

The Meadowlark

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**Serving Eastern Nebraska
and Western Iowa**

DeSoto/Boyer Chute and the Summer of 2011 - Thursday, January 12

By Clem Klaphake

We all remember the flooding that occurred in the Missouri River valley this past summer. We heard and read about the levels of the flood waters from Yankton, South Dakota, to St. Louis, Missouri. We saw what the flood waters did to crops and farm fields, homes and highways in the Missouri River's floodplain. Can anyone forget the numerous photos and video footage of the Ft. Calhoun Nuclear Power Plant getting oh-so-close to flooding and potential shutdown—or who knows what else? When the Chair of the Nuclear Regulatory Agency visits a plant, it usually means some serious problem or potential problem exists. We all probably have our own stories and experiences with the flooding.

One area right in the center of this flooding is that of the DeSoto/Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuges in Nebraska and Iowa.

At our general meeting January 12, Tom Cox, Director of the Refuges, will address both the devastating effects of the flood as well as the potential opportunities as a result of the flooding. Many of us will be interested in hearing

an opportunity for visitors and the concerned public to become engaged in the planning process. For many of us, the Refuges have been wonderful places for birding year round.

As a child, Tom Cox planned to follow in his father's footsteps and become a factory worker, but his father made him promise to give college a try. So Tom went to Ohio State University to study wildlife management. He worked as a private lands biologist, then with U.S. Fish & Wildlife, ending up at DeSoto and Boyer Chute after working at seven other refuges. He has become known as the "habitat guy." His work also included a stint with law enforcement and as a scuba diver performing mussel surveys.

Join us for our general meeting Thursday, January 12, at 7:00 p.m. in the Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances Street (1 block south of 45th & Center Streets) to hear Tom Cox address the future of DeSoto and Boyer Chute NWRs. The program will be followed by a brief business meeting and conclude with a social hour and cookies. Visitors are welcome.

Feeder Watching Field Trip January 21

Join Justin Rink Saturday, January 21, 2012, for a feeder watching field trip. The winds may be blustery and cold,

about the future opportunities for the Refuges because much of what we have heard (especially through the media) focused on the damage, devastation, and destruction of the flooding.

Tom will focus on how repairs will move the Refuges toward making them more flood friendly. Both DeSoto and Boyer Chute have long been recognized for excellent public use opportunities. The future for both may be in the development of excellent floodplain habitat for migratory birds and other federal trust species.

In the next two years, both Refuges will be conducting Comprehensive Conservation Planning that will map out the future for the next 15 years. This will be

snow may cover the ground, and all the lakes may be iced over....but that doesn't mean we cannot enjoy avian life.

We will meet at 9:00 a.m. at Fontenelle Forest Nature Center and watch the feeders from the comfort of the enclosed "bird room." If time allows, we will stop by Kathy Schwery's house in Cass County to see what is hopping at her feeder. Be sure to bring optics and warm clothing.

Midwinter Bird Seed Sale

Page 3

2

Postcard From The President

I look forward to fall, when I band hawks at Hitchcock Nature Center. It is a time that envelops and consumes me. It has become part of the way I define myself, so much so that I have given myself a reverent name, "He who touches those who touch the sky."

For a few moments, I have the extreme good fortune of sharing time with a raptor during the journey we call migration. It is a direct physical connection with the natural world. During the course of the banding season, some experiences stand out.

Peregrines are by far my favorite raptor. When you hold a wild, healthy peregrine, it vibrates energy, and that energy is

By Jer Toll

to the blind even if it wasn't caught), then landing on the lure just like a redtail. Anomalies reign in wildlife behavior.

If peregrines are my favorite, it is the redtail I respect the most. Part of the allure of the peregrine is its rarity. The redtail is very common and the raptor I work with most.

Very smart, very aware of their surroundings, opportunistic, and found in a wide range of habitats. As with peregrines, we attract many more redtails than are captured. Also cautious, they often choose to land in a tree or on a post to look the situation over before deciding whether to take the chance. More often than not, their patience is greater than ours because if a redtail is sitting near the lure, other raptors will not visit us.

transmitted to the bander. Unlike the other raptors we handle, you can hear them breathe. They huff. It could be a fear response, but I prefer to think they are indignant about being handled, being lords of the sky. They are tolerant for only a few moments and then express their impatience by screaming at a decibel level that leaves your ears ringing.

This banding season we were fortunate enough to capture two peregrines. Both were of the tundrius subspecies that breeds in the high arctic and winters as far south as the coastline of Chile in South America. We attract many more peregrines to the banding station than we catch. We see most of them between the middle of September and the middle of October.

Peregrines are famous for their stoop from on high, but I have seen a stoop only once. It occurred so fast, it was over almost before I realized what had happened. Mostly, we see peregrines low.

The banding station is on a north-facing hill with a valley running at an angle in front of it. Flying up the valley, the peregrines see the break in the trees and see the lure. They come in low, often only a few feet above the ground. In most cases they veer off at the last moment, something not looking safe. I was taught that they have to be caught in the air because they do not come to the ground during the capture process. Typically they hit the prey in the air and return to feed on it.

That was true for the previous three peregrine captures, but this past season, both captures were made on the ground where raptors are most vulnerable. Both peregrines came in low, circled the lure (exciting enough to have a peregrine circling so close

This past season one redtail threw caution to the winds. One way we capture the birds is with mist nets—like fish nets for the air—made of fine thread, making them nearly invisible until you are close. The redtail flew in from the south through the trees. It went into a mist net, bounced out and stood on the ground. It flew into the mist net again, and this time looked caught so I ran out of the blind, and just as I got to the bird, it got out again and was standing on the ground.

Typically a raptor will fly off when this happens. This redtail chose to stand its ground, raised its wing tips high over its head like the phoenix rising, with mouth agape. We looked at one another, neither retreating. I dared not advance from the front because I was sure to be "footed" by its talons. I reached out, grabbed a wing tip, thinking I could spin it around and grab it from behind. Nope, not a chance. Same possible outcome. It was a standoff.

While we stood there looking at each other, I remembered how raptor rehabbers capture birds. They throw a towel over them. I took off my shirt, threw it over the redtail and captured it.

There was nothing typical about this capture. It was a Darwinian moment for the bird. This was its first migration. Like all birds, it faces a steep learning curve to survive the first year. My first thought was that it will not survive if it continues this behavior.

Or, perhaps it has learned valuable lessons: be cautious on the ground and stay away from humans.

Continued on page 3

Introductory Bird Identification Class

Saturdays March 24th, April 21st, and May 5th

8:00 a.m. to Noon - At Fontenelle Forest/Neale Woods Nature Centers. Admission \$20.00 for all three sessions **MUST** be paid in advance.

Ages 12 and up - This class is limited to 15 participants.

With over 50 million "birders" in the U.S, bird watching is the fastest-growing outdoor activity today. Led by Clem Klaphake and Justin Rink, both board members of the Audubon Society of Omaha, this class includes local field trips designed to teach you how to identify the birds in your back yard or places you go on vacation.

No prior knowledge of bird identification is needed. To sign up, contact Clem Klaphake at 402 292-2276 or at ckavian@cox.net.

Election of Board Member at February General Meeting

The Board of Directors announces its choice of Jonas Grundman to fill a vacant position of Director. The election will be held at the February 9 general meeting. All members present are eligible to vote.

DeSoto/Boyer Chute CBC

By Jerry Toll

The DeSoto/Boyer Chute CBC was conducted Sunday, December 18, under nearly ideal weather with a high temperature of 51, very little wind and mostly clear skies. The Count straddles the Missouri River valley to the north of Omaha/Council Bluffs, an area subjected

Midwinter Bird Seed Sale

By Kathleen Crawford-Rose

If you are getting low on bird seed, here is your chance to stock up again.

Audubon will have an email Bird Seed Sale with pickup delivery date on February 4, 2012. The pickup site will be Neal Ratzlaff's garage on 84th Street and Brentwood Road.

If you don't have your email address already, you can send us a message at katr@cox.net or download the order form from the audubon-omaha.org website after January 6. We will send an order form on January 7 to all of our previous customers who have given us an email address.

You'll be happy to hear that our best-selling black oil sunflower seed has decreased somewhat in price.

Omaha Christmas bird Count

By Betty Grenon

The Omaha CBC was held Saturday, December 17, 2011. A pleasant day for the counters with temps ranging from 23F to 51F and little wind. Concerns were for the impact of this summer's flooding, and while many of the lowland areas were somewhat devoid of vegetation and some areas were actually closed to our count, the results were not dissimilar from other years.

Thirty-seven counters tallied 70 species and 14,550 individual birds. This species count is tied for the fourth highest count with two other years, 1998 and 1987. Our highest count was last year with 78 species. One new species is being documented for records: Savannah Sparrows (seven) were found in the Glenwood quadrant.

We reached high counts for individual species with Hairy Woodpeckers and Belted Kingfishers (this latter must be from all the extra water this summer?).

to flooding much of the summer. I estimate that nearly 50% of the Count circle was flooded. Very little ground vegetation remains. Both DeSoto and Boyer Chute Refuges were nearly completely under water. Also N. P. Dodge Park was flooded out and remains closed. These are some of our best birding areas for the Count.

With 21 participants, we concentrated on the upland areas away from the flooding. It paid off with the second-highest species count in our 15-year history. Waterfowl were well represented with

Continued on page 4

Postcard.....Cont from Page 2

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Forsberg, Batt Highlight Rivers

& Wildlife Celebration

by Kevin Poague, Audubon
Nebraska

The 42nd annual Rivers & Wildlife Celebration, Nebraska's Crane Festival, will be held March 14-18 in Kearney, Nebraska, the Sandhill Crane capital of the world. See current information at <http://nebraskacranefestival.org>.

Organized by Audubon Nebraska and the Nebraska Bird Partnership, the conference gathers together nature enthusiasts from across the country to witness the migration of over half a million Sandhill Cranes and millions of waterfowl and other birds through central Nebraska.

Events include guided field trips; the Wildlife Experience Room, with

Great Backyard Bird Count February 17 - 20, 2012

The 2012 GBBC will take place Friday, February 17, through Monday, February 20. This is a four-day event that engages birders of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, from beginning birders to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

You can count birds anywhere for as little or as long as you wish during the four-day period. Then tally the highest number of birds of each species you see together at any one time. **To report your counts, you will fill out an on-line checklist at the Great Backyard Bird Count web site birdsource.org/gbbc/whycount.html.**

free activities and wild animal shows for the whole family on Saturday; and daily visits to river blinds operated by Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary for up-close views of cranes roosting on the Platte River.

Local and national speakers will present information on a variety of wildlife and conservation topics. Michael Forsberg will be featured on Saturday evening. Al Batt returns to the RWC for performances in the Wild Experience Room and as lunchtime speaker on Saturday.

Other presenters include Paul Johnsgard, noted Nebraska ornithologist; George Happ, who will share his experiences with Sandhill Cranes nesting, literally, in his back yard in Alaska; Sharon Stiteler, who runs the popular birding blog Birdchick.com;

Caroline Jezierski, the Wind and Wildlife Coordinator with the University of Nebraska Coop unit; and

Keanna Leonard, Education Director at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary.

The festival is open to the general public. On-line registration will be available beginning in January at nebraskacranefestival.org. To be put on the mailing list, write Nebraska@audubon.org or call 402/797-2301. Rowe Sanctuary has information about viewing the Sandhill Crane migration, 308/468-5282; www.rowesanctuary.org.



Photo by Phil Swanson

Participants can send in their photos and photos can be viewed on line, as well as prizes awarded.

12 species, largely due to a bubbler on a farm pond near Hitchcock and open water at DeSoto.

High numbers: G. White-fronted Goose, Cackling Goose, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Common Merganser and Ruddy Duck.

Also seen: Snow Goose (180), Canada Goose (1,931), Gadwall (1), Mallard (656), Ring-necked Duck (6), & Common Goldeneye (161).

Sparrow species: Spotted Towhee (2), Am. Tree Sparrow (326), Song (5), Swamp (1), White-throated (5), Harris (24) and Dark-eyed Junco (694).

Grassland birds largely absent: meadowlark sp (1) and Ring-necked Pheasant (4).

Unusual species: Hermit Thrush (2), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (2), American White Pelican (1).

Record high numbers: Wild Turkey (473), Golden Eagle (3), Downy Woodpecker (119), Hairy Woodpecker (22 - 2nd highest), White-breasted Nuthatch (145), Brown Creeper (13), Yellow-rumped Warbler (26) - double the previous high.

Total Species: 66; Record high is 69 species in 1999. Total individuals: 8,316. Out third lowest individuals count.

Thanks to staff at DeSoto NWR who opened the Refuge for us. And a special thanks to all the birders who counted. It was an enjoyable day!

Addresses to Remember

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Representative Lee Terry

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Representative Jeff Fortenberry

House of Representatives,
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225-4806

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The second option is local membership that includes receiving *The Meadowlark* and participation in all of our local activities. Dues from this membership are all applied to our chapter.

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Memorials

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

When sending a 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.

**Please send all changes of address to
djschw@windstream.net**

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



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