



# Meadowlark

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## Finding summer birds & staying safe

by *Conor Gearin*



*Summer Tanager by Andre Chudy*

Why not make this the summer of the Summer Tanager? It's in the name, after all! Redder even than a Northern Cardinal, a male Summer Tanager high in the canopy makes a stunning contrast with the deep green leaves. Females, no less colorful, are bright yellow. They're distinguished from the similar Scarlet Tanager by their wings (Scarlet Tanagers have black/dark gray ones) and by their voices (each species has a unique call, though their songs both sound somewhat like that of the American Robin. Check out recordings on Cornell's All About Birds website.)

Broadly speaking, we're in the tallgrass prairie region, but the Omaha metro area also features wooded bluffs and the Loess Hills — read Rebecca Carrillo's article on our unique river bluff habitats for more (p. 3). These forested slopes provide homes for species such as tanagers that would be at a loss nesting in a grassland. Check out Hum-

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### GREEN CORNER: HOW YOU CAN HELP WILDLIFE AT HOME

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

### Help birds stay cool with essential nutrients & hydration

On hot summer days, you can offer backyard birds juicy fruits like watermelon, grapes, apples, orange slices, and berries. Fresh water, shade and chilled fruit can help birds stay safe and happy during the hot summer months.

## Join us for our free summer programs!

### Fighting Habitat Loss: The Number One Threat to Wild Bird Populations

*July 9*

Join us for an engaging presentation on conservation efforts in Nebraska that are making a meaningful difference for birds and their habitats. Our guest speaker Nic Salick of The Nature Conservancy in Nebraska will highlight how local landscapes — prairies, forests, wetlands, and river corridors — support diverse communities of birds and why these ecosystems are critical to maintaining Nebraska's natural heritage. Explore the work of The Nature Conservancy as they deploy innovative strategies to address the twin crises of biodiversity loss and the climate emergency.

### From Beginner to Big Year: Tobin Brown's Birding Journey

*Aug. 13*

Please join us for a special program featuring acclaimed birder, photographer and Omaha local Tobin Brown. Brown earned statewide recognition after completing a 2025 Nebraska Big Year — an impressive undertaking where a birder tries to find the highest number of bird species across Nebraska within a single calendar year. Brown recorded 355 bird species — breaking the previous state



*Photo courtesy of Tobin Brown*

record of 347 set in 2013.

What makes Brown's accomplishment especially remarkable is how recently he began birding. After taking up the hobby in 2023, he has rapidly developed an impressive knowledge of bird identification, documentation and tactics for finding and photographing birds across the state.

During his presentation, Brown will share photos from his record-setting journey through the backroads of Nebraska, giving us a firsthand look at what it takes to pursue birding at the highest level.

Whether you're an avid "lister" (the moniker for competitive birders) or simply curious about the world of extreme birding, Brown's story is sure to delight you. We look forward to seeing you there!

Our monthly educational programs are held in the private meeting room at DJ's Dugout, 777 N. 114th Street. Meet and mingle with other nature-lovers at the 6 p.m. social hour, followed by the program at 7 p.m. Our meetings are free and open to the public. Register at [Audubon-Omaha.org/Calendar-of-Events](https://Audubon-Omaha.org/Calendar-of-Events)

# Field notes from the president

## Everything in its season

by *Conor Gearin*

The modern 9-5 schedule creates the illusion that each day of the year should have basically the same activities, besides weekends and holidays. Birds know that's nonsense.



Would a Northern Cardinal try to nest in January? Birds have their seasons straight: summer is for breeding, spring and fall for travel, and winter for making do, often far to the south. Each part of the year has its special purpose for birds — and, I would argue, for people. There are some widely recognized ones: New Year's resolutions, spring cleaning, and summer breaks, to name a few. Among the people I know, I've noticed that, as spring turns to summer, there's a surge of enthusiasm in picking up new projects and trying new things, as if the return of warm weather brings everyone a little glimpse of optimism despite all the challenges we face. Maybe we're not so unlike birds after all.

Here at ASO this summer, we welcome new members and officers to our board (see p. 5.) It's a wonderful thing when enthusiasm leads someone to offer their time and skills to us, and we're

## Finding summer birds & staying safe

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mel Park, Fonetanelle Forest, or Neale Woods if you want to see and hear tanagers. Summer Tanagers' preference for the upper canopy makes them tricky to spot. But listen for that distinctive call — *pit-tuck! pit-ti-tuck!* — look for movement up above, and see if you can't zero in on a tanager or two.

And try to go in the morning — not just because that's the best time for bird activity and singing behavior. Temperatures soar by midmorning, posing risks of dehydration and sunstroke. Choosing a shaded environment such as a forest doesn't hurt, either. Getting out early reduces your risk and makes for a more comfortable birding experience — not to mention, when you get back home at, say, 9:30 or 10 a.m., you'll have already accomplished something while having

honored to have them join us. We also celebrate the contributions of long-serving volunteers, board members, and officers who have decided to step back this year or who have completed their terms. We rely on people who contribute as long as it feels right, and we wish them the best when they have to go. We are grateful for any form of help people can offer and benefit from a diverse range of

### 2026 ASO Service Award

The ASO Board of Directors has chosen **Duane & Kathy Schwery** for the 2026 ASO Service Award, for many years of dedicated service as volunteers — especially for serving as chairs of the Membership Committee for 26 years. The board humbly thanks the Schwerys and commends their example to us all.

skills and experiences.

We thank Virginia Stauffer, who is retiring from the board after outstanding contributions to the Meadowlark newsletter, the Student Art Show and Contest, the EZ-Does-It Birding series, and much more. Virginia will continue to chair our Student Art Contest and Show after she steps off the board. We thank Kyle Finley, who has completed two terms on the board. Kyle has served as our chapter liaison to the UNO Conservation Society, our official student chapter. Kyle has been a dedicated ASO

the whole day ahead of you.

But let's not write off open habitats entirely. A long day in a grassland on a sunny day requires lots and lots of water. But even short trips can prove fruitful, especially if you're stopping by at dawn or dusk when bird activity picks up. (Birds tend to dodge the full noon sunlight, too.) And consider less conventional ways to enjoy the sun while seeing birds. A bike ride on the Keystone Trail offers a steady breeze along with the sights and sounds of Red-winged Blackbirds, Dickcissels, Eastern Meadowlarks and more making use of grassy habitats bordering the path — plus Cliff Swallows nesting on bridges.

Keep safety first when searching for birds this summer. And spare a thought for the wildlife that has to stay outside

volunteer, especially for the bird seed sales, our biggest fundraiser. And we thank Roger Carroll, who is stepping away from the board after chairing our Habitat committee, helping kick-start our Chimney Swift tower project, and volunteering for bird seed sales. Thanks to Virginia, Kyle, Roger, and everyone else who has contributed to ASO and keeps us in motion!

This year, we want to especially thank Duane & Kathy Schwery, who have been chosen by the board for the 2026 ASO Service Award. These two long-serving volunteers have contributed to ASO in many ways over several decades, but we want to celebrate them in particular for serving as co-chairs of the Membership Committee for a remarkable 26 years. This means they kept track of our thousands of members, coordinating our roster with the National Audubon Society, updating addresses to make sure everyone received their newsletter, and sending renewal reminders. We are so grateful to Duane and Kathy for stepping up to ensure that our members stayed connected to ASO, a task that is fundamental to ASO's basic existence. While I could never expect someone to devote 26 years to ASO in this way, we can at least marvel at the accomplishment and be grateful that helpers such as the Schwerys are out there, humbly working away to make sure our community stays together. Thank you, Duane and Kathy! You're an example to us all.

in all weather. A warming world isn't making things any easier on them. Heat waves are particularly hard on young birds. If you enjoy the company of birds this summer, consider returning the favor to them in some way. Planting native species — especially oaks and other shade trees where appropriate — can mitigate climate change by reducing surface temperatures and slowing storm-water runoff. You can make nest boxes more heat-resistant by locating them out of full sun or using a double roof to insulate the interior. Try reducing your own carbon emissions and working with others to push for renewable energy and stopping the use of fossil fuels. Birds and people alike depend on summer. Keeping temperatures from reaching extremes will make the warm season better for all of us.

# ASO receives grant to build Chimney Swift nesting towers

The Audubon Society of Omaha has been awarded a \$17,000 grant from the Claire M. Hubbard Foundation to support a collaborative project to build five new nesting towers for Chimney Swifts in Omaha. Working together with Bluebirds Across Nebraska, which has already built swift towers in eastern Nebraska, ASO will coordinate

the construction of one tower at Joslyn Castle & Gardens, one at Lauritzen Gardens, and three at City of Omaha parks (one each at Elmwood Park, Fontenelle Park, and Hanscom Park).

Chimney Swifts have become almost entirely dependent on human-built structures for nesting habitat following the loss of most old-growth forests in North America east of the Rocky Mountains. Unable to perch on branches, Chimney Swifts can only cling to vertical surfaces such as the insides of hollow trees or chimneys built from masonry. Their association



*Chimney Swift towers & interpretive signs at Schramm State Park (Courtesy of Bluebirds Across Nebraska)*

with historic brick buildings makes Chimney Swifts a common sight in historic Omaha neighborhoods, despite the species' steep decline in abundance continent-wide.

As chimneys continue to be capped and new constructions do not include suitable masonry chimneys that Chimney Swifts can use, available habitat in Omaha will continue to decline in coming years. By building new nesting towers designed specifically for Chimney Swifts, we can mitigate the loss of historic nesting habitat, which could become a limiting factor for Chimney Swift populations and worsen the rate of decline. Interpretive signs at each park will educate people about Chimney Swifts and their habitat needs, inspiring further action to conserve this species.



*Chimney Swift tower on UNL campus (Courtesy of Bluebirds Across Nebraska)*

## Join us for fun, free summer events with ASO!

### Meet the Producer:

#### Open house with No More Empty Pots

2120 N 30th St., Omaha, NE 68112

July 25, 12pm-2pm

No More Empty Pots is a grassroots organization that was founded to fight food insecurity and promote economic resilience. Its programs provide opportunities for employment, leadership and education. This open house event will be hosted at No More Empty Pots' greenhouse facility. Join us as we sample products, hear the producer's story and support local agriculture. Ask questions, explore the Micro Market for seasonal items and build a deeper connection with a local food community. This is a relaxed, self-directed, drop-in event: grab a few friends and arrive anytime between 12 – 2 p.m. All ages welcome. Please register on the ASO website as space is limited.



### Join us for a book club gathering in August!

*Ten Birds that Changed the World*

by naturalist Stephen Moss

Co-hosted with Lauren Salick of Baldwin Wildlife Center & Hubbard Family Wildlife Hospital

9777 M St., Omaha NE 68127

Aug. 5, 6 – 7 p.m.

*Ten Birds That Changed the World* is a fascinating look at the relationship between humans and birds from every continent throughout history. In each chapter, the author explores the impact of one bird species and a specific aspect of humanity. Grab a copy at your favorite bookstore or Omaha Public Library, add it to your summer reading list and join us for discussion and camaraderie in August! There is a nature-themed gift shop on site, so come a little early or stay a little later to browse around. Drinks and snacks will be provided. There are restrooms on site. Please register on the ASO website as space is limited. This activity is free!

# Birds of the Missouri River

## A closer look at bluffs and wetlands

By *Rebecca Carrillo*



*Missouri River bluffs & valley as seen from Indian Caves State Park overlook. Photo by Ali Eminov*

A steady river flows east of Omaha. Birds fly overhead, dipping low above the silt-colored water. “Big Muddy,” otherwise known as the Missouri River, is the longest river in the United States. It starts at the convergence of three smaller rivers in Montana, at the base of the chilly Rocky Mountains. From there, it stretches more than 2,500 miles, traveling through the Great Plains all the way to St. Louis, Missouri. Many different types of wildlife, including birds, can be found in and around the river. A major biodiversity hub, the Missouri River provides food, shelter, resources, and habitat for hundreds of bird species. Among them are songbirds, raptors, waterfowl, and shorebirds. It also supports many threatened and endangered species, such as the Bald Eagle, the Piping Plover, and the Least Tern.

The Missouri River is a powerful force, carving through stone over the course of thousands of years. The river’s flow cuts through a series of natural formations known as ‘bluffs’. These

bluffs look like steep, rolling cliffsides, exposed with layers of rock and soil. Nebraska’s bluffs stretch from Ponca State Park in the northeast to Indian Cave State Park in the southeast. On the Iowa side of the river, the unique Loess Hills are made of ancient windblown silt, with some of the slopes towering over the floodplain. Bluffs provide important habitat for birds. Some species, such as the Bank Swallow, burrow into the soft and sandy parts of a bluff, carving out small holes for nests. Other birds, such as the Wild Turkey or the Eastern Whip-poor-will, live on top of the forested bluffs. According to Audubon Great Plains, forested bluffs are home to a wide variety of birds, including Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Vireo, Wood Thrush,

Ovenbird, American Redstart, Eastern Towhee, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Orchard Oriole, and Baltimore Oriole.

As the river winds across the land, floodplains and wetlands take shape below the bluffs. These ecosystems are highly complex and constantly shifting. The Missouri River once had a vast network of braided channels and streams. Due to human engineering and urbanization, much of the river is now channelized. Nonetheless, tributaries such as the Platte River and side channels like Boyer Chute continue to provide crucial shallow-water and wetland habitats. DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge is an excellent place to see shorebirds and waterfowl in the Missouri River floodplain. Migrating waterfowl stop at the refuge’s wetlands in the spring before heading further north. Snow Geese, Trumpeter Swan, Green-winged Teal, American Wigeon, and Northern Pintail are just a few of the many species that rely on this environment. Other duck species, waders, hawks, and grassland birds can also be found there.

From bluffs to wetlands to the open river water itself, the Missouri River is a unique landscape, especially for birds. Each individual ecosystem supports a diverse community of wildlife. The next time you visit one of the parks or refuges along the river, look out for the birds and appreciate the range of species living there. You never know what you might see!



*Eastern Towhee by Kenneth Cole Schneider*

# Welcoming new ASO board members & officers

At the May 2026 meeting, the ASO Board of Directors elected its officers for the 2026-27 fiscal year:

**President:** Conor Gearin

**1st Vice President:** Melissa Sitze

**2nd Vice President:** Mark Harberg

**Treasurer:** Derek Comba

**Secretary:** Rebecca Carrillo

Thank you to Melissa Sitze, Mark Harberg, and Derek Harberg for taking on new officer roles for 2026-27, and to Rebecca Carrillo, who joins ASO this year as Secretary!

At the June 2026 meeting, the board elected three new directors to serve two-year terms beginning July 2026: Ashley Carlson, Hannah Miller, and Zach McMullen. Below, find biographies for the four people new to the board!



**Rebecca Carrillo** is excited to join the Audubon Society of Omaha as an Elected Officer! She is a water and environmental policy specialist, and recently moved to Omaha after attending college and grad school on the East Coast. Rebecca currently works for the Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute in Lincoln and is passionate about agricultural water conservation. Originally from Texas, she began birding in high school and loved to spot songbirds and waterfowl in the Rio Grande Valley. In Rebecca's spare time, she enjoys birding, hiking, making art, and exploring the beauty of the Great Plains in Nebraska.



**Ashley Carlson** is joining the Audubon Society of Omaha board as part of an ongoing effort to become more involved in her community and help support its natural wonders. She graduated from the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2022 with a BA in Graphic Design and now works in the Omaha area as a design and marketing professional. While serving on the board, she hopes to use this experience to support ASO's marketing and outreach initiatives. An artist at heart, she also plans to assist further with the Student Art Contest. In her free time, Ashley loves to take care of her balcony garden, thrift for bird decorations, and read with her cat asleep on her lap.



**Zach McMullen** is a graduate student at UNO pursuing a master's degree in geography with a focus on geospatial information systems (GIS). He is obsessed with all things birds and spends most of his time outdoors hiking and bird watching. Ultimately, he plans on building a career in bird conservation and preserving the amazing species that need us. He loves to travel and wants to attempt to see more than 5,000 bird species in his lifetime. He is sitting at a little over 300, so he has a ways to go. He's excited to put his skills to use to help advance ASO's conservation initiatives!



**Hannah Miller** is a Naturalist Educator at Fontenelle Forest with 8+ years of experience in environmental education and conservation. Hannah followed her passion for the natural world and earned her bachelor's degree in fisheries & wildlife from UNL in 2017. Her professional experiences include game counts in southern Africa, teaching preschoolers at Pioneers Park Nature Center, and field research and private land work in Western Nebraska before starting her current adventure at Fontenelle Forest. At the Forest, she runs programs for preschool-aged children, facilitates and compiles data for community science projects, and dotes on a 40-year-old turtle named Tre.

## Resources & Info

### How to join/renew/update

Join or renew your membership online at [Audubon-Omaha.org](http://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](mailto:audubon@emailcustomerservice.com)

### Stay Connected

Join our email list at [Audubon-Omaha.org](http://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](http://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](mailto:cgearin@audubonomaha.org) for more info.

### Take action

Big things are happening, so communicate with your elected officials. Go to [Audubon-Omaha.org](http://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.*

### contact us at:

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402-445-4138  
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email: audubonomaha@audubonomaha.org



Find us on Facebook  
and Instagram.

### Elected Officers

President: Conor Gearin  
Past President: Anne Maguire  
1st Vice President: Melissa Sitze  
2nd Vice President: Mark Harberg  
Treasurer: Derek Comba  
Secretary: Rebecca Carrillo

### Elected directors

Bennett Amdor  
Bill Bossman  
Ashley Carlson  
Betty Fullerton  
Sheila Glencer  
Zach McMullen  
Hannah Miller  
Katy Simmons

### Committee Chairpersons

DEIB: Bennett Amdor  
Education/Field Trips: Sheila Glencer  
Finance: Derek Comba  
Fundraising and Bird Seed Sale:  
Elizabeth & John Fullerton  
Legislative Affairs: Mark Harberg &  
Bennett Amdor  
Marketing and Outreach: Conor Gearin  
Natural Areas Stewardship: Glenn Pollock  
Nominating: Mark Harberg  
Program: Anne Maguire  
Student Art Contest: Virginia Stauffer  
ASO Administrator: Sarah Shepherd  
Executive Director, Audubon Great Plains:  
Kristal Stoner

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Photo: Great Blue Heron, Kelly Colgan Azar