
Avian Flu

By Nancy Leonard

Every so often something happens that makes us wonder if this is the beginning of a very bad thing. Nineteen thousand chickens die in a two-week period in Korea; seventy thousand chickens die in Vietnam, and days later three people are confirmed dead of avian flu. Thailand, Indonesia, and Cambodia all report cases in both birds and humans. In Europe the disease is found in birds in Turkey, Hungary, Denmark and Romania. Recently it has been confirmed in swans in Michigan.

Avian flu is a large and confusing subject. It comes in various forms, of which the H5N1 is the most dangerous. It exists in populations of wild birds and may or may not be transmitted to populations of domestic birds such as poultry, during migration. What precautions can governments take to monitor its outbreaks and avert a pandemic?

Our speaker, Bruce Morrison, has worked with wildlife disease for thirty-three years. Bruce is the Assistant Administrator of the Wildlife Division for the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. He is in charge of the Wildlife Disease Section and has participated in wildlife

disease planning efforts and investigations in the U.S, Canada, Mexico, Taiwan, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, France and Great Britain. He will talk to us about avian flu in wild birds and what the finding of high pathogenic H5N1 avian influence in Asia, Europe, and Africa means to the U.S. and Nebraska, and what Game and Parks is doing to monitor and address the situation.

Please join us as we explore this interesting and important topic. Our first meeting of the year will be held Thursday, September 14, 7:30 p.m. at the Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances (one block south of Center Street). The program and question time will be followed by a brief business meeting and a social hour. Nonmembers are welcome. We hope to see you there.

September Field Trip to Schramm

By Loren & Babs Padelford

The first ASO field trip of the fall season will be held on Saturday, September 9. Meet at the Schramm State Recreation Area Aquarium parking lot at 8:00 A.M. Loren and Babs Padelford will again lead the group in finding birds, butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies.

A Nebraska Game and Parks car sticker is required for entry to the park. They

Bird Seed Sale October 28 & 29

By Kathleen Rose

Each year at this time, preparations are

made for the annual bird seed sale, and this year is no exception.

We will be asking you for help with the numerous tasks, some requiring strong muscles, others not. The seed bags need to be unloaded at garage sites, and staffers need to be on hand on the dates of the sale for loading and paper work.

Please mark these dates on your calendar and give Jerry Toll an email (jertol@radiks.net) or phone call (453-9239) to let him know you are available to assist with this major fundraiser.

are available for purchase at the aquarium.

Bring a sack lunch and drink if you wish to have lunch with the group. If you have any questions or need directions, call Loren at 292-5556 or send email to lpdifrd@juno.com.

2006-2007 Field Trip Schedule -

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Current Currents

By Elliott Bedows

We Are Choking Our Planet With Plastic Pollution

Welcome back to all after our summer vacation. In thinking about the subject to take up first this year, I recalled our chapter's mission statement: ASO is here to educate the public about environmental concerns through the study of bird life. In that regard, I was inspired to write this article following conversations with my wife, Sheila, and one of our esteemed Board members, Urban Lehner.

Earlier this summer Sheila suggested that I inform our readership that many seabirds, especially gulls, are choking in those 6-pack plastic rings that beverages come in. And while I have now been scissor-cutting the plastic rings so birds will not be trapped in my discards, it turns out (as Urban revealed) that this domestic issue doesn't even scratch the surface of the global plastic problem.

A Los Angeles Times article of August 2, 2006, by Kenneth R. Weiss and Usha Lee McFarling, revealed that "On Midway Atoll [alone], 40% of albatross chicks die [because their] bellies [are] full of trash. Swirling masses of drifting debris pollute remote beaches and snare wildlife." By the way, Midway Atoll is

Its isolation would seem to make the Midway Atoll an ideal rookery for seabirds, especially Laysan Albatross, which lay their eggs and hatch their young here each winter because the chicks depend entirely on their parents for nourishment for their first six months of life. But while the adults forage at sea, scouring the ocean surface for high-calorie takeout, a slurry of partly digested squid and flying fish eggs, they encounter vast expanses of floating junk. They pick up all manner of plastic debris, mistaking it for food. As a result, the regurgitated payload flowing down their chicks' gullets now includes Lego blocks, clothespins, fishing lures and other plastic that can perforate the stomach or block the gizzard or esophagus. The sheer volume of plastic inside a chick can leave little room for food and liquid.

Of the 500,000 albatross chicks born here each year, about 200,000 die, mostly from dehydration or starvation. A two-year study funded by the U.S. EPA showed that chicks dying from those causes had twice as much plastic in their stomachs as those dying for

more than 1,000 miles from the nearest city.

John Klavitter, a wildlife biologist, turned one dead bird over and cut it open with a knife. Probing its innards with a gloved hand, he pulled out its stomach. Out tumbled a collection of red, blue, and orange bottle caps, a black spray nozzle, part of a green comb, a white golf tee and a clump of tiny dark squid beaks ensnared in a tangle of fishing line.

"This is pretty typical," said Klavitter, who is stationed at the atoll with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. "We often find cigarette lighters, bucket handles, toothbrushes, syringes, toy soldiers—anything made out of plastic." It's all part of a tide of plastic debris that has spread throughout [all of] the world's oceans, posing a lethal hazard to wildlife, even on an atoll halfway between North America and Japan, which has no industrial centers, no fast food joints with overflowing trash cans, and only a few dozen people.

other reasons.

The Atoll is littered with decomposing remains, grisly wreaths of feathers and bone surrounding colorful piles of bottle caps, plastic dinosaurs, checkers, highlighter pens, perfume bottles, fishing line and small styrofoam balls. Klavitter has calculated that albatross feed their chicks about 5 tons of plastic a year at Midway alone.

Nearly 90% of floating marine litter is plastic—supple, durable materials such as polyethylene and polypropylene, Styrofoam, nylon and saran that come from garbage dumped by overcrowded Asian populations who view the ocean as the infinite garage dump. *And that is simply wrong!*

About four-fifths of marine trash comes from land, swept by wind or washed by rain off highways and city streets, down streams and rivers, and out to sea. The rest comes from ships. Much of it consists of synthetic floats and other gear that is jettisoned illegally to avoid the cost of proper disposal in port.

Continued on page 3

Elliott Bedows Cited

for Research Breakthrough

By Eric Scholar

It may not be generally known, but many of the officers for purifying proteins using a chemical and members of ASO have lives other than the time spent tag or label that attaches to proteins and attending meetings and volunteering for various Audubon allows scientists to more easily and activities. cheaply purify these proteins.

In his other life, Elliott Bedows, current ASO President, is Such a technique is especially important a Ph.D. research scientist at the University of Nebraska in modern science where proteins are created using DNA manipulation Medical Center (UNMC) in the Obstetrics/Gynecology techniques. UNMC plans to patent and Department. It was for his accomplishments in this other market this technique so it is available to life that Elliott was recently cited in the Omaha World-scientists worldwide. Herald for a research breakthrough.

Elliott and his team of scientists developed a method

It should also be noted that one member of Elliott's team is David Smith, who like Elliott, is an avid birder. Elliott deserves

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Elliott and his team of scientists developed a method

our heartfelt congratulations for his achievement.

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ASO Cleanup at Lake Zorinsky, Saturday, Sept. 23

Here is a way to turn our words into action, join others in ASO, and work on cleanup as if we really mean it! Should we need a push in the right direction, our President's column, previous page, should be a strong encouragement to help remove trash around a body of water where gulls and other birds feed.

We will meet Saturday, September 23, at Lake Zorinsky,

9:30 A.M. Trash bags and gloves will be provided at the site, courtesy of Keep Omaha Beautiful. Cold drinks and treats will be furnished by ASO.

Please phone Laurine at 451-3647 to indicate your willingness to help so that we know the size of our group and the supplies needed.

Plastic Pollution,

Continued from page 2

We cannot simply blame other nations for the problems that we, the world's greatest energy wasters, create. One ship heading from Los Angeles to Tacoma, Washington, disgorged 33,000 blue-and-white Nike basketball shoes in 2002. Other loads "lost" at sea include 34,000 hockey gloves and 29,000 yellow rubber ducks and other bathtub toys.

earth's biological systems. Sorrowfully, this represents another example of how "the solution to pollution is dilution" is no longer a valid environmental strategy!

What can we do? As always, the first step is educating the public to the enormity of the problem.

Albatross are not the only victims. An estimated 1,000,000 Here is my initial contribution to seals, sea lions, whales, dolphins, other marine mammals, revealing the ramifications of this and sea turtles suffer the same fate. Next month, I'll discuss immense impending disaster. some of the other ramifications of plastic pollution. But the take-home message is clear. We now are generating a toxic waste stream more deadly than any oil spill because plastic cannot be broken down by

Making Your Yard A Bird Sanctuary

By Laurine Blankenau

Why travel to Ding Darling Refuge or Bosque del Apache when you could find bird habitat without packing a thing or making reservations?

It isn't quite the same, of course, but while we bemoan the ruin of bird habitat here, there and, seemingly, everywhere, we may be ignoring some spaces nearby that could entice feed and shelter birds. These spaces are our own yards, now eyed as important bird habitat because we have lost so much of our woods and open spaces.

Speaking from my experience, although I may have gone beyond reason with a natural-state yard, catbirds and others love the vines that clamber over the fence, the thickets that hide nests, the leafy places, and yes, the weeds (mostly concealed from view).

But for the neat owner/groundskeeper, the advice of Steve Kress passed on by Dean Fosdick in *The Eagle* could be the inspiration for a trip down the right garden path: "[Steve Kress] would like a few words with you if you're among the many property owners manicuring their yards to resemble putting greens on a golf course. The few words? `Stop doing it.'

`The structure you provide is important to birds. Structure and layering. All kinds of layers. That means leaving

to be fancy; a shallow birdbath or an upside-down garbage can lid will serve. Change the water often so it's clean for the birds and free of mosquito larvae. If you want even more bird traffic, you can add some sort of drip device.

Ö Keep your house cats inside the house. `Responsible pet owners who care about cats as well as birds should not be feeding birds,' Kress said. `At least in spring and summer, keep cats indoors.'

Ö Clean feeders and birdbaths regularly to prevent mold and algae, which can sicken or kill birds. Move feeders closer to the windows to avoid bird strikes. `There's this huge problem about bird collisions with windows,' Kress said. `If feeders are within 3 feet of the windows, then the birds don't have the momentum to hurt themselves should they get startled and fly off.'

Ö Create brush piles around the yard and rake leaves beneath shrubs. Leaves decompose over winter, attracting earthworms as well as birds that like scratching in the litter. Along with providing cover, brush piles serve as supplemental feeding sites, Kress said. `During storms, that's where birds seek shelter [and] will be able to survive. They're good at finding these places.'

Ö Weeds are in; large, thirsty lawns are

some leaves around. Some brush. The tidy look is not a good thing for birds,' said Kress, Vice-President for Bird Conservation, National Audubon Society.

Kress, who also teaches field ornithology at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, takes designing wildlife-friendly habitat beyond the Big 3 of food, water and cover. He suggests adding such come-hither things as nesting, dusting and roosting sites, controlling predators, primarily pets, using social attractants like decoys and recordings of breeding birds. He also calls for eliminating the use of pesticides on lawns.

It doesn't matter whether you live on a grand estate property or in an apartment with only a balcony. There are things you can do that will nurture wildlife, Kress said.

'Urban people can do container gardening. They can plant (dwarf) trees, small-scaled shrubs and plants. Hummingbird plants attract birds. Even ships at sea sometimes attract birds during migration because they have a few (potted) trees around.'

Other suggestions: Some other quick and easy projects designed to attract songbirds:

Ö Build a bathing and drinking pool. It doesn't need

out. 'People landscaping their property can pick native plants that have bird-attracting value and arrange them in ways that mimic natural bird habitat.'

Leave some Weeds: There are other, more subtle things that good wildlife habitat often requires, Kress said in an interview. 'Tree snags, for instance. Dead standing trees, or snags, can be as important as live trees for certain cavity-craving, insect-eating birds and animals, particularly woodpeckers. If you have any woodpeckers around, you'll soon see them create natural nesting cavities [in the snags] for nuthatches and warblers,' he said.

The virtues of wildflower and weed patches may not be understood or appreciated by many landowners, but scores of backyard plants are ranked among nature's most important bird foods. We're talking ragweed here. Also lambs-quarter, amaranth, bristle grass, sunflowers and crab grass, among others.

Kress asks that you not root them out. As a matter of fact, he suggests that you cultivate wild food patches in

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Teshekpuk Lake, in far northern Alaska, is the latest target of big oil. The lake is part of a vast network of wetlands, a federally designated "special area" on

Alaska's North Slope from which the current Administration has recently removed protection.

Since 1976 the important wildlife habitat around Teshekpuk Lake has been closed to oil leasing through the actions of three Interior Secretaries, who recognized the necessity of protecting caribou, geese

By Kathy Schwery

development could have major consequences for wildlife of this region."

The fragile wilderness that is Teshekpuk Lake, with its incredible diversity of wildlife and waterfowl, needs to be protected from development. By allowing the oil lease sale to go forward, this Administration shows a callous disregard for protecting critical wildlife

and other birds and wildlife which use the area. Now, however, Teshekpuk Lake has been opened to leasing, and the lease sales are to take place in September.

A National Audubon Society report warns that if "industrial-scale oil development encroaches on the Teshekpuk Lake caribou herd, it will not be possible to sustain the subsistence harvests Alaska natives depend on. Disturbances associated with Routine oil field activities will displace molting geese and reduce their populations. Oilfields attract predators, such as ravens and foxes, which also prey on bird nesting sites. The interactive cumulative effects of climate warming and industrial oil

habitat and for preserving the way of life of the Inupiat people.

Please write to Secretary of the Interior, Dirk Kempthorne, and ask that the oil lease sale be cancelled: **Secretary Dirk Kempthorne, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington D.C. 20240; 212-218-3100.**

Letters must be received before September 12. Perhaps it is not too late to save the habitat of Teshekpuk Lake, which nesting birds from six continents use, molting geese from three nations depend on, and which is home to the caribou on whom several North Slope communities depend.

Vincent Bluff Volunteer Work Days

The Loess Hills Preservation Society is seeking help at Vincent Bluff Prairie on Saturdays this fall. The first work day will be held on September 9, 9:00 am to noon. Participants will do physical work, so wear work clothes. If possible, bring work gloves and cutting tools (i.e. bow saws, loppers). Bring water and snacks as amenities are limited.

Directions to preserve: from I 80 (eastbound): take Madison Avenue (#5), turn left onto Madison Ave; at the second stop light, take a left onto Woodbury Ave and go about half a mile. Take a right onto Thallas Street. End of Thallas will be the parking area.

For other information, contact Larry Tibbles at larry.tibbles@hotmail.com or 712 527-5011 or 402-669-0537 cell.

Coming Events

Sept 6 Board Meeting

Sept 9 Field Trip to Schramm Park

Sept 9 Vincent Bluff Work Day

Sept 14 General Meeting

Oct 28-29 Bird Seed Sale

Bird Sanctuary, Continued from page 4

out-of-way sections of your yard. Over time, that not only reduces shrub growth but it also provides a bountiful supply of tree seed for ground feeding birds like sparrows and quail.

Large-scale development aside, everything eventually will center on what people would rather have in their yards: birds and dandelions or plain grass with the feathered treasures, Kress said. "That's a choice property owners have to make. Have birds around and enjoy their song or kill off some weeds for appearance's sake."

Bookbreaks

By Nancy Leonard

Have you ever noticed how some of life's best moments and memories are the totally unexpected ones? Perhaps it is the gift when it isn't your birthday or a letter from a friend you thought you had lost track of. The gift of the unexpected also applies to birdwatching. An ordinary bird in an unusual habitat becomes quite special. A brilliant cardinal in a junkyard may stick in our memory better than one in our backyard.

"City Bird: True Tales of Birds and Birdwatching in Unexpected Places" is a collection of true stories of birds surviving and thriving in unlikely places. Nature writers like Kenn Kaufman, Clay Sutton, Paul Johnsgard, Marie Winn and many others have written about their experiences birding near sewage ponds, from hotel rooftops, and on airport tarmacs. Many of their experiences will resonate with readers. Who hasn't read the rare bird alerts as a Christmas Count approached, hoping that the unusual bird listed will stay around just two more days and make it onto the count?

Other stories will bring a smile to the reader's face. Who wouldn't adopt a family of Mallards that decided to make the Scholar's Courtyard at the Metropolitan Museum home? There is no outside ground level access. It is surrounded by buildings on all sides that are at least four stories high. Yet one day a mother Mallard and four downy chicks showed up outside a curator's window. How they got there was unclear, but their needs for food and water were real. Soon curators were tending to "their ducks," bringing food, water and a ramp to lead them

World-Herald Editorial and

ANWR Drilling

An Omaha World-Herald editorial of August 24 exposed the fact about ads appearing locally pressuring for drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The ads, sponsored by Americans for American Energy, "indirectly in the pay of the Alaska Legislature." The usual arguments are made: that we depend too much on foreign oil, that domestic reserves are great, that ANWR oil would help reduce the price of gas at the pumps.

In reality, the article states and as we know, it would take from seven to twenty years for the ANWR oil to reach consumers, and the U.S. gobbles up massive amounts of oil (one quarter of the world's oil) while possessing a comparatively modest amount (3%) of the world's reserves. The article noted the ecologically crucial and sensitive nature of the Refuge lands. Of final note here and in the article is Senator Ben Nelson's record of voting against the ANWR drilling, a record to remember in the not-so-distant future.

into the kiddie pool. When it came time for the ducks to leave, their human family came up with a creative solution to help them make their way in the wider world.

Each essay is only a few pages long, making it an ideal book to pick up when you have a few idle moments. You may find a new perspective on bird habitat, a new respect for the resourcefulness of birds, and a new perspective on our parallel worlds.

Field Trip Schedule 2006-2007

Date Place Event Leader(s) Meeting place/Time

Sept 9 Schramm State Park Anything that flies Padelfords Schramm Park 8:00 AM

Oct 21 Spring Creek Prairie Field trip Bedows Spring Creek 8:00 AM

Nov 4 Hitchcock WMA, IA Field trip Jerry Toll Hitchcock WMA, TBA

Dec 16 Sarpy County Xmas Count Grenon et al TBA

Jan 20, 2007 Fontenelle Forest Winter Forest Walk Ratzlaff/Barth Fontenelle Forest
8:30 AM

Feb TBA Omaha & vicinity Feeder Watch TBA TBA

Mar 24 Branched Oak Lake Field trip Pasekas ca 8:00 Am

Apr 21 So.Nebraska, Indian Cave Park Field trip Silcock or TBA ca. 8:00 AM

May 12 Sarpy County Spring Count/Birdathon Group ca. 8:00 AM

Addresses to Remember

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President George W. Bush

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The White House, 1600
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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

Bequests

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

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



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