



Meadowlark

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Early Birds: Species to Look and Listen for in March and April *by Conor Gearin*

How do we mark the beginning of spring? There's the vernal equinox on March 20th, of course, but in practice it depends whom you ask. An elementary school student might reference the first day the class gets to go outside for recess. Similarly, the start of spring for birds might have more to do with the weather and their preferred activities than the spring equinox. For Red-winged Blackbirds, spring begins in early March or even late February.



Red-winged Blackbird, photo by Susan Young

Unbothered by the cold, male blackbirds want to get north as soon as they've put on enough weight to survive the trip. An early arrival time lets them stake a claim to a breeding territory, hotly contested by neighboring blackbirds. Females follow the males north a couple of weeks later. Upon arrival, they'll feed on seeds left over from fall until insects emerge.

For strict insectivores like swallows, the spring equinox is often too early for good eating in our area. Many swallows arrive during April's thaws: Bank Swallows, Barn Swallows, Cliff Swallows, Purple Martins, and Northern Rough-winged Swallows.



Tree Swallow, photo by Larry Frame

One early-bird exception is the Tree Swallow, which will eat leftover winter fruits in March before insects take to the air.

Ask a Bald Eagle and you'll get an angler's meandering thoughts about the weather and fish. In the fall, Bald Eagles move south as northern water bodies freeze. Early the following year, the opposite happens sometime between January and March. Basically, if weather allows and they can find fish to eat, eagles will start drifting north.

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Upcoming Programs and Field Trips

On **March 13th**, wildlife photographer, Mike Benkis, will share his secrets to capturing amazing images of birds and other wildlife. Sit back and enjoy his captivating photos, followed by a question-and-answer session. Benkis teaches photography at the Henry Doorly Zoo and is president of the Heron Haven photography club.

Be ready to get "Ticked Off" at our **April 10th** program. Joseph Fauver, Ph.D. is an epidemiology professor at UNMC. He is a tick expert and will share how to prevent tick bites while wandering around in nature. Learn all about ticks and what you should do if you discover one on you!

Our programs are free and open to the public. They are held in the private meeting room at DJ's Dugout, 777 N. 114th St. Please join us for social hour at 6 p.m. Food and drinks are available for purchase. The programs begin at 7 p.m. 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 Garden Cleanups

Many insects and small wildlife depend on the protection of mulch and leaves in yards and flowerbeds to survive harsh winter weather. So, take care when re-planting flower beds and gardens; then let wild birds take care of any pesky insects.

Plant Weeds, Get Butterflies

Native milkweed is the food source that Monarch caterpillars seem to prefer over any other. Planting milkweed is easy, especially if you use starter plants vs. seeds. Even a small milkweed garden can help their species bounce back.

ON THE HORIZON

March

MEMBERS PROGRAM

THURSDAY, MARCH 13

What: Photographing birds and other wildlife with Mike Benkis

When: 6 p.m. social, 7 p.m. program

Where: DJ's Dugout meeting room
777 N. 114th Street, Omaha

How: Register at Audubon-Omaha.org

Who: Members and the public (free)

FIELD TRIP

TUESDAY, APRIL 18

What: Urban habitat hike led by Grasslands Unlimiteds, Trevor Pellerite

When: 6 p.m.

Where: Cotton Creek Preserve at
7902 Lake Cunningham Road.

How: Register at Audubon-Omaha.org

Who: Members and the public (free)

April

MEMBERS PROGRAM

THURSDAY, APRIL 10

What: Ticked Off? Joseph Fauver, epidemiologist and tick expert will speak about tick facts, myths, do's and don't's

When: 6 p.m. social, 7 p.m. program

Where: DJ's Dugout meeting room
777 N. 114th Street, Omaha

How: Register at Audubon-Omaha.org

Who: Members and the public (free)

FIELD TRIP

SATURDAY, MARCH 15 & APRIL 19

What: EZ Does it Urban Birding

Leisurely birding walk on paved paths

When: 9-11 a.m.

Where: Towl Park

9310 W. Center Rd., Omaha

How: Register at Audubon-Omaha.org

Who: Members and the public (free)

FIELD TRIP

THURSDAY, APRIL 3

What: Evening bird walk led by Conor Gearin, followed by stargazing with the Omaha Astronomical Society

When: Walk begins at 6 p.m. -
stargazing after sunset

Where: 14810 State St., Bennington

How: Register at Audubon-Omaha.org

Who: Members and the public (free)

Field notes from the president *by Anne Maguire*

WHAT CONNECTS YOU TO AUDUBON SOCIETY OF OMAHA?



Our Audubon community is a melting pot of bird watchers, habitat gardeners, native prairie and grassland advocates, arborists, insect and pollinator enthusiasts, and everything in between.

In 1972, Audubon Society of Omaha became the first National Audubon Society chapter in Nebraska.

Over the years, our group has welcomed thousands of members who share a common love and respect for all things nature.

Is nature your hobby, a passion, or even your career? From students to retirees, everyone has a place to learn and get involved with our mission: to actively promote environmental awareness to our community through education, conservation, and enjoyment of our natural heritage, especially birds.

We offer monthly educational programs and field trips, publish our bimonthly Meadowlark newsletter, and serve as stewards of two local native prairie properties. We hold semiannual birdseed sales to help fund our Student Art Contest and awards ceremony. All of our programs and events are free and open to the public.

If you joined National Audubon and live in our area, you are automatically a member of our local chapter, Audubon Society of Omaha.

Whatever connects you to ASO, we welcome you, and hope you keep coming back to our community of environmentalists, conservationists, birders, and nature lovers of all kinds.

The eyes have it – your photos

We love to see your wild bird photos! Please email them to audubonomaha@audubonomaha.org



Eastern Kingbird, photo by Stephanie Le



Great Blue Heron, photo by Jennifer Dobby

Early Birds: Species to Look and Listen for in March and April

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Rough-legged Hawk, photo by Ryan Johnson

The biggest movements of raptors occur when favorable winds from the south help propel them onward, which often happens in April. Search the skies for migratory raptors over the Missouri River in spring and you might get to see less-common species, such as Rough-legged Hawk, Swainson's Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, and familiar species in surprising numbers.

When talking about spring migration, it's good to consider how climate change can make things more challenging for hard-working birds. As any traveler knows, timing is everything — and earlier growing seasons are making it harder for birds to time things right. Songbirds that set off for the breeding grounds when the days reach a certain length may find that the trees have already leafed out a week or two early due to excessive warmth and that they've missed the best time to

find caterpillars on new leaves to eat, making it significantly harder to find food to fuel their migration.

One way we can help migrating birds is to make sure our urban habitats provide food and shelter for worn-out birds. Avoiding pesticides and gardening with native plants ensures that songbirds can find food sources to power their trips northward. Another way is to dim the lights during big

migration nights to avoid disorienting birds and causing them to collide with buildings. Check Birdcast.info for the latest migration forecast.

Early spring is also the perfect time to think about creating habitat for the summer breeding season. Consider planting native trees and shrubs that can act as keystones for your backyard habitats, offering year-round protection and nourishment for birds.

Highlights of March-April Birds

WATERBIRDS

Blue-winged Teal
Green-winged Teal
Northern Shoveler
Gadwall
Lesser Scaup
Horned Grebe
Common Loon

SHOREBIRDS AND WADERS

American Woodcock
Wilson's Snipe
Lesser Yellowlegs
Greater Yellowlegs
Baird's Sandpiper
Pectoral Sandpiper
Great Egret
Seabirds
Franklin's Gull
Forster's Tern
American White Pelican

RAPTORS

Turkey Vulture (No, really!)
Osprey
Bald Eagle
Rough-legged Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Swainson's Hawk

LANDBIRDS

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Eastern Phoebe
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Golden-crowned Kinglet
All of our swallows (Tree Swallow, Bank Swallow, Purple Martin, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Barn Swallow, Cliff Swallow)
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Red-winged Blackbird
Yellow-headed Blackbird

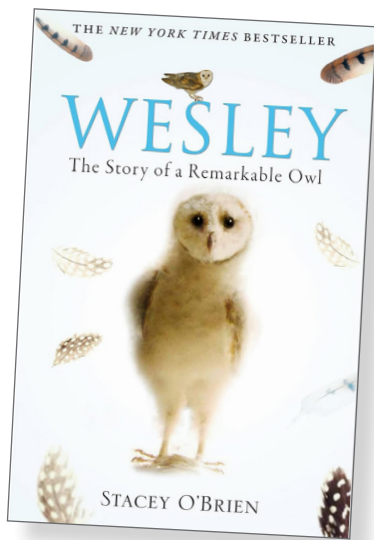
Put on your hiking boots for field trips!

On Tuesday evening, March 18th, join Grasslands Unlimited's founder, Trevor Pellerite, for an Urban Habitat hike around the Cotton Creek Preserve at 7902 Lake Cunningham Road. Learn about the community conservation efforts made to restore this once neglected urban space to a flourishing wildlife habitat haven. The hike begins at 6 p.m. Be sure to register on the calendar of events at Audubon-Omaha.org so we can give you important parking information.



ASO bird walk at Glacier Creek Preserve

On Thursday, April 3rd, join ASO Vice Presidents Conor Gearin and Bennett Amdor for a leisurely evening birding hike in the restored tallgrass prairie at Glacier Creek Preserve. Enjoy walking the mowed trails through five species of tallgrass as Conor identifies a wide variety of wild birds that inhabit the breathtaking landscape. The hike begins at 6 p.m. at 14810 State St., Bennington, NE. Please register on the calendar of events at Audubon-Omaha.org.



BOOK REVIEW:

Wesley: The Story of a Remarkable Owl

by Anne Maguire

Are you fascinated by owls? Wesley the Owl is sure to open your eyes to insights you never imagined. This entertaining real-life story chronicles 19 years in the lives of Wesley the owl and his caretaker, Stacy O'Brien, a young research biologist and owl expert at Caltech. O'Brien adopted the fledgling barn owl with a broken wing, not knowing the amazing impact he would have on her life. She shares the heartwarming experience of her bond with Wesley, and the love and loyalty they shared. Documented with photographs of their life together, Wesley was much more than a research project. While his six-mice-a-day diet was challenging, O'Brien learned astonishing lessons on owl behavior, emotions and communication. Get Wesley the Owl for yourself, and after reading it, you'll want to pass it on to another nature lover.

New York Times Best Seller

LA Times Best Seller

Audubon Magazine Editor's Choice

People Magazine 4 of 4 Stars

Available on Amazon

ASO Prairies Update

In January and February, ASO continued stewardship work on its two prairies, making them even more worth a visit this spring and summer.

At the **Cuming City Prairie**, a skilled operator used a skid-steer loader with a drum mulcher to remove at least three acres of overgrown shrubs and trees to help preserve the site as a grassland. A new firebreak around the edge of the site will allow for a controlled burn early this year once conditions allow. Staff from Fontenelle Forest will assist with the burn. The mechanical removal of woody stems over three years, combined with fire and other control techniques, will ensure that trees and shrubs do not take over and will create more opportunities for native prairie plants to flourish this growing season and in the future. The stewardship efforts have been supported in part by a grant from Pheasants Forever. Glenn Pollock, co-chair of the ASO Natural Areas Stewardship Committee, hopes to lead a visit to the Cuming City Prairie in June to look at how the prairie has benefited from these recent stewardship activities.



With a burn completed last fall, the **Glenn Pollock Prairie** should show a fresh burst of growth this spring. At some point this year, ASO hopes to mow some remaining dead vegetation to make way for new growth. If there is a significant snowfall this winter, it will help seeds planted last fall work their way into the ground and provide moisture for their development.



Board Update

SARAH PRESCOTT was elected to the board of directors at our January meeting. Sarah comes from a family of environmentalists, so her passion for conservation and the protection of wildlife habitats comes naturally. She hopes to work in conservation when she finishes her degree in Environmental Sciences at UNO.

125TH ANNUAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT was held on December 15, 2024. Specialty trained birding teams counted what they could see in four specific areas. Seventy-four species of birds were ID'd and counted for a grand total of 11,085 birds.

JANUARY MEMBERS PROGRAM

was presented by Conor Gearin, 1st Vice President, who spoke about the value of small-scale urban habitats to birds. The main message? Even small backyards and parks can have a positive impact on birds and other vulnerable species that depend on native plants for food and shelter.



JANUARY FIELD TRIP to DeSoto

National Wildlife Refuge was well attended and members enjoyed seeing Snow Geese and other waterfowl from the comfort of the visitor center.

NOMINATE OFFICERS AND DIRECTOS Each spring, Audubon Society of Omaha holds an election for our chapter's leadership. If you, or someone you know, would like to join the board, please contact Bennett Amdor, 2nd Vice President, at bamdor@audubonomaha.org

Legislative update: Issues that impact Audubon's work *by Trevor Pellerite*

If the early bird does, indeed, get the worm, Nebraska State Senator George Dungan, a Lincoln Democrat, is getting a jump on two issues resonating with the values and mission of Audubon Society of Omaha. He has introduced a bill to give nature lovers a head start on making their own corner of the world more environmentally friendly and a resolution to create a constitutional right to “a clean and healthy environment” for all Nebraskans.

LEGISLATIVE BILL 137 (LB137) would enable Nebraskans to create and cultivate pollinator-friendly gardens and landscaping features. The legislation would effectively prevent homeowners associations (HOAs) from prohibiting certain types of plants and gardens.

Specifically, LB137 would allow people to design and develop “a garden of any size that is designed to support pollinators, such as bees, butterflies and hummingbirds, by providing food, water and shelter.” These gardens also must comply with political subdivision pollinator garden programs. If passed, the legislation would make any HOA provision that outlaws such native landscaping null and unenforceable. LB137 would prevent HOAs from imposing fines or other forms of retaliation on those who are simply trying to preserve and promote Nebraska's native environment.

Dungan, and many Nebraskans, believe that returning native flowers, grasses and trees to the landscape is vital to stemming the tide of biodiversity loss. Similar legislation has passed in other states, including Colorado. Dungan's bill now rests with the Unicameral's Judicial Committee.

Through **LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION 22CA (LR22CA)**, Senator Dungan is proposing to create a constitutional right for all Nebraskans to “a clean and healthy environment, including pure water, clean air, healthy soils, balanced ecosystems, a safe climate, and diverse and abundant native flora and fauna, and to the preservation of the natural, cultural, scenic, recreational, and healthful qualities of the environment.”

The language of the amendment puts the state and its subdivisions in charge of stewarding these natural resources on behalf of every citizen. If passed by the Unicameral, this resolution would be placed on the general election ballot so that Nebraska voters can decide whether they want to enshrine this right in Nebraska's Constitution.

Such a right would allow ordinary citizens to request state action to protect the state's prairies, rivers, and hills, regardless of whether individual citizens own the land in question or are well-connected politically.

Other states, such as Montana, include a right to a clean environment in their state constitutions. This resolution has been introduced into the Natural Resources Committee.

In case you're wondering about the differences between bills and resolutions introduced in the Unicameral, here's a quick primer. Bills change state law and must go through the formal lawmaking process. Resolutions do not change state law. Instead, they aim to change internal legislative rules, make official declarations, enable interim studies, or place initiatives, referenda, or constitutional amendments on the ballot for voters.

If you believe that LLB137 and LR22CA align with your values and beliefs, as well as the values and mission of Audubon Society of Omaha, please contact your state senator and make your voice heard.

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 Audubon Society of Omaha.

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

We're searching for volunteers to help us with the 2025 Student Art Contest and Show – It's kind of a big deal! There are a wide variety of tasks, dates and times available for helping with this popular community event. If you can help out, even for a couple of hours, please contact Sarah Shepherd at sshepherd@audubonomaha.org

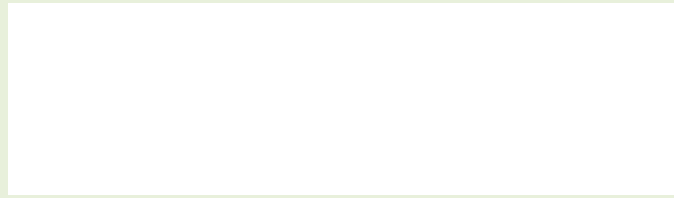
TAKE ACTION Big things are happening, so communicate with your elected officials. Go to Audubon-Omaha.org for links to contact info.

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.

Audubon
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STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH AND ITS CREATURES

the Meadowlark

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Photo by Ron Hiatt

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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Find us on Facebook
and Instagram.

ELECTED OFFICERS

President: Anne Maguire
Past President: Christine Prescott
1st Vice President: Conor Gearin
2nd Vice President: Bennett Amdor
Treasurer: Melissa Sitze
Secretary: Virginia Stauffer

ELECTED DIRECTORS

Amy Campagna
Roger Carroll
Kyle Finley
Betty Fullerton
Trevor Pellerite
Sarah Prescott
Katy Simmons
Open position

COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

DEIB: Bennett Amdor
Education/Field Trips: Amy Campagna
Finance: Melissa Sitze
Fundraising and Bird Seed Sale:
Elizabeth and John Fullerton
Legislative Affairs: Trevor Pellerite
Marketing and Outreach: Conor Gearin
Membership: Duane & Kathy Schwery
Natural Areas Stewardship:
Kayla Johnson & Glenn Pollock
Nominating: Bennett Amdor
Program: Anne Maguire
Student Art Contest: Virginia Stauffer
ASO Administrator: Sarah Shepherd
Executive Director, Audubon Great Plains:
Kristal Stoner

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