Eagle over the water.

The best sighting was a Peregrine Falcon at the Iowa settling ponds perched in the water for some minutes before leisurely bathing and preening, then alighting on one of the towers, unperturbed by the attention it received.

A total of 39 species were sighted. The trip was led by Dick Rasmussen.



2002 Sandhill Crane Calendar

A calendar of exceptional crane images by Michael Forsberg, which will bring back wonderful memories of the Platte River and its magnificent crane migration spectacle, is available from Audubon Nebraska.

Calendars are \$15.70 each (not including shipping and handling) and make great holiday gifts.



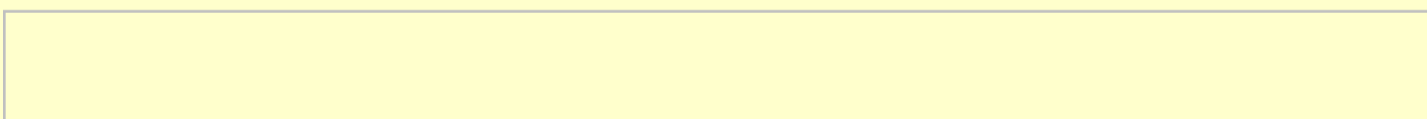
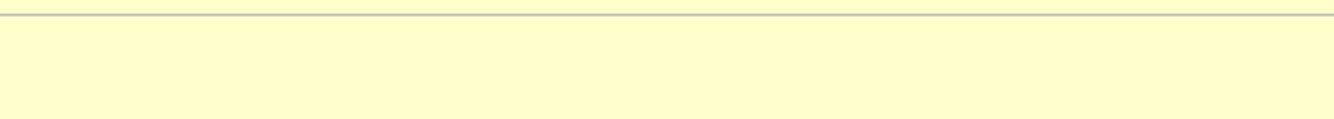
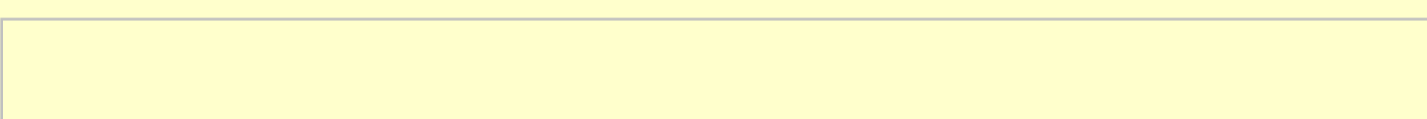
If you find an injured bird, contact a Raptor Responder at 402-734-6817 or



Birdline

For an update on the sightings in the state, call 292-9687.

Report your sightings after listening to the tape.



Notes from Nature

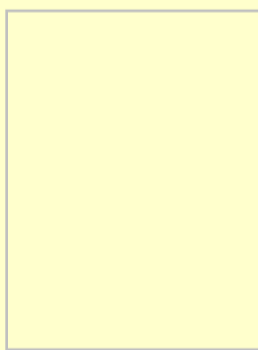
By Jerry Toll

Taxonomy: Biology, a system of arranging animals and plants into natural, related groups based on some factor common to each, such as structure, embryology, biochemistry, etc.

When I opened the new *Sibley Guide to Birds*, I was somewhat dismayed and frustrated to find that my old friends vireos and warblers were no longer closely related families. The vireos can now be found related to shrikes and ordered just before the corvids such as jays and crows. I think it is frustrating to many birders when they first see a new field guide or checklist and find that changes have been made to their orderly world of birds. They have either lumped two species together, split a species into one or more new

der, family, genus and species. And then there are prefixes such as sub- and supra- that can be affixed at any level because not all creatures easily fit into a system created by humans. For instance, there are creatures that share characteristics of both plants and animals. Nature is orderly but isn't as tidy as humans would like it to be. Up until the mid-twentieth century, taxonomists relied heavily on describing the structure of an organism. A bird's bone structure, plumage, even eye color and shape of the beak

onomists must face is the enormous discrepancy between what is known about birds in North America and Europe and what little is known in the rest of the world. The developed world has had the resources to make advances in understanding birds on our continents, but it has created a bias in understanding the extent of diversity in the rest of the world, particularly the tropics where the



species, or rearranged the families or genera. Baffling.

So I decided to look into how the system works and what criteria is used to create order out of chaos.

Science is about systematics—gathering bits of information, seeing how it fits with other bits of information, putting them into some kind of order, and then forever tweaking the information in the hopes that eventually it can be demonstrated to be correct.

I once heard someone say that nothing new has been learned since the 16th century. j

It took some thought, but I think it can be said if you take a narrow definition of the word "new," everything learned subsequent to the "old" has been an expansion of or systemization of fundamental knowledge from that century or before.

Taxonomy is a fundamental of the principles of biology. All living things are ordered in descending order from the most inclusive: phylum, class, or

helped to define what constituted a species.

Since that time, technological developments in other fields have been applied to taxonomy, particularly redefining what constitutes a species.

Advances in the fields of biochemistry and genetics have probably particularly had a strong effect. DNA testing of all species promises to revolutionize taxonomy.

In the interim, ornithologists are publishing information about bird behavior, vocalizations, ecology, and biochemistry. These characteristics are now factored in when reviewing a species and account for many changes birders have faced in recent years.

For example, enough analysis has now been done on bird vocalizations to theorize that vocal analysis can be used as a first step to realizing the true status of a species. This is particularly useful for neotropical and tropical species where virtually nothing is known about them except a description of plumage.

Perhaps the largest problem bird tax

greatest diversity lies.

For most tropical birds, only their plumage has been described. Not only that, ecological influences on speciation are more pronounced in the tropics, magnifying the need for behavioral and biochemical analysis.

For these reasons, avian diversity in the tropics is probably vastly underestimated.

Conversely, a number of species in the tropics may only be geographical variants or subspecies. Having only plumage descriptions to address this problem is inadequate.

As you can see, the classification of birds is a work in progress.

References:

"Ecology and `Evolution of Acoustic Communication in Birds,"

edited by Donald Kroodsma. Cornell University Press, 1996.

The Sibley Guide to Birds, David Sibley. Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.

National Audubon Society

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

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

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

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