

*December
2006
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*ASO is a Chapter
of the National
Audubon Society
Serving Eastern
Nebraska
and Western Iowa*

Three Christmas Bird Counts: December 16, 23, 30

Omaha Area Count

The annual Omaha Area Bird Count will be held Saturday, December 16, and cover four areas. If you wish to participate, you need to sign up for one of the quadrants by contacting Betty Grenon, count coordinator, at 731-2383.

The leaders and quadrants are Rick Schmid at the Glenwood, IA area; Sue Mattix at the Plattsmouth area; Clem Klaphake, Fontenelle Forest; Loren Padelford, Lake Manawa area.

Participants may join the count at 8:00 a.m. for a whole or half day or as time permits. An expertise in bird identification is not needed because record keepers are in demand, so everyone is welcome. The weather may be very cold and/or snowy, so be prepared with warm clothing, especially footwear. Bring a hot drink and lunch if you wish, or join the group for lunch at a restaurant.

The DeSoto NWR Count will be held Saturday, December 23, under the

December General Meeting Cancelled

By Laurine Blankenau

The regular general meeting of the Audubon Society of Omaha will not be held in December. We will be back in January with a fine program.

In lieu of the general meeting, we invite our members to join one of the Christmas Bird Counts.

These are led by sharp-eyed expert birders. Your participation will help in spotting the numbers we hope to find. Enjoy the woodpeckers, cardinals, jays, chickadees, Tree Sparrows, and many others that winter over with us. Not least, joining a Bird Count gives you outdoor time and the company of other like-minded trackers of birds.

We wish each of you a happy holiday season and a pleasant beginning of a new year. We hope to see many of you at our events in 2007. We value your participation.

Count will begin at 8:00 a.m. Come

direction of Bob Barry at DeSoto. Participants are asked to contact the sector captains directly regarding starting time and meeting place.

Captains are DeSoto: Bob Barry - Bob_barry@fws.gov 642-5404; **Hitchcock:** Jim Meyer - jmmeyer50@hotmail.com 537-9568; **Fort Calhoun:** Sue Mattix - suemattix@cox.net 871-3314; **Boyer Chute Refuge:** Jerry Toll - jertol@radiks.net 453-9239.

DeSoto participants will meet at the Refuge Headquarters (not the Visitor Center) at 7:30 a.m. and begin by 8:00. (Contact Bob Barry to sign up.)

The usual advice: dress warm, bring a hot drink and snack and lunch, if you wish.

The Ames, Nebraska, Count will be held on Saturday, December 30, led by Don and Janis Paseka. The

prepared to spend time out of doors, dressed warmly, and with a hot drink, snacks, or lunch, if you do not plan to stop at a restaurant.

Rather than meet at a central location, the Pasekas will divide up the participants and start from several points, thus saving time and extra driving.

Anyone wishing to participate should contact the Pasekas at (402) 727-9229 or paseka@tvs.online.net before the day of the count to receive directions.

Current Currents

By Elliott Bedows

Eating Better—Through Bureaucratic Consensus

In my October 2005 column, I pointed out a problem for persons who want to eat wisely. Government guidelines for what and how often to eat fish are so confusing that even different Government agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency differ in their recommendations.

But recently, at the request of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Institute of Medicine (IM) reviewed evidence on the benefits

Americans generally consume too much saturated fat and cholesterol and too little of the "good unsaturated fats" found in fish. But seafood is the major source of human exposure to methylmercury, a contaminant that accumulates in the muscle of animals over time. Because evidence suggests that methylmercury can disrupt neurodevelopment in the fetus, the report supports current recommendations that women who are pregnant or wish to become pregnant avoid consumption of lean predatory fish such as swordfish, shark, king mackerel, and tilefish and limit their consumption of albacore or "white" tuna. Other potential risks

and risks associated with seafood selections. The mission of the Institute of Medicine is to serve as adviser to the nation to improve health by providing unbiased, evidence-based, authoritative information and advice concerning health and science policy to policymakers, professionals, leaders in every sector of society, and the public at large. This is accomplished by working outside the framework of government to ensure scientifically informed analysis and independent guidance.

The Institute concluded that consumers need better guidance on making seafood choices because information we receive about the nutritional value and health risks associated with these food sources can result in "confusion or misperceptions."

Additionally, the Institute concluded that much of the evidence on seafood's health benefits and risks is preliminary or insufficient, that reliable data on the distribution of some contaminants is lacking, and that there is little evidence on how beneficial effects of seafood might counteract some of the risks from contamination.

For example, it is not clear whether consuming seafood actually reduces people's risks for diabetes, cancer, Alzheimer's disease, or other ailments. While the committee warned that evidence suggesting that people who *already have suffered heart attacks* can reduce their risk of future heart attacks by eating seafood is weaker than previously thought, they did confirm that eating fish and shellfish appears to reduce people's overall risk for *developing heart disease*. It is not certain whether this is so because substituting the lean protein of seafood for fatty cuts of meat reduces consumers' intake of saturated fat and cholesterol or because of the protective effects of unsaturated fatty acids, which are found in relatively high amounts in many fish species.

The report also found evidence that maternal consumption of unsaturated fats through seafood can contribute to vision and cognitive development infants and lengthen the duration of gestation.

associated with seafood are exposure to persistent organic pollutants such as dioxin, PCBs and microbial infections, which are contracted mainly through the consumption of raw or undercooked fish and shellfish.

As a result, the Institute created guidelines by weighing the risk to benefit balance for various age groups and geographic locations, including gender requirements (while it does not support giving those with a history of heart disease advice different from that given to the general population). Their general conclusions, which vary somewhat as seafood supplies and cultivation practices change, are as follows (edited slightly from the original version).

Females who are or may become pregnant or who are breastfeeding:

- May benefit from consuming seafood, especially those with relatively higher concentrations of unsaturated fats;
- A reasonable intake would be two 3-ounce (cooked) servings, but they can safely consume 12 ounces per week;
- Can consume up to 6 ounces of white (albacore) tuna per week;
- Should avoid large predatory fish such as shark, swordfish, tilefish, or king mackerel.

Children up to 12 years of age:

- May benefit from consuming seafood, especially those with relative higher concentrations of unsaturated fats;
- A reasonable intake would be two 3-ounce (cooked) or age-appropriate servings, but they can safely consume 12 ounces per week;
- Can consume up to 6 ounces of white (albacore) tuna per week;

Continued on page 3

Not All News Is Grim

By Kathy Schwery

In the past six weeks, we have had abundant good news for those who care about the natural world. Three recent issues of concern to Audubon Society members have led to positive outcomes for the environment.

A federal judge halted the sale of oil leases in the Teshekpuk Lake area of Alaska, stating that insufficient

environmental studies had been done. The judge's action was in response to over 300,000 letters sent to the Secretary

of the Interior, Dirk Kempthorne, asking that the Teshekpuk Lake oil lease sale be cancelled. Oil drilling in the area would have destroyed key habitat for ducks, geese, shorebirds and caribou.

In another far-reaching decision, a federal judge struck down the Bush Administration's modified Roadless Rule and reinstated the Rule as it had been written by the Clinton administration. This ruling applies to all roadless national forest areas in the lower 48 states. It also possibly will apply to the Tongass Forest in Alaska, which the Bush administration had previously exempted from the Roadless Rule. This exemption may no longer be valid because it is based on a management plan which has also been ruled illegal.

A further decision regarding the Tongass Forest blocks nine upcoming timber sales until the Forest Service rewrites the management plan for the forest. If the Bush Administration had prevailed in its attempt to modify the Roadless Rule, management of our national forests basically would have been left to each state, and most environmental protections for the forests would have been repealed.

The Endangered Species Act, which has been under attack recently, is safe for another year. In fact, its most

relentless opponent, Rep. Richard Pombo, was recently voted out of office, partly because of scandals involving money he received from oil companies. His bill to gut the ESA passed the House, but a companion bill in the Senate never made it out of committee.

The November elections change the makeup of the House and most probably of the Senate as well. With Democrats in control, it should be possible in the coming year to pass a bill guaranteeing permanent wilderness status to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. That would be extremely good news for everyone who has worked so hard the past six years to save this natural treasure of America.

Finally, on the state level, Governor Dave Heineman's decision to sign the plan by which Colorado, Wyoming and Nebraska will manage the Platte River is good news for Nebraskans. This tri-state effort will restore habitat for Whooping Cranes, Least Terns, and Piping Plovers, but it should increase ecotourism as well. Managing the Platte for wildlife and for humans, with some of the costs shared by neighboring states, is a wise decision.

The Animals of Christmas

By Nancy Leonard

Animals have always been a part of Christmas for me. One of the first songs I learned all of the words to was *The Friendly Beast Song*. Later I read stories about animals such as the robin.

Growing up, we put out garlands of popcorn and berries for the birds and carried extra crusts of bread to the pond for the ducks.

Most of us already feed birds (and some even feed the squirrels), but if you don't, you might consider putting up a feeder, a cake of suet or a nice mix of wild bird seed. You can also plant native species, cut down on pesticide use, and switch to shade-grown coffee to protect the Central and South American forests our songbirds need to survive. There are many ways and many organizations that promote habitat and wildlife protection.

I hope that as we shop for family and friends, we remember our wild friends and do something to make their world a happier one! Merry Christmas to All!

petroleum, produce fewer greenhouse gases, require less land and deliver much higher amounts of renewable energy compared to corn ethanol.

Ethanol's use as an alternative fuel can be one small step in helping solve this nation's energy problems. Meanwhile, much higher fuel economy standards on all vehicles are urgently needed. Measures to reduce travel demand, such as mass transit use, carpooling, and better urban planning must be adopted. The combined approach of renewable fuels and increased fuel efficiency will put our country on the path to energy independence.

Eating Better, Continued from page 2

- Should avoid large predatory fish such as shark, swordfish, tilefish, or king mackerel.

Healthy adolescent and adult males and females who will not become pregnant:

- May reduce their risk for future cardiovascular disease by consuming seafood regularly;
- Although supporting evidence is limited, there may be additional benefits from including seafood selections with

**Bird Seed Sale Volunteers
— Thanks!**

By Kathleen Crawford-Rose

high levels of unsaturated fats;

- Those consuming more than two servings a week should ensure that they select a variety of seafood to reduce the risk for exposure to contaminants from a single source.

The committee did not explore environmental factors that also may affect consumers' seafood choices. It did not endorse any specific sources of seafood, but rather showed what the evidence says about the nutrient and contaminant content of various types. But as we learn more about how our environment impacts our human food chain, the better prepared we will be to sustain our own health.

For more information and a full copy of the Institute of Medicine's report, go to <http://NATIONAL-ACADEMIES.ORG>

Birds of the Arctic and a Call to Action

By Jackie Scholar

Paul Konrad and Katie Little of the Alaska Coalition presented an inspiring and informational evening on Nov 10 for Audubon members, students, and the general public at Bellevue University. Approximately 90 attendees viewed photographs of the Arctic NWR Coastal Plain and many of its birds. Conservation issues relative to saving fuel oil were also a part of the evening's program.

Konrad is a birding expert and photographer of the birds, animals and vistas of the Arctic Refuge. He showed many slides of seabirds, shorebirds, and more.

Katie Little presented factual information and slides about drilling for oil in the Arctic and told how we can save oil by driving more fuel-efficient cars like hybrids, and amazingly, by keeping our car tires inflated at the proper pressure. The Dept. of Energy states that under-

At work: L-R: Duane Bright, Roland Barth, Clem Klaphake

Our annual bird seed sale is over, and it was truly a group effort from start to finish. When all the bills are paid and the checks counted, we should clear approximately \$4,500.00. Thanks go out to all the volunteers and customers who make this sale a success each year. We apologize if we miss anyone, but we truly want to recognize these workers who made this sale a success.

Head-of-it-all: Neal Ratzlaff:

Chief Assistants: Carole & Dick Rasmussen, Jerry Toll, Kathleen Crawford-Rose

Computer Program: Bill Swick

Mailing: Pauline Dickey, Eunice Levisay, Earl and Marge Collins, Helen Rees, Carole & Dick Rasmussen, Janie Fuller, Alfa Fiske, Nelli Falzgraf, and Kathleen Crawford-Rose

Garages and snacks: Neal and Izen Ratzlaff, Duane and Janie Bright, Eunice Levisay and Barbara Sennentz

Distribution crew (loading and unloading the seed): Jerry Toll, Crew Chief, Crew: Sharon Ahrens, Mark Armstrong, Jo Bartikoski, Elliott Bedows, Laurine Blankenau, Chuck Coatney, Fritz Davis, Clem Klaphake, Mace Hack, David Nichols, Eric Scholar, Roy Rayner, Jim McLochlin, Tom O'Dell, Dick & Carole Rasmussen, Duane Schwery, Jim & Collette Chiesa, Kathleen Crawford-Rose, Loren & Babs Padelford, and Don Westling.

The Des Moines Feed Company sends thanks to the organizers, garage owners, and all other volunteers for another successful sale.

inflated tires waste an estimated 200,000 barrels of oil per day or 73 million barrels per year. Decreasing highway speeds from 75 to 65 mph would increase fuel economy by 15%. (For more information on tires and saving fuel, go to www.pumpemup.org)

3

4

Ethanol: solution or diversion?

By Kathy Schwery

Is ethanol a solution to our country's energy needs or is it a costly diversion?

America's dependence on oil is a threat to our security and our economy, and it causes great harm to the environment. Because of these concerns, ethanol is increasingly being touted as an alternative to oil.

There are two main sources of ethanol: starch ethanol produced from the seeds and fruits of plants (such as corn kernels) and cellulosic ethanol, produced from whole plants—the leaves, stalks, and stems. Ethanol's advantages are that it can be produced domestically, it is renewable, and it is a cleaner fuel than oil. Questions have been asked, however, about the production of ethanol and whether the manufacturing process uses more energy than is produced. Will focusing on ethanol cause our nation to avoid taking real steps now to reduce oil dependence through improved fuel efficiency and efforts to cut the demand for vehicle travel?

The Natural Resources Defense Council summarized the findings of several studies that examined the energy return on investment in ethanol. Comparing the ratio of total energy contained in a liter of ethanol to the nonrenewable energy consumed during production of the same amount of ethanol, a number value was

to more than 26 million barrels per day by 2025. Even if we used all our corn to make ethanol with nothing left for food or animal feed, we could only displace perhaps 1.5 million barrels per day of this demand." However, the manufacture of corn-based ethanol will be an important key to the transition to cellulosic ethanol in the future.

Sources of raw materials needed to produce cellulosic ethanol are abundant: rice straw, grasses, wood chips, and even the corn plant itself. The manufacturing process for cellulosic ethanol consumes the entire plant, including lignin, a chemical compound found in the cell walls of plants that is burned to provide the fuel for the industrial process, thus making it much more energy efficient. Furthermore, surplus electricity most likely will be generated by this process and can be sold. The technology needed to produce this form of ethanol, however, is still being developed and is years away from being ready for use. A heartening bit of news appeared in the November 21 issue of the *Omaha World-Herald*, stating the Broin Cos. plant in Emmetsburg, Iowa, will be producing cellulosic ethanol by 2009.

The Natural Resources Defense Council voiced a concern regarding the use of corn-based ethanol in automobiles. According to the NRDC, low-blend ethanol (low percentage of ethanol)

assigned to the ethanol. Values less than one meant more energy was consumed to make the product than the amount contained in the ethanol. A value greater than one meant the ethanol contains more energy than the nonrenewable energy consumed in the manufacturing process. The NRDC found that in five studies of ethanol production, the average values assigned to corn ethanol were from 1.2 to 1.6. Cellulosic ethanol values, according to three different studies, were much higher, averaging between 4.4 and 6.6. As the technology for producing this type of ethanol is perfected, the values could rise as high as 10.

What role will corn ethanol play in future energy production? That depends on several factors: how much land is available for growing the crops needed, where irrigation water will come from, and the amount of water needed in the manufacturing process for corn ethanol. And most important, how much grain is available for use as fuel. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, the United States currently uses about 11% of its corn crop to produce ethanol. Because corn is a food source, the large scale potential for ethanol production is limited. Again, quoting from the UCS article, "U.S. use of oil is expected to grow from 21 million barrels per day today

releases nitrogen oxides and other volatile organic compounds into the atmosphere. The best way to avoid air quality problems with ethanol is to use it as a high blend, such as E-85 (85% ethanol). Only newer flex-fuel vehicles are equipped to run on E-85, which means it would be many more years before most automobiles could use this type of fuel.

On a personal note, my husband and I drive a Toyota Prius Hybrid. During the first year that we owned it, we used only fuel with ethanol added. Our average mileage was 47.8. Then in June of this year, we began using regular gasoline with no ethanol. Our average miles per gallon rose to 51.

It would seem that if ethanol averages fewer miles per gallon than regular gasoline, and taking into account the massive amounts of water needed to irrigate the corn to produce ethanol, as well as the nonrenewable energy consumed to make the product, caution needs to be exercised in deciding if grain ethanol is a good source of alternative fuel. Ethanol in its higher-blend forms does lower greenhouse emissions, and it does decrease this nation's dependence on foreign oil. Cellulosic ethanol looks very promising as a fuel which will consume less

Continued on page 5

Project Feeder Watch

Every year we notify our birdwatching friends of a project that can involve them in counting birds for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

This project is as easy as

- Putting up bird feeders
- Counting the birds that visit
- Sending the data to scientists

Through the FeederWatch web site, you can see where birds are being reported across the continent and what birds are most frequently reported in your state or region. Learn more at www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw

"Scientists cannot be everywhere all the time, but FeederWatchers are. With information sent in, large-scale movements of winter bird populations can be tracked and monitored for long-term trends.

The Lab says this is a good activity for children as well as adults. Anyone can watch outside the window.

Participants select their own "bird-count days," maybe once per week from now through April, watching birds on all or part of those days. Then counts can be entered into the Lab's web site or onto paper data forms.

New participants will receive

- Simple instructions
- FeederWatch handbook filled with tips for
 - Ö attracting birds to your yard
 - Ö maintaining a clean and safe feeder area
 - Ö selecting bird feeders and foods
 - Ö identifying birds
 - Ö discouraging predators and pests
- Bird-identification poster with paintings by noted bird artist Larry McQueen
- Colorful wall calendar to help you keep track of your bird counting days
- One-year subscription to BirdScope, quarterly newsletter of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology
- Access to the FeederWatch web site where participants enter and receive their personal count summaries and view project results from their region and across the

continent.

Please cut out and mail in the form in the next column, with your check, or sign up by phone or online as indicated at the bottom of the form.

Thank you for your participation, and good birding!

7

Addresses to Remember

President George W. Bush

The White House, 1600
Pennsylvania Ave NW

Washington D.C. 20500-0001

Comments: 202-456-1111; fax:
202-456-2993

Senator Ben Nelson

U.S. Senate, Washington DC
20510; 202-224-6551; fax 202-228-
0012; Lincoln: 402-437-5246;
Omaha 391-3411; Omaha address:
7602 Pacific St, #205, 68114

Senator Chuck Hagel

U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C.
20510-2705

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224-5213

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Representative Lee Terry

U.S. House of
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Governor Dave Heineman

Capitol Bldg, Box 94848 Lincoln,
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Phone: (402) 471-2244; Fax: 471-
6031

Mayor Mike Fahey

Omaha/Douglas Civic Center

1819 Farnam St, Omaha NE 68183

Phone: 444-5000 Hot Line: 444-
5555

Bequests

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

Memorials

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

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

Mail to Audubon Society of
Omaha

P. O. Box 3542

Omaha NE 68103-0542

If you find an injured bird of
prey, please contact a Raptor
Recovery Center volunteer at
402-731-9869.



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68103-05

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

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**One swallow does not make a summer,
but one skein of geese, cleaving the
murk of a March thaw, is the spring.**

Aldo Leopold

