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# The Meadowlark

*November 2009*

*Volume 38 Issue 9*

*ASO is a Chapter*

*of the National Audubon  
Society*

*Serving Eastern Nebraska  
and Western Iowa*

## Recollections of a Longtime Birder

Our speaker for the Thursday, November 12, 7:30 P.M. general meeting was born in Omaha and spent much of his life in Nebraska. Jack Curran graduated from high school in Omaha and joined the Air Force in 1954. After four years of military service, he attended the University of Nebraska at Omaha, majoring in Fine Arts.

In 1961 he became advertising manager for Farmers Union State Exchange, a regional farm cooperative headquartered in Omaha. In 1966 he accepted a position as Art Director with *Nebraskaland Magazine*, published by Nebraska Game & Parks in Lincoln. He also helped produce and co-host "Outdoor Nebraska" on ETV during the mid-seventies.

Jack left Game & Parks in 1984 to pursue a free-lance sculpting career, completing hundreds of wildlife commissions in wood and clay since then. Major commissions were for Disney World, the CIA, BASF and DuPont. He won many first place ribbons for his waterfowl carvings at the World Show in Ocean City, MD.

If you have been to the Henry Doorly Zoo Safari off I-80 along the Platte River, you may remember seeing large

By Clem Klaphake  
completed those sculptures.

In 1995 Jack and his wife, Marilyn, moved to Bella Vista, Arkansas. In 2004 he began authoring his book, *Jack Curran's World of Birds*, which was published in July of 2008. Along with his excellent photography, he describes his lifelong love of birds.

He has a special interest in raptors and was the third licensed falconer in Nebraska. He told me recently about the Red-shouldered Hawk nesting in his yard. He is able to photograph it by just opening one of the windows in his house (no camouflage or blind needed).

Jack has offered to bring a number of his books with him to sell for \$12.00 each, autograph them, with \$6.00 from each sale going to ASO (a very worthy cause). These will make great Christmas gifts, so bring a little cash or your checkbook. He may even play a game or two and give the winners a copy of his book!

As a speaker, Jack is not only informative but also entertaining. Bring a friend(s) or family member(s). Remember, you don't have to be a member to attend our meetings or listen to our speakers. The meeting is held at

bronze bison near the visitor center. Jack created those and can tell you a story about how he

Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances St (1 block south of 45th & Center Streets.

## Field Trip to Squaw Creek Nov. 7

The November Field Trip will take place on Saturday, November 7. We will venture down to Squaw Creek NWR near Mound City in extreme northwest Missouri. We plan to meet at the southeast corner of the Southroads Mall in Bellevue and will carpool down, leaving Bellevue at 6:30 A.M, arriving at 8:30. For those not carpooling from the Southroads, the best meeting place is at the Visitor Center.

Last year we had a great trip, and weather permitting

By Elliott Bedows

(as I write this there are two inches of snow on my decks), we will do so again.

Plan for the weather and pack a lunch or plan to eat in town. Some participants will undoubtedly want to come back to Omaha directly, while others may want to stop and bird their way back making stops along the way. We'll make those decisions following the Squaw Creek NWR portion of the trip; it may depend on what we see at the Refuge.

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## Not All Is Lost Or Negative in Bird Conservation: Part III

By Clem Klaphake

These are my final comments concerning positive things going on with bird conservation in North America. The purpose for doing this is that so often we only hear about the bad things happening to birds and their survival. There are many problems that numerous species face, and I plan to outline some of those over the next few issues of *The Meadowlark*.

A songbird species that many of you have on your life list but had to travel to Mio or Grayling, Michigan, to see is the Kirtland's Warbler (often listed as the rarest warbler in North America). With that type of label, there obviously has been a longtime concern for it. With considerable intervention: a. doing controlled burns of jack pine forests and b. trapping Brown-headed Cowbirds,

habitat and, again, trapping of Brown-headed Cowbirds. The Fort now estimates that just on the reservation alone there are 5,400 Golden-cheeked Warbler males (always easier to count singing males). And even more successful is the Black-capped Vireo population that grew from 85 males in 1987 to 8,000 in 2006, also just on the Ft. Hood reservation.

WHY would these two species be so successful where there are army tanks ripping open wide swaths of land, large artillery shells exploding and shaking the ground, and where Apache helicopters suddenly drop in, making throbbing sounds that drown out all other sounds? David Cimprich, a biologist who works for The Nature Conservancy and helps with conservation issues at Ft. Hood,

this species has now increased its breeding territory beyond a small area in the northern portion of the lower peninsula of Michigan. In the past couple of years, breeding pairs have been found in both Wisconsin and Ontario.

This species will probably never achieve great numbers because it relies on a very specialized type of forest environment (large tracts of young jack pines that have grown after a forest fire) for reproduction. But their situation looks much better than it did 15-20 years ago.

Then there are the Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo that breed in the same basic environment. Both of these birds are thriving in Texas on Ft. Hood's 217,000-acre military reservation. As with the Kirtland's Warbler, both of these species have very specialized environments and have been plagued by Brown-headed Cowbirds.

The Black-capped Vireo was added to the Endangered Species List in 1987 when scientists believed that only about 1,500 survived. In 1990 the Golden-cheeked Warbler was added to the list, with an estimated 5,000 to 16,000 survivors. They both are on the National Audubon Society's 'red list' as birds facing major threat.

However, recent numbers from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology estimate there are now 21,000 of the warblers and 12,000 of the vireos. Much of this increase is attributed to Ft. Hood's conservation measures of

says, "It is because it is Ft. Hood and a large training facility. Not only are reservation lands protected from development, but training activities have created shrubbery habitats favored by the birds."

Maybe we need more Ft. Hood-type military reservations for some of our threatened bird species and less urban sprawl as we see in Sarpy and Douglas County (tongue in cheek of course).

And then there are the waterfowl species. If any of you have ever followed the population of waterfowl, you know that there are a lot of up and down numbers from year to year. Currently USFWS and Ducks Unlimited have issued their estimates of breeding success for most waterfowl species.

We all know that the Canada, Snow, Ross's, and White-fronted Geese are doing quite well and continue to keep increasing their numbers. As for ducks, most are maintaining their numbers or increasing (especially Redheads, Wood Ducks, Mallards and Gadwall). Only the Northern Pintail and Lesser Scaup have shown a slight downturn in numbers. In general, waterfowl are doing as well as ever, despite the concerns often voiced about draining wetlands, polluted water, too much irrigation, or over-zealous hunters.

More funded scientific research, citizen science and vigilance is constantly needed to make sure more species continue to grow rather than decline.

Project FeederWatch, an annual survey of feeder birds reported at feeders or other sites, begins November 14 and runs through the first Friday of April. You are encouraged to participate by signing up at any point by February 29. The reported data is published in scientific journals and shared with ornithologists and bird lovers nationwide.

If you sign up on line or by mail, you receive a Research Kit with instructions, a bird ID poster, wall calendar, resource guide to bird feeding, and a tally sheet. You may count birds in your yard, a park or other site with clear boundaries.

Contact [feederwatch.org](http://feederwatch.org) now or later. Allow about two weeks for receiving the information and supply kit. The cost is \$15 (\$12 for Lab members) per person. This fee is the Project's only means of support for staffing, web design, analysis of data and report of the year's findings.

Photo by Gary  
Mueller

## **Finding and Reporting Banded Birds**

Bird banders attach a small metal leg band to wild birds which bears a number used to identify the date and place the bird was banded, age of the bird at banding, and other data about the bird.

If you find a banded bird, be sure to retain the band and call 1-800-327-2263 or contact [www.usgsbirdbandinglab](http://www.usgsbirdbandinglab) to report the number on the band. You will be asked how you obtained the band (shot the bird, found it dead, e.g.), when and where you obtained it and whether the bird was dead or alive.

This information assists in the management and conservation of our wild birds.

The trip was NOT one of our better ones. The weather was cool (but not cold) and dreary, which also described the birding. There were a total of two participants from Omaha (Clem and I) and four others from Lincoln.

Don't know if it was the weather or the fact that there was a football game that kept folks away (hope it wasn't the latter because that game was..... not good).

Anyway, here's the list. We only hit on one of our three target birds (a single Sprague's Pipit), and that was seen only by Clem and heard by me.

Species total (barring what Clem might have seen on the way home) was 41 including the following highlights:

Northern Bobwhite - 20

Sprague's Pipit - 1

Horned Lark - 5

Ruby-crowned Kinglet - 3

Orange-crowned Warbler - 2

Yellow-rumped Warbler - 6-8

Eastern Towhee - 5

Eastern/Spotted Integrate  
Towhee - 1 - not counted as separate  
species

Dark-eyed Junco - 1 (now you know it  
was a slow day!)

Chipping Sparrow - 1

Field Sparrow - 2

Harris' Sparrow - 25+

Savannah Sparrow - 1-2

White-throated Sparrow - 10

White-crowned Sparrow - zero: missing  
that  
bird on this trip is a first!

Fox Sparrow - 2

## Christmas Bird Counts

Saturday, December 19, has been set for the Omaha area Christmas Bird Count

The DeSoto NWR/Boyer Chute Count will be held Sunday, December 27.

Complete information about both Counts will be given in the December *Meadowlark*.

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## Amazing Feats of Migration

By Kathy Schwery

Tiny hummingbirds migrate across the Gulf of Mexico, a distance of more than 500 miles, in a single flight. Young godwits, whose parents have already departed on migration, somehow find their way from Alaska to New Zealand, which is a journey of 6,800 miles. How do birds accomplish the amazing feat of migration? If you are as fascinated by bird migration as I am, then I can recommend any or all of three books on the subject.

Scott Weidensaul has written *Living on the Wind: Across the Hemispheres with Migrating Birds*. His lyrical book contains vivid descriptions of events which happen on migration.

Weidensaul's account of the day that over 400,000 raptors funneled through the area around Veracruz, Mexico, is thrilling. He tells the heart-wrenching tale of massive hawk deaths in Argentina, caused by an organophosphate pesticide, but then explains the encouraging, beginning steps that farmers there are taking to protect the hawks. Because the book

and explains how this loss affects our forests, gardens and flowers. Birds play crucial ecological roles in our natural communities, from controlling insects to helping pollinate plants. Stutchbury devotes chapters to several of the major threats causing songbird declines, such as pesticides, communication towers, loss of habitat, and feral cats. She discusses threats to birds here in the United States and also in their winter homes much further south.

Injecting a hopeful note in her book, she lists things we can do to help save songbirds. Interestingly, one of the best things we can do is to drink shade-grown coffee, because trees on coffee plantations provide some of the only habitat left in many Central American areas. We also can buy paper products that come from sustainable forests and limit our use of pesticides. Stutchbury also urged readers to get involved in citizen science projects such as the Breeding Bird Survey to help provide more information about songbirds and

takes us to Mexico and South America, readers can see the obstacles and dangers that migrating birds face as they travel from one hemisphere to another.

*Songbird Journeys*, by Miyoko Chu, is another well-written book about migration. Chu, an ornithologist at the Cornell Lab, tells her story by dividing up the year into its seasons and then detailing what goes on in the life of birds during the different times of year. She begins with an interesting account of some pioneering scientists who first proved that songbirds do migrate across the Gulf of Mexico. Initially it was thought that this was impossible for birds to do.

In a fascinating story that had me rooting for a migrating Gray-cheeked Thrush, Chu tells of two scientists in an airplane who attempted to follow the transmitter-carrying thrush. In spite of the extra weight from the transmitter, the thrush continued to fly on across Lake Michigan in a thunderstorm.

A section of *Songbird Journeys* is devoted to "citizen science" activities ordinary people can do to help birds: conducting Breeding Bird Surveys, the Nest Card Record Program, eBird and Backyard Bird Counts. The book also lists "hotspots" for birding in each of the seasons.

Bridget Stutchbury, a biology professor in Toronto, has written *Silence of the Songbirds*. This book details the tremendous loss of songbirds in the past 40 years

their diminishing numbers.

Much research has been done to explain what triggers the urge to migrate, and this research was detailed in both Weidensaul and Chu's books. Factors such as less daylight in fall as well as the orientation of the sun and stars all affect migration.

*Living on the Wind* describes some of the longest journeys in the songbird world, and I found those fascinating. How can the wheatear fly from the Yukon to Siberia and from there down to Syria and across the Sinai Desert and finally to Tanzania? Why does the curlew travel yearly from Alaska to Hawaii and eventually all the way to Fiji?

Writing in *Songbird Journeys*, Miyoko Chu has a very interesting section on audio monitoring of migration. With new technology, it is possible to place microphones on our roofs and then through the use of computer software, identify birds that are migrating above our homes. How interesting to listen in on the call notes from high above and then to be able to find out which birds were traveling overhead.

Now that our songbirds have departed for the year on their long and sometimes perilous journeys, we are left to marvel at their courage and endurance. Bridget Stutchbury, Miyoko Chu and Scott Weidensaul help us to understand more about migration and give us a new appreciation for the amazing travels of songbirds.

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

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*The Meadowlark* is published monthly September through May, plus a summer issue. The newsletter may be accessed on our web site, <http://audubon-omaha.org>

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