AUDUBON SOCIETY OF OMAHA

Meadowlark

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Hawks, owls — raptors, oh my!

See Saw-Whet Owls Up Close!

Wed., Nov. 4, 7 – 9 p.m.

Join us at Hitchcock Nature Center in Honey Creek, IA, for a Northern Saw-whet Owl banding demonstration! Meet in the visitor center overflow parking lot and we will all walk to the banding area. The specific location will be provided near the event day to those who register.



Photo courtesy of Hitchcock Nature Center

Please bring your own chairs and be prepared for cold weather! The banding location is not temperature-controlled and we will be out after dark. If the weather is unfavorable, the backup date will be Nov. 11 from 7 – 9 p.m.

Hitchcock Nature Center access is $5/vehicle for a day pass, or free for Hitchcock members. We can't wait to see you there for this amazing experience getting close looks at this secretive little hunter!

All About Hawks with Anna Keenan

Thurs., Nov. 12, 6 – 8 p.m.

Wildlife biologist and Omaha local Anna Keenan will join us on Nov. 12 to share her enthusiasm and observations about hawks!

Anna grew up playing in the forest behind her grandparents' house in Ponca Hills, developing a lifelong appreciation for birds. "I am very grateful to get to talk with you about my love of birds, and, more specifically, my passion for raptors and raptor ecology," Anna says. "I have spent more than 10 years studying them, specializing in woodland raptor nesting ecology."



Please join us in the private meeting room at DJ's Dugout, 777 N. 114th Street. Our social hour begins at 6 p.m. with food and drinks available for purchase, followed by the program at 7 p.m. Our programs are free and open to the public! Please register at AudubonOmaha.org/Calendar of Events

GREEN CORNER: HOW YOU CAN HELP WILDLIFE AT HOME

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

Make winter more magical for birds!

Host a winter bird cafe

Offer fresh seeds and unsalted peanuts in suitable feeders. Add a heated birdbath or refresh a shallow water dish frequently. Fresh water can be especially valuable when natural sources freeze.

Build a bird hideaway

Keep a small, stable pile of branches, leaf litter and native flower seed heads in a quiet corner. Add a compost pile nearby and help birds thrive by attracting insects and providing natural food sources.

Spotlight on sparrows

Birds to see in late fall and early winter

by Conor Gearin



American Tree Sparrow by Tom Murray

The American Tree Sparrow is a charming bird cursed with a confusing name. European settlers named it due to its resemblance to the Eurasian Tree Sparrow, but they nest on the ground and mostly search for their food on the ground, too. Their most distinctive feature, which has little to do with trees, is the little dark dot on their otherwise plain white breasts. That dot can quickly distinguish it from the many other streaky brown sparrows out there in winter, especially when an American Tree Sparrow pops up on a fenceline and shows off its feathers on a cold, snowy day.

The bird's name also gives a vague impression of widespread abundance — "American" being quite nonspecific. While American Tree Sparrows are currently widespread in North America, they are fast losing their abundance. Breeding Bird Survey data from Canada indicate an 87% decrease in the population. They face threats

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Field notes from the president

Having fun, getting serious

by Conor Gearin



When we put up our winter wreath on the front door, I remembered what happened with our summer wreath earlier this year. An itty-bitty House Finch nest appeared, nestled in the upper part of the wreath. First there was one little blue egg, then two, three, and four. Each time we came home, we'd frighten one of the parents off the nest, but they soon returned once the door was closed. The drama heightened when we noticed a speckled cowbird egg in the bunch. The nestlings all hatched, but the larger cowbird nestling disappeared a few days in (unclear what happened, but I did notice a local feral cat hanging out underneath the nest around that same time…)

I posted updates on the finch family's progress on Instagram. Friends and family asked for updates — *How are they doing? Do you think they'll make it?* For wildlife, there are no guarantees of success, so I really wasn't sure if I was sharing updates to a tragedy or a success.

For several days, the four chicks could barely squeeze their bodies into the tiny nest. And I'm sure they were working their parents to the bone getting them enough food. Then one day, I opened the door to take a quick peek at the finches, and with an explosion of fluttering past my face, all four finch youngsters flew to the maple tree in the front yard, never to return to the nest. They had fledged!

It strikes me that the finches took the wreath much more seriously than we did. To us, it was just a bit of decoration. To the finches, this was habitat, and a clever place to avoid many potential predators, as birds of prey and squirrels couldn't possibly reach them when they were tucked into the wreath.

Our pocket gardens, backyard habitats, restored patches of prairie, and other urban green spaces can be like that, too. The thin strip of prairie plants in our yard was just a casual experiment until I noticed Monarch caterpillars chowing down on swamp milkweed and Mourning Doves nesting among the wildflowers. What starts out as a fun project begun in the spirit of "worth a shot" or "better than nothing" can become a valuable resource to real wildlife



One, two, three, four House Finch eggs — and then a cowbird egg!

— serious business for their survival.

In her article on the Christmas Bird Count (p. 3), Hannah Miller shares how she and her family became involved in the annual count, and how over the years it grew into a strong tradition. As birds face the cold months, let's ask ourselves: what can we try out, even just for fun, that could grow into something bigger? Is it planting the dormant roots of a tree or shrub in winter, joining us for the CBC, or reaching out to a local business about protecting birds from window strikes? Just see what happens. What if it goes well? What next?

Check our calendar for events!

We keep our online calendar and social media updated with upcoming event info. Check our online schedule (Audubon-Omaha.org/calendar-of-events) and follow us on Facebook and Instagram for the latest updates!

Autumn walk in the grassland



Bennett Amdor (foreground), ASO Board Member and Land Management Specialist at Glacier Creeek Preserve, speaks to attendees at a nature walk at the preserve in October. Highlights included LeConte's Sparrows, Northern Harrier, Sedge Wrens, Great Horned Owls calling to each other, and more!

What's the buzz on community science?

Join us for the 127th Christmas Bird Count!

by Hannah Miller

Do you like counting birds? Or identifying bumblebees? Are you interested in analyzing images of galaxies from the comfort of your home?

All these things – and much more – are part of community science projects happening throughout the United States. Community science, often called "citizen science", is a research model that links members of the public, like you and me, with scientists to collect data and make observations. These projects cover hundreds of topics and are a great way to get involved in the scientific process and help the natural world!

Over 10 years ago, I attended my first Christmas Bird Count in Lincoln. Though I didn't know it at the time, I joined one of the most famous and long-term community science projects in the world. The Christmas Bird Count has been running for over 120 years across North America. It started in 1900 to replace a holiday tradition known as "side hunt," where sportsmen would compete to see who could shoot the most birds. An early National Audubon Society officer, Frank M. Chapman, proposed to instead have people count the birds around Christmastime. What started with 27 birders in 1900 has grown to over 85,000 volunteers across the United States and Canada. The event has continued for over a century!

Each year, beginner birders and experienced ornithologists alike get together on one day around the holiday season. Counters are assigned to a certain area, such as a park, hiking trail, or bird feeder, and count every bird they see or hear. The National Audubon Society compiles all the observations into a massive database to track climate change impact, population trends, migration patterns, and much more.



Hannah (foreground) at a past CBC

Anyone is welcome to join the Christmas Bird Count, even if you're a beginner! I started as a college student, dragging my completely uninterested father through parks across Lincoln. Over the years, my ID skills have improved, and I even started compiling data for the Omaha Count Circle with Bob Wells. My once-begrudging dad now looks forward to spending a morning together in the (often) freezing weather. It's become a tradition in my family, and I'm one of thousands who have made it a tradition during their holiday season.

This year, the Omaha Christmas Bird Count is taking place on Saturday, December 19. If you're interested in participating, please reach out to Hannah Miller at hmiller@fontenelleforest.org. Information on other community science projects can be found online through the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, SciStarter.org, the Xerces Society, and many more.

We hope to see you at this year's Christmas Bird Count!



Trails at Fontenelle Forest on a previous CBC date

How to help birds in your backyard in the cold months

Keep things messy, offer a place to roost, and feed the birds!

by Rebecca Carrillo

As the festive month of December approaches, the change in season also marks the end of fall migration for the birds. In Nebraska, the last birds to migrate through are largely sparrows and blackbirds. This time of year also marks the presence of Nebraska's overwintering species — birds that pass through or stay in the region during the winter. Many ducks and songbird species fall into this category. Birding outdoors in the winter months isn't for everyone, so if you prefer to stay cozy inside drinking hot chocolate and birding from your window, here are several ways you can help the migratory and overwintering birds in your own backyard!

One of the easiest ways to support birds during the winter is keeping your backyard messy! Dead trees, fallen tree limbs, dead seed heads of last season's flowers, and fallen leaves are all beneficial to the birds. The dead trees and leaves are home to tasty insects for the birds. Dead trees and large tree limbs also often serve as shelter for many smaller birds, especially when those chilly winds blow through. Providing places for birds to shelter is an easy way to help out.



Birds like this Rusty Blackbird depend on dormant and larval insects found in leaf litter to make it through the winter. Photo by Andy Reago and Chrissy McClarren



Pine Siskins and many other birds flock to bird feeders in winter, especially when snow covers up other food sources. Just make sure to keep it clean! Photo by Eric Scholar

If you are creative and crafty, you might want to build a roost house for overwintering birds. Roosting is when birds, often grouped together, find a place to sleep or shelter. A roost house is different from a typical next box because it provides ample space for multiple birds to rest (although birds sometimes use nest boxes for roosting, too — so clean them out after the breeding season!) The National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology both provide great online resources on roosting boxes, what makes a good roosting house, where to put them, and more.

Lastly, as the famous Mary Poppins song goes, "Feed the Birds" is another great way to support birds in the cold months. UNL Extension recommends that bird feeders for winter feeding can come out as early as mid-September. Bird feeders with an overhanging roof are useful for keeping the seeds fresh during rainy or snowy conditions. Suet mixes are another popular option for winter feeding. Suet is usually sold as a small brick and hung from a tree branch in a wire cage. Finally, fresh water is a great resource to provide for the birds, especially when unfrozen water is hard to find. Just make sure to clean your bird feeders and bird baths regularly to prevent the spread of disease.

So whether or not you're hiking to spot birds on chilly trails, there are many ways to support the birds in your own backyard. Keeping your backyard messy, placing roosting houses, and setting out bird feed are all ways to help migratory and overwintering birds make it through the season.

The eyes have it: your photos

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

Right: Barred Owl by Rebecca Boyd



Spotlight on sparrows: Birds to see in late fall and early winter

(Continued from page 1)

both in their northern breeding range (loss of habitat due to climate change; pollution) and in the places they spend their winters, including Nebraska. Here, losing habitat to agricultural development and predation by outdoor cats could have significant impacts on the number of birds able to return north next summer to breed. By providing good habitats for sparrows and other birds, and by keeping cats indoors, each of us can take a small but meaningful action in support of American Tree Sparrows.

Other sparrows to look and listen for include Dark-eyed Juncos (a.k.a. "snowbirds"), White-throated Sparrows (singing "Old Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody!"), and Harris's Sparrows (another fast-declining species with an unhelpful name). Though sparrow appreciation might seem like a niche interest, spend some time with sparrows and see what it awakens in you. They're tough, resourceful birds at home in a little backyard hedge or a thicket between two fields. The world through the eyes of a sparrow becomes a place of unexpected opportunity and places to take shelter from Nebraska's brutal winds. How can birds so small survive winters so rough? With a little more help from us, even more of them might make it through.

Highlights of November-December Birds

Waterbirds

- Snow Geese
- Northern Shoveler
- Gadwall
- American Wigeon
- Northern Pintail
- Green-winged Teal
- Canvasback
- Redhead
- Ring-necked Duck
- Lesser Scaup
- Bufflehead
- Common Goldeneye
- Hooded Merganser
- Common Merganser

Landbirds

- Bald Eagle
- Winter Wren
- Pine Siskin
- Dark-eyed Junco
- American Tree Sparrow
- Fox Sparrow
- Harris's Sparrow
- Rusty Blackbird

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 ASO.

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? Eager to share your talents and time for a good cause? Consider serving on our board of directors or joining one of our committees! We are searching for enthusiastic people to help us with our Student Art Contest, Bird Seed Sales, leading programs/field trips and more. Email cgearin@audubonomaha.org for more info.

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.

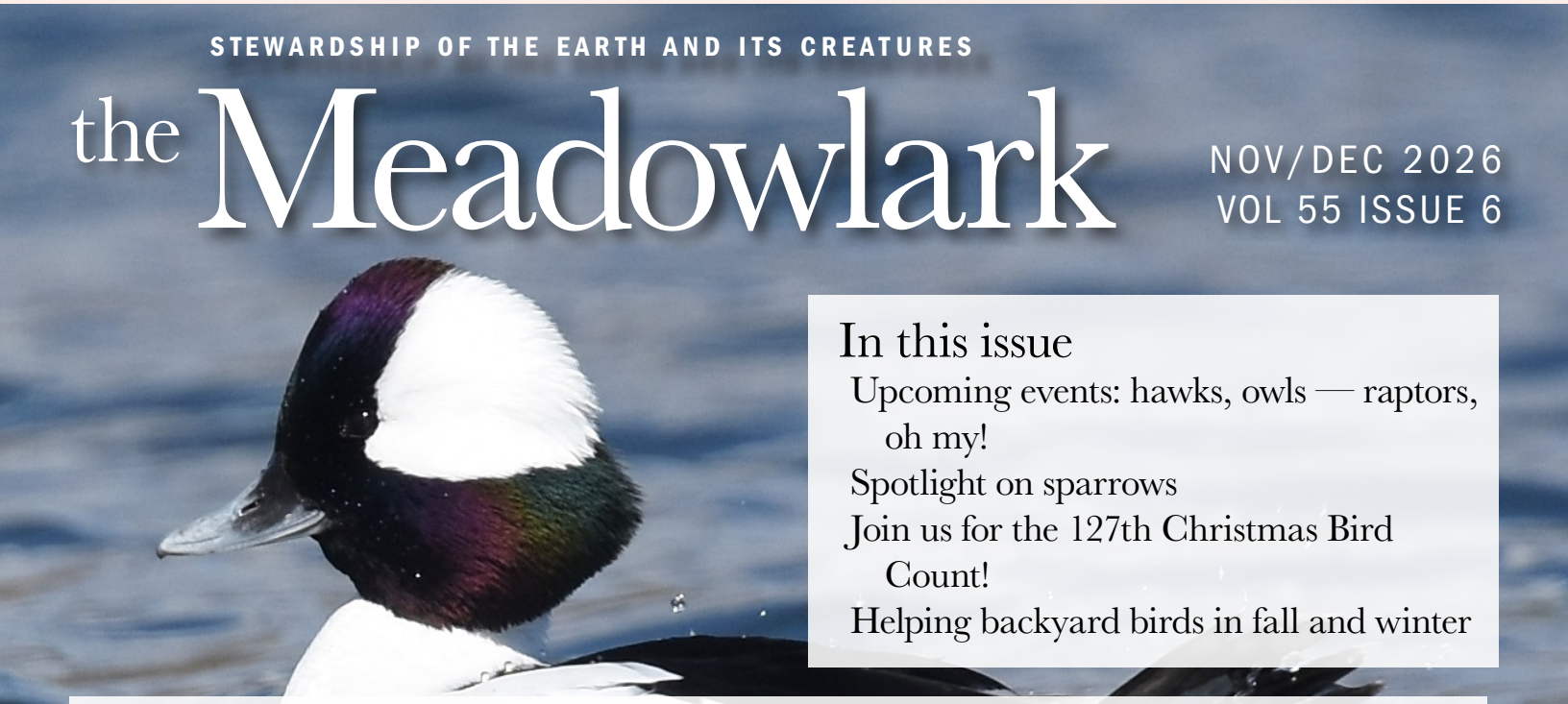
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STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH AND ITS CREATURES

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.

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Photo: Bufflehead by Andy Reago & Chrissy McClarren