

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Spring Birding at Branched Oak Lake

By Nancy Leonard

By Clem Klaphake

In March 2002 Frank Murkowski, Senator from Alaska, held a piece of blank white poster board up to his colleagues and told them it was a rendition of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—empty and lifeless. He implied there was nothing there to protect and much there to exploit for the wealth of the nation. He was wrong on both counts.

The Refuge consists of several types of terrain. Along the coast of the Beaufort Sea, it is an eight or nine month icepack. Numerous seals and polar bears make their winter homes there. In the summer, whales migrate through, and more than 300,000 Snow Geese gather before starting their journey south. South of the coast, the flat arctic tundra provides year-round home for the musk oxen and birthing grounds for the caribou in late spring.

Farther south, foothills give way to the rugged, rocky mountains of the Brooks Range. Dall sheep search for winter forage along these slopes; marmots hibernate for nine months in the stony crevices.

When the mountains merge into the boreal forest, beaver, mink, moose and numerous small rodents inhabit the wet meadows, bogs and forests. Nearly one-third of the world's population of Buff-breasted Sandpipers nest in the Refuge, as do Long-tailed Ducks, Red-necked Phalaropes, and Common Eiders.

Overall, the Refuge is home to 35 fish species, 36 land mammals, 9 marine mammals, and more than 160 migratory and resident bird species. It is also home to the Gwich-in people, who follow the caribou and depend on them for their subsistence lifestyle. They call the Refuge "the sacred place where life begins."

Join us March 10 for "Oil on Ice," an award-winning documentary which takes us on a visually stunning journey through this sacred place. The film shows how the fate of the Refuge is inextricably linked with decisions about energy, transportation, and other seemingly unrelated issues.

Spring birding for early migrants should be in full gear by late March, so Don and Janis Paseka will be leading an ASO field trip to Branched Oak Lake in Lancaster County on Saturday, March 26, to see what has arrived.

Anyone interested in joining our group should meet at 8:30 A.M. on the south end of the dam in the parking lot at Branched Oak Lake, located 3 1/2 miles north of Malcolm, Nebraska.

If you are not familiar with this location, there are many local birders who can help you with directions. It also is fairly easy to find with a road map or gazetteer because it is a major public recreation area.

In the past we have usually had a good variety of bird species. Some years we've had good numbers of waterfowl and other years a nice variety of passerines and raptors.

A lot will depend on the weather. Last year it was a little soggy with those March showers. So bring proper clothing for late March unpredictable Nebraska weather (warm and windy, or cold and windy, or cold, wet and snowy, or just a nice warm calm day).

Having a scope can be useful for looking at waterfowl and gulls should they be present.

A variety of cookies will be provided. However, they will remain under wraps unless the birding is slow. By about noon we will retire to the Malcolm restaurant for a lunch, beverages and birdy conversation.

The film examines the consequences of drilling and alternative solutions to energy needs. The Refuge is being threatened with the prospect of development for oil drilling. This film supports National Audubon's

Arctic Action Day March 12. See what is at stake and discuss the issues.

Our meeting will be held at Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances (1 block south of 45th & Center), 7:30 P.M. A short business meeting will follow the film. We will conclude with a social hour. Nonmembers are welcome.

Whether or not you attend the meeting, it is important that you write to your senators and representatives asking them to oppose drilling in the Arctic. Addresses are found on page 7.

By Nelli Falzgraf

Nelli's Notes

There's nothing like a midwinter getaway to clear the mind and recharge the system, and maybe give the body a workout, too. Many Nebraskans look to sunny, warm places for an escape. Randy and I found our winter R & R skiing in Colorado at Copper Mountain and snowshoeing at the forest behind his sister and hubby's digs in Silverthorne. We were stationed at the North American Air Defense Command in Colorado Springs when our daughter was young and caught the winter sports bug, which we've never shaken, even when the U.S. Air Force sent us on a tour of duty in Hawaii at a solar observatory.

Nature News for Bird Lovers

Doesn't that include most of us in ASO? Friends of mine who subscribe to the *New York Times* told me of an article by Sandra Blakeslee in the February 1 issue titled "Minds of Their Own: Birds Gain Respect. Smarter Than Anyone Thought." Thank you, Laurine Blankenau and Lorinda Langner. Then in the February 7 *World-Herald*, page 5A an article from the *Washington Post* appeared. It is safe to say much interest has been generated in bird brains.

Researchers and birders found clever behaviors of birds, not explained by common views of them as "bird brains." At a university campus in Japan, carrion crows "line up patiently at the curb waiting for a traffic light to turn red. When cars stop, they hop into the crosswalk, place walnuts from nearby trees onto the road and hop back to the curb. After the light changes and cars run over the nuts, the crows wait until it is safe and hop back out for the food."

In the *Nature Neuroscience Review* journal, a group of avian experts agreed that bird brains are as "complex, flexible, and inventive" as those of mammals, and it's time to correct the terms we use in order to accurately state the new knowledge.

"In mammals the bottom third of the brain contained neurons organized in clusters. The top two-thirds of the brain consists of a flat sheet of cells with six layers. This new brain, the seat of higher intelligence, lay over the old brain, the seat of instinctual behaviors." In birds, the brain is "composed entirely of clusters," which led to the classic view of birds as creatures guided by instinct.

A neuroscientist at the University of California, San Diego, began using new experimental methods to study brain "wiring" and trace the routes being made by a variety of "brain chemicals." He

the lower clusters of both are "evolutionarily older structures that lie under a newer mantle," where thinking occurs.

Where experts differ is about the upper clusters of a bird's brain. They're not primitive, but from where did they derive? Some say avian brains form the same sorts of "internal connections" as mammal's brains, and intelligence in both birds and mammals both result from these "connections." Others believe bird intelligence resulted or evolved through building upon an ancient part of a mammalian brain and putting it to new uses.

Researchers at the University of Cambridge, England, compared two highly social groups, apes and corvids—jays, ravens, jackdaws. These birds are known to be smart, maybe because in relation to the size of the body, the crow's brain in fact is the same size as that of the chimpanzee. An explanation for intelligence is that it "evolved to process and use social information—who is allied to whom and how to use this information for deception."

Meanwhile, examples of bird brilliance continue to delight bird watchers and researchers. For example, Nutcrackers are known to conceal and rob. If they observe other birds watching them conceal food, they'll come back later to hide the food again. Do they understand that another bird intends to take their cache?

We may know pigeons are smart. It seems they know how to deceive other pigeons by pretending to find a source of food so that other pigeons will go for it, while the deceivers sneakily retreat to the place with food.

Fall Migration

We're told the duck and goose fall migration was not at all typical. The large flocks didn't stop here and were not observed until seen further south. What did they know and what told them to change their habits? Seeing them here is a fall experience we look forward to. We hope spring will induce them to make our area a stopover.

Nature's Power

After the tragic losses brought about by the earthquake and tsunami, something might be learned. Least disturbed by the tidal wave were the animals that fled the scene in time and a village of people who survived because they knew the ways of the sea, moving back from the coast before it was too late. Some

found that dopamine projected mostly into the lower brain of humans and birds. Later studies show "many similarities between clusters in the mammalian brain and lower clusters in the avian brain." Experts agree that

Continued on page 3

Rivers & Wildlife Celebration

It is not too late to sign up for Audubon Nebraska's and Rowe Sanctuary's Rivers & Wildlife Celebration March 18-20 in Kearney.

Field trips and outstanding guest speakers, plus a workshop, are offered. To register, call (402) 797-2301 or email nebraska@audubon.org. For crane viewing info, call (308) 468-5282 or email rowe@nctc.net.

For more information, see the February issue of *The Meadowlark*.

Earth Day 2005 - April 23

ASO is partnering with Sierra Club and other conservation-minded organizations to sponsor Earth Day 2005, which is scheduled to be held in Elmwood Park on April 23.

Volunteers are needed to perform a number of tasks including running children's activities, helping with vendor and display booths, picking up afterward, handing out flyers to businesses, and helping with fundraising.

If you can contribute a few hours of your time to help make Earth Day 2005 a success, contact ASO board member Pauline Dickey, 932-8205, or Cammy Watkins at the Missouri Valley Group Sierra Club office (551-9480), or Camellia.Watkins@sierraclub.org.

Opportunities for Fund Raising

If you are thinking about buying a book, shirt or cap, or gift, we have items available at the general meetings. We will also have these items at the Rivers & Wildlife Conference and Earth Day, Elmwood Park (see item top of page).

If you have time to devote at Rivers & Wildlife or Earth Day, please call Pauline, 932-8205. Your assistance would be invaluable.

Nelli's Notes,

Continued from page 2

coral reefs, blamed on warming oceans, pollution, and overfishing, allowed the tidal wave to do more damage to the

Slate of Candidates for 2005-2006

The following candidates will be presented for election at the April general meeting.

President - Elliott Bedows

1st Vice-President - Jackie Scholar

2nd Vice-President - Laurine Blankenau

Treasurer - Patty Albright

Recording Secretary - Linda Dennis

Past President - Nelli Falzgraf

Directors - Mace Hack (for second two-year term), Urban Lehner (replacing outgoing Director Bob Fuchs).

Jenny Henricksen, Sharon Draper, Mark Armstrong and Tad Leeper will remain in office, completing two-year terms.

Identifying Coral Reef Fish

On Thursday, March 3, 7:00 pm, Fontenelle Nature Association monthly meeting, Bechara Embaid will give a presentation about coral reef fish identification techniques and compare them to bird identification, with photos by famous underwater photographer Paul Humann.

An oceanographer graduate from the University of Washington and the American University of Beirut, Embaid is a diver and a lecturer on conservation of the marine environment in his native Venezuela. His lectures have entertainment and education value for audiences of all ages.

The presentation is open to the public on Thursday, March 3, 7:00 P.M. at the Buffett Learning Center, Fontenelle Nature Center, 1111 No. Bellevue Blvd, Bellevue.

Bird Banding

Bird banding (weather permitting) will be held at the Wetlands Learning Center, Gifford Road, Fontenelle Forest, on Saturday, March 12, 9 am - noon. Non-FNA members will be charged a small fee for participation. Call Betty Grenon, 731-3140 for information.

coasts than it otherwise might have done. Nature's power and messages are not to be ignored.

Omaha Raptor Team at Pheasants Forever

The Raptor Team staffed a booth at Pheasants Forever and as usual were a great success. Crowds were thrilled with close encounters with the birds. Thanks, Team for being great educators and ambassadors for wildlife and for Audubon.

March Events

Mar 2 (Wed) Board Meeting

Mar 10 (Thur) General Meeting

Mar 18-20 - Rivers & Wildlife Celebration

Mar 26 (Sat) Field Trip

Project FeederWatch -

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Raptor Team Exhibits at Pheasants Forever

By Jenny Henricksen

Sherry Seibert, Harley the Barred Owl, and Amy Thomas **Falconer Scott Morin and his Goshawk "Morticia"**

Photos by J.E. Van Horne

From January 14-16, the Omaha Raptor Team participated in the National Pheasants Forever convention held at the Qwest Center in Omaha. The Pheasant Fest was a wonderful opportunity for us to reach thousands of hunters, conservationists, outdoor enthusiasts, and their families. We extend a very special thank you to Pheasants Forever for providing our booth in the children's village; to Christy Jacobsen and the Pappio-Missouri Natural Resources District for inviting us to be a part of this convention and generously providing our brochures and handouts for the fami

lies; and to Tara Nation and her staff at Images of Nature for donating the beautiful photo, "Winter's Ghost," by Thomas D. Mangelsen. Amy Thomas, J.E. Van Horne, Laurine Blankenau, Pauline Dickey, and Bechara Embaid - we couldn't have done it without your help!

Pheasants Forever, a non-profit organization, is dedicated to the creation and acquisition of wildlife habitat. As exhibitors at this event, the Raptor Team is proud to have our feathered educators help promote and contribute to future wildlife habitat through education and public awareness.

Our Cranes

Some of us have begun migrating toward the Platte and its populations of our beloved Sandhill Cranes. Others will make the trip in a few days to view the staggering numbers and hear their voices, wild and untranslatable, but understood in the blood and bone.

A quotation by Aldo Leopold begs for inclusion in this issue. Referring to Whooping Cranes, his words surely apply to Sandhill Cranes too.

"Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the

Proposal by Sunset Valley Speedway

The Douglas County Planning Board unanimously voted to deny an application by the Sunset Valley Speedway to take 51.5 acres of land for a race track. The land is south of Highway 36 and between new Highway 275 and 312th Street.

The meeting was held on February 9, the second hearing on the proposal. Nearby landowners, attorneys and others testified in opposition to the speedway because of the intense noise level, dust, traffic, and adverse effects on land

pretty. It expands through successive stages of the beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language. The quality of cranes lies, I think, in this higher gamut, as yet beyond the reach of words."

values. Adjacent to the proposed site is an organic farm, other farm land, and a game preserve.

Nelli Falzgraf and Laurine Blankenau attended the hearing, with Laurine testifying against the speedway.

The Planning Board's decision amounts to a recommendation only; the applicant may follow up with a petition to the County Board.

Hitchcock Hawkwatch 2004 Fall Report

By Mark Orsag and Jerry Toll

The Hitchcock Hawkwatch enjoyed an unprecedented season in the fall of 2004. The growing crew of hawkwatchers logged 694 hours, the most ever, but more importantly, not one day of coverage was missed during the season. The 2003 record season total of 9,772 was eclipsed by last fall's incredible total of 11,953.

We would have been content to surpass the much-anticipated 10,000 raptors-in-a-season brick wall. By the third week in October, we knew we would surpass the 10K mark. By November 2, we had passed it! With more than 6 weeks to go, the conversations at the watch centered on just what the final tally would be.

Species Account

We set a number of species records this season. **Turkey Vultures** surpassed Red-tailed Hawk as the most abundant target species passing Hitchcock, 3,074 Turkey Vultures vs. 3,065 Red-tailed Hawks. **Mississippi Kites** had a typical year with 16. We spotted 947 **Bald Eagles**, up 39 from the previous record. The new **Osprey** record of 184 more than doubled the previous record. Additionally, we set a new one-day record of 39 on September 23.

The **Northern Harrier** new record of 344 far surpassed the previous 2000 record of 229. **Sharp-shinned Hawk** surpassed the 2003 record of 948 by 138 (1,086). The 2002 record of 199 **Cooper's Hawk** was surpassed by 74 (273). **Goshawks** remained unchanged from last year (9), a fairly typical count recently, but far below the record of 18 in 2000.

The **Broadwing Hawk** flight was about average - 358. **Swainson's Hawk**, coming all within a few days in large kettles, is the most anticipated species. They didn't disappoint us. We counted a record 2,230, eclipsing the 2002 record of 1,914. The **Red-tailed Hawk** count declined slightly from last year, but it is the color morphs and subspecies seen that enhance the uniqueness of the Hitchcock watch. We see such a mix of western and eastern forms, northwestern

the true number migrating through the area. Evidence from other watches seems to indicate they don't migrate using ridge systems as much as other raptors do. We have speculated that we would see more Kestrels if we were down in the Missouri Valley.

Merlin posted a respectable new record of 35, surpassing the 29 seen in 2000. **Peregrine Falcon** had a strong year of 38 after a poor showing of 25 in 2003. This year approached the 2000 record of 42. **Prairie Falcon**, the second rarest raptor regularly seen, broke a new record of 6.

A new species was added October 24. A **Gyrfalcon** was seen over the east overlook and is awaiting consideration by the Iowa Records Committee before official inclusion.

Of the 20 species seen, 11 set new records, 1 species showed a marked decline, and the balance had respectable or better numbers. This information taken alone would suggest that raptor populations are increasing. This hawkwatch is just one source of data that, when combined with other hawkwatches and other kinds of studies, give a clear picture of raptor population trends.

Interest in the hawkwatch continues to grow. Our core group is as strong and committed as ever. More and more visitors come to enjoy the migration with us from a wider and wider circle. In October the Governor of Iowa recognized our commitment by bestowing upon us one of the Governor's Volunteer Awards.

The Pottawattomie Conservation Board, who manages Hitchcock Nature Center, continue to be strong supporters. They have underwritten the salary of a hawkwatcher for the past 2 years, and beginning in March, groundbreaking will begin on a tower from which we will be able to see the entire panorama of the Loess Hills. The tower is scheduled for completion by next fall's Hawkwatch.

and prairie forms that are not seen at other hawkwatches.

The **Rough-legged Hawk** count was down considerably from last year's record, but their movement into eastern Nebraska is weather-dependent and varies year to year. **Ferruginous Hawk** is the rarest regularly occurring raptor at Hitchcock. As our yearly observation coverage increased, so did the sightings of Ferruginous Hawk, from 1 to 2.

Golden Eagles became almost predictably present for a short time in November (an exaggeration). The runaway new record of 36 more than doubled the previous records of 17 in 2002-3. **American Kestrel** numbers are difficult to assess at the hawkwatch. The count of 123 does not reflect

If all goes well, and it should, we will be opening a banding station to coincide with the hawkwatch next fall. This will add greatly to our understanding of the raptor migration through this region by adding detailed sex, age, and health conditions, as well as information from recovered banded raptors.

We need your help

For use in restraining raptors at the new banding station, we will need the following clean, empty food cans with the bottoms intact: 10oz soup can, 15oz vegetable can, 22oz pet food can, 13oz, 24oz, and 39oz coffee cans; we also need a 3 beam metric scale and a metric dial caliper. Contact Jerry Toll, 453-9239, if you can supply any of these items by September.

What to Do With Old Electronics

From the Union of Concerned Scientists

Rapid advances in technology come with a price: the equally rapid pace of obsolescence. the average lifespan of a computer, for example, will have dropped from 4.5 years in 1992 to approximately two years in 2005.

As a result, "e-waste"—discarded computers, TV's, cell phones, and other electronics—comprise one to four percent of the municipal solid waste stream, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. What's worse, this equipment is often made from nonrenewable resources and contains hazardous chemicals including lead, chromium, cadmium, and mercury.

Here are some ways you can cut down on the e-waste:

Buying

Before you buy replacement technology, assess your current equipment. Can you improve your computer's performance with a memory or video card upgrade? Do you need a cell phone with all the newest features when your old one works just fine? Is it worth buying a new portable CD player if you eventually want an MP3 player?

Choose a product that has all the features you will need for the foreseeable future, has space to add components such as memory if needed, or takes the place of two separate gadgets (for example, you could consolidate equipment by buying a cell phone with integrated personal organizer, or a printer with integrated scanner or fax).

Purchase used or refurbished electronics (but be aware that these products might not come with a warranty).

Reusing

Before discarding obsolete electronics,

Computers: If your town does not accept computers, look for a commercial recycler that can break down and distribute usable components and dispose of the rest properly.

Cell phones: Many cell phone manufacturers and service providers will take back used phones for reuse or recycling.

Hi-Tech Bird Watching: Conservationists Use NASA Radar to Follow Migrations

By Jennifer Uscher, *Nature Conservancy* Spring 2005

When NASA scientists were looking for a site for their new portable Polarimetric Radar, which measures precipitation, they contacted the Nature Conservancy's Barry Truitt about moving the radar to a Conservancy property in Oyster, Virginia. Truitt, a conservation scientist, had his own ideas for the radar, so they struck a deal: On rainy days, NASA gathers precipitation data; on clear fall nights, the Conservancy tracks migrating birds along Virginia's Eastern Shore.

Millions of migrating songbirds stop along the shore to rest and forage before taking to the evening skies to continue their journeys. The radar picks up concentrations of migrants moving into the atmosphere, and Truitt and Sara Mabey, a conservation scientist at North Carolina State University, use this data to identify stopover habitats. Banding studies help confirm the information. "This will open up a whole other world of habitats that these birds are using," says Truitt, "and will help us prioritize areas for conservation."

The new radar is an improvement over

Computers: If your town does not accept computers, look for a commercial recycler that

Cell phones: Many cell phone manufacturers and service providers will take back used p

find out whether a local repair shop, the national network of weather radar electronics training program, or even a that ornithologists have used for technologically inclined friend or family migration research for a decade. That member could use it for parts or radar can record the flight direction, practice. speed and relative density of birds in the atmosphere; the newer radar can also

Consider donating used electronics to a nonprofit organization or school. Some organizations, for example, reprogram used cell phones for emergency use by senior citizens or victims of domestic violence. Computers less than five years old should be donated through an electronics refurbisher, who will clean out old files and software and ensure all of the components are running properly. Computers more than five years old should be recycled, because software and technical support for older systems is difficult to find.

determine the size and shape of targets. Mabey and Truitt hope to calibrate the new radar to identify the numbers and sizes of groups of birds, allowing the scientists to distinguish, for example, between songbirds and waterfowl.

"We don't really understand the big picture of dynamics of migration yet," says Mabey. "Weather-surveillance radar has great potential as a conservation tool, because it can help us see the long-term patterns and protect this phenomenon on a continental scale."

Recycling

General electronics: Many cities and towns now offer electronics recycling as part of their household hazardous waste collection program. Contact your local public works department to find out what equipment it will accept and on what days; some charge a small fee per item.

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

Phone: (202) 224-4224; Fax: (202)
224-5213

Omaha phone: (402) 758-8981

Representative Lee Terry

U.S. House of
Representatives, Washington, DC
20515

Phone: (202) 225-4155 ; Fax: (202)
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6031

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5555

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



If we had a keen vision of all that is ordinary in human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow or the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which is the other side of silence.

George Eliot, *Middlmarsh*

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.

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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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