



Meadowlark

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The overlooked splendor of ducks

How to spot more birds in March and April

by *Conor Gearin*



Northern Shoveler male (left) and female by Richard Griffin

Many people report having a “spark bird,” the species that jumpstarted their passion for birding or that illuminated the wider world of birds. A former professor told me about the first time he looked through a spotting scope at a group of ducks on a lake and realized that there was not just one kind of duck, but many. For him, the whole group of waterfowl was his spark.

March and April are the perfect time to see ducks and other waterborne birds migrating through our metro area. If your appreciation for ducks is only surface-level right now, with room to deepen, consider the Northern Shoveler. Though it might sound like an unlikely spark bird, it just might cue you in on the wonders of the duck world. Male Northern Shovelers remix the classic green, brown, and white colors of the ever-present Mallard and add something unique: a gigantic bill, a spade for scooping big mouthfuls of water and straining out tiny arthropods. For the

bill isn't just a shovel — it has over 100 tiny projections along its sides that help pick out miniscule animals from the water, somewhat like the baleen plates in a whale's mouth. It's an incredible solution to the challenges of survival.

In early spring, waterbodies around Omaha swell with large numbers of Northern Shovelers and other species of migratory ducks. Looking quickly from a traveling car, students on a field trip at first told me that shovelers in Lake Manawa were Mallards. But once you get a really good look at that bird's shovel, as those students did after we parked, you'll never mistake them again — and you might start to realize the surprises that the duck's branch of the tree of life has in store.

During early spring, duck species stopping by on their journey north include Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, Ruddy Duck, Red-head, Lesser Scaup (more common) and Greater Scaups (less common), Buffle-head, Common Goldeneye, and more. Non-duck waterfowl such as Pied-billed Grebes, Horned Grebes, and Common Loons are also on the move. Try to find a big group of ducks, called a raft, on a lake. These are migratory species congregating at a stopover habitat. Scan the group carefully to spot differences: the perky tails of Ruddy Ducks, the sharp white crescents on the heads of Blue-winged Teals. Then see what species

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Spring programs highlight birds and bees

Thursday, March 12

Hidden Pollinators: Nebraska's Tiny Bees and Their Relationships with Native Plants

Did you know that Nebraska has 400-500 native bee species and most are as small as a grain of rice? These tiny bees are pollinator powerhouses. We will explore the diversity of Nebraska's tiny bees, what makes them exceptional pollinators, and why native flowers are essential for their survival. Presented by Amanda Stasney, owner of Bumbling Bee Native Wildflowers.



Photo by Amanda Stasney

Thursday, April 9th

Hummingbirds and Orioles are Coming. Are You Ready for Spring Migration?

Join us for this fun and interactive seminar where we will learn practical tips for attracting these entertaining and colorful visitors. From feeders and food, the plants they love, their favorite colors and common mistakes to avoid — we'll cover it all! Presented by Crinda Williams, owner of For the Wild Birds.

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

GREEN CORNER: HOW YOU CAN HELP WILDLIFE AT HOME

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

Spring is almost here!

Native trees and shrubs to plant
They give birds food and habitat
Add flowers and berries too
for color, nectar, and morning dew!

Superfood

Winter's almost done, hooray!
Fuel birds up the healthy way:
Suet, sunflower, peanuts too,
Nyjer seeds for energy fuel!

Field notes from the president: Migration connects us

by *Conor Gearin*

“Birds don’t recognize borders so we



must work with our neighbors to protect them wherever they fly,” says Marshall Johnson, the chief conservation officer

of the National Audubon Society. I couldn’t think of a better quote to set the tone for how the Audubon Society of Omaha approaches spring migration. Think of the incredible journey of the Blackpoll Warbler, a tiny bird that winters deep in the Amazon rainforest. Leaving Brazil, this bird flies over Venezuela, over the Caribbean Sea, Cuba, and the Gulf of Mexico before finally reaching the southern U.S. With only short stops to refuel, the bird continues north through the Midwest — maybe spending a day or two in Omaha! — then on to the breeding grounds in northern Canada and Alaska. We know this thanks to fascinating research that tracks individual Blackpoll Warblers’

migratory routes. If you’re lucky enough to catch a glimpse of this bird or hear its metallic little song this spring, know that it ties together landscapes and communities over thousands of miles.

Birds rely on each and every human community they encounter along the way to provide them with suitable habitat. It’s up to us and our neighbors in Omaha to care for this species and every other that passes through our city or spends the summer here for the breeding season. The continued survival of each species depends on everything going right at every stage of the migratory journey and every part of the breeding season. Every year, this miracle happens again — but it’s up to us to ensure that future generations get to witness it.

In this issue, we describe two ways to help migratory birds: reducing light pollution and making windows safer for birds. Let’s also recognize a third action just as important as anything we do as individuals: connecting with our neighbors and sharing what we know

about wildlife conservation. Birds need more than a checkerboard of individual homeowners here and there protecting them. They need a seamless garment: a community united by its value for providing wildlife, both resident and migratory, with good habitat.

When we work together to care for wildlife, we also care for human communities. If we’re united in caring for our shared environment, our relationships with our neighbors will improve, too. In talking with our neighbors, we might find they have undertaken incredible journeys in their lives, and we might end up sharing our own journeys with them, too. Like every city in the U.S., Omaha brings together peoples and cultures from all over the world. Both birds and people know what it means to travel great distances for survival. If ASO can do its part to make Omaha a better place for everyone to live — for wildlife and for people, no matter where they’re from — we’ll help create a better place for future generations to live.

ASO special events this spring

Discovering the Galapagos (National Geographic Live event feat. marine ecologist Alex Hearn)
The Holland Center

March 15, 2026, 2 p.m.

Audubon Society of Omaha has a limited number of tickets to share with members to attend this National Geographic Live Event! National Geographic Explorer and marine ecologist Alex Hearn will explore the history, ecology and conservation efforts in the Galapagos Islands, along with the groundbreaking science happening with Darwin’s finches, giant tortoises, marine iguanas, and other remarkable wildlife on these islands.

The number of tickets is very limited, so please only register if you know for sure you can attend. Each person attending must register. Make sure to visit our online Calendar of Events to grab a



DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge wetlands by Randy Mays/USFWS

free ticket! Once successfully registered, we send an email notification to let you know when and where to meet at the Holland before the show to receive your ticket. See you there!

Wetlands Tour, DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)

April 18, 2026, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Ages 12 and up (limited to 20 people)

Join ASO for a special tour of a wetland area at DeSoto NWR. Meet promptly at 9 a.m. at the visitor center for an introductory program on the history of the refuge, its role as a migratory bird sanctuary and wetland manage-

ment. After the presentation, the group will caravan out to a designated area to walk around sections of wetlands. We will do some bird watching with more in depth discussion around wetland management and spend time answering questions.

Dress in weather-appropriate clothing and wear sturdy water resistant or waterproof footwear suitable for uneven terrain and potentially muddy conditions. There are restrooms at the visitor center. Bring water and anything else you may need to stay comfortable. Don’t forget your binoculars!

Dark skies light the way for migratory birds

By Rachael Yi



Omaha at night by Bradley Weber

Hundreds of thousands of birds migrate through Nebraska each year, bringing with them the birdcalls, sightings, and aerial displays many of us cherish. But all the joy we get from daytime bird watching depends on dark skies. Springtime migratory birds — especially songbirds such as sparrows, finches, thrushes, and warblers — travel at night and depend on darkness to do so. These birds “read” pathways revealed by the stars and moon to maintain their path, but light pollution increasingly threatens their ability to find their way.

Light pollution is a common part of life for us all. It’s estimated that 99% of people in the United States live in areas impacted by excess lighting. This makes it harder for us humans to sleep, relax, and follow our natural circadian rhythms. Simultaneously, this light pollution harms nocturnal animals and interrupts the natural cycles and rhythms that birds, and all creatures, depend on.

While many of us are familiar with “dark sky places,” like Merritt Reservoir State Recreation Area in Valentine, Nebraska (a designated Dark Sky Park), dark skies aren’t limited to areas with

naturally little light pollution. We all have a part to play in keeping nighttime dark and sacred for creatures who rely on the stars. Pave the way for birds on the move by following these simple steps to preserve dark skies this spring:

1. Dim outdoor lights. Springtime bonfires or cookouts are a great time to illuminate your yard, but afterward, consider dimming it down. If you use pathway lighting, choose lights that direct the beams downward, and limit their wattage. Turn off unnecessary lights on your porch, deck, and inside your home when you’re not in the room. Light shining through windows can confuse birds’ nighttime pathways and even delay their migration patterns as they misread their route. A bonus of dim outdoor lighting is that it allows fireflies, whose populations are in drastic decline, to see each other more easily.

2. Add reflective material to your windows to redirect birds. When birds become disoriented by light pollution, they can grow fatigued, and this makes it harder for them to notice when they’re flying toward a solid structure like a residential home. Placing reflective or

patterned decals on your windows helps birds both night and day, reducing the likelihood of often-fatal collisions with homes and buildings.

3. Increase habitat that also lets the stars shine. Planting native trees, shrubs, or other plants near lighting sources helps to shade the glare of light pollution from path lights, streetlights, or homes. Strategically placing these plants by light sources not only beautifies your space, but it lessens the intensity of beams from light sources while also adding valuable habitat for a variety of creatures.

4. Trade out old lightbulbs for energy-efficient and warm-light options. You don’t have to sit in the dark at home, but you can make your bulbs more bird-friendly! Using warm-white or amber lightbulbs can be a simple way to reduce light pollution in your neighborhood. To make this approach even more effective, draw your curtains or blinds at night, so less light glare reaches outside of your windows.

5. Be an advocate! Talk with your neighbors about the importance of dark skies. If anyone in your community is an obvious bird-lover – look for feeders in the yard or a birdbath – consider sharing what you know about how dark skies benefit birds. A single conversation can make an impact across your neighborhood, and for birds across the country.

Dark skies are a comfort and necessity, but they are also in peril. A life without the stars is less beautiful for people and animals alike. Doing what you can to preserve the glimmer of night skies can ensure that the birds you love are able to thrive and return to Nebraska for decades to come.

Learn more: <https://darksky.org/news/how-darksky-partners-with-the-national-audubon-society-to-promote-lights-out-for-the-birds/>

Join us for the ASO Student Art Show!

The 2026 Student Art Show and Awards Ceremony will be held live and in person at Creighton University's Harper Center on April 11, 2026. The Art Show begins at noon and is open to all student artists and their families, as well as teachers. The specific times for Awards Ceremonies will be announced after March 16, 2026.

Note: To see ALL student artwork in the show, arrive before 1 p.m. for best experience – artwork is removed by student artists after each awards ceremony.

Right: Lorelai K., 12th grade, Best in Show 2025 for Graphic Design, Grades 9-12



Preventing birds from colliding with windows



Window decals on Connector Building, South Omaha Campus, Metropolitan Community College

During migration, many birds die after colliding with glass because they do not see it as an obstacle — they perceive the reflection of trees and other plants and think they are flying to shelter, so they crash into the window at full speed. These collisions are almost always fatal. In North America, building collisions are one of the leading causes of bird mortality from human activity, accounting for more than 1 billion bird deaths per year. While collisions can happen in both rural and urban areas, preventing bird strikes is a crucial way that cities can contribute to conservation. Millions of birds pass through Omaha each spring and fall, and we can do our part to help protect them.

Fortunately, awareness of the problem is growing, and there are cost-effective solutions that avoid any need for replacing existing windows. Manufacturers such as Feather Friendly produce small decals applied to windows to create a pattern that birds can recognize as an obstacle. You can purchase an amount of decals suitable for a house or apartment. For businesses, cost-effective commercial-scale installations are possible, too. McCormick Convention Center in Chicago was responsible for thousands of migratory bird deaths. In 2024, the center installed Feather Friendly decals. So far it has been 95% effective in reducing migratory bird mortality, according to the Cornell Lab



The reflection of trees can cause birds to collide with a window, but decals like these can help birds see the window as an obstacle.

of Ornithology.

Last fall, the South Omaha Campus of Metropolitan Community College applied decals to the Connector Building's many large windows. This will help prevent window collisions during this spring migration and for many years to come. Putting up bird-safe window decals on such a large building represents a significant step forward in conserving birds in Omaha, and serves as a great example for other institutions near and far.

The eyes have it – your photos

Send in your bird photos to
[audubonomaha@audubonomaha.org!](mailto:audubonomaha@audubonomaha.org)

Right: Cedar Waxwing by Mark
Schubert



Nebraska legislative update

by *Mark Harberg*

The second session of the 109th Nebraska Legislative began on January 7 and is a 60-day session ending on April 17, 2026. The following are bills and resolutions that have been introduced:

LR1072: Governor's 2026 budget adjustment bill for biennium 2025-2027 budget. Included is a proposal to transfer about \$40 million from the Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) to the Water Recreation Enhancement Fund and the Water Resources Cash Fund administered by the Department of Water, Energy, and Environment. A hearing was held on Feb. 2, 2026, and a good rationale to support opposition would be as described in LR298CA.

LR298CA: This is a proposed constitutional amendment to preserve the intent and viability of the Nebraska Environmental Trust by requiring that all grants be awarded through a competitive process and by limiting state agencies' use of the Nebraska Environmental Trust Fund. State agencies will be able to access Trust funds only if they provide a grant request that is granted in a competitive process, with evidence of a match for those funds of 50% from a political subdivision, the federal government, or private donors. This would prevent future fund transfers without applying for them and going through the competitive grant process.

LB823: Proposes to establish clear

definitions that distinguish between "controlled burning" and "prescribed burning" as two distinct land management practices, and by mandating the tracking of approximate acreage during the permit and planning processes.

LB897: Allows municipalities and rural and suburban fire protection districts to charge a fee for the cost of extinguishing a fire to individuals who violate burn permit requirements. It also changes the penalty for violating burn permit requirements from a Class IV to a Class III misdemeanor.

LB916: This bill gives authority to the Nebraska Oil and Gas Commission to approve applications for the construction of CO2 pipelines and prohibits the use of eminent domain for the purposes of acquiring right-of-way, constructing CO2 pipelines, and operating CO2 pipelines. The bill also requires CO2 storage operators to obtain the consent of all persons who own reservoir estates within the storage reservoir.

LB1026: This bill would prohibit retirement, shutdown, cessation of operation, and alteration of operation of certain energy generation facilities.

LB1028: Creates standards for entities classified as large, concentrated animal feeding operations who apply large amounts of animal waste for fertilization purposes, in order to protect Nebraska's water resources, both underground and above ground, from contamination entering water resources.

The overlooked splendor of ducks

(Continued from page 1)

are diving and dabbling on the fringes of the big group: Buffleheads popping up from a swim like a cork, Pied-billed Grebes pushing their short, squat little bodies surprisingly fast through the water before vanishing below in search of prey. Each species finds its own niche in the aquatic habitat.

As you get to know birds better, you'll find that you shift from searching for a long list of clues to identify a single species to recognizing familiar birds at a glance, much like you'd recognize a friend. Migratory species are especially valued friends to see, because we only get a chance to observe them once or twice a year.

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, Membership/Recruitment, 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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