

The Meadowlark

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*ASO is a Chapter
of the National Audubon
Society*

*Serving Eastern Nebraska
and Western Iowa*

Hawks, Falcons, Owls: Raptor Banding at Hitchcock Nature Center

Program at General Meeting Thursday, January 13

The Missouri River valley is a river of migrating birds. Every fall, millions of birds follow the river, and Hitchcock Nature Center is the place to follow the phenomena.

Beginning in late summer with kingbirds and Redheaded Woodpeckers through December with Bald Eagles, the Hitchcock HawkWatchers are up on the tower watching the ebb and flow of migration through the valley.

The primary focus of the Watch is raptors, which are attracted to the 200-mile-long ridgeline of the Loess Hills that provides them with lift and diminishes the amount of energy required to migrate. Streams on the Iowa side, lined by their ridges, feed into the Missouri River valley, bringing raptors. Where the raptors are concentrated, information on their populations can be gathered.

Four years ago the raptor banding program was initiated at Hitchcock Nature Center. Jer Toll, current president of our chapter and raptor bander, will inform us about how raptors are banded and what is being learned about them. To date, 460 diurnal raptors have been banded, mostly redtails, sharp-shins, and Cooper's Hawks, along with six other species of raptors.

In the fall of 2009 the banding station began band

By Jerry Toll
ing day AND night to include owls. Thus far 92 saw-whets have been banded at Hitchcock in the past two seasons. The owl program has attracted more interest in the birding community than our diurnal program.

Jer Toll became interested in birds in 1984. Soon after, he volunteered with Raptor Recovery-Nebraska, staying on for seven years. In 1988 he became an organizer for the program introducing Peregrine Falcons to downtown Omaha. In 1992 he helped initiate the HawkWatch at Hitchcock Nature Center. He earned a bachelor's degree in wildlife ecology at the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 1994. Since then he has been an avian wildlife technician in Hawaii, North Dakota, Saipan, Nebraska and Iowa. He continues to volunteer for the Hitchcock HawkWatch.

Join us for the meeting Thursday, January 13, at 7:00 p.m. at the Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances St (1 block south of 45th & Center).

A short business meeting will follow the program. Cookies and conversation will close the evening. Visitors are welcome.

ASO Armchair Field Trip to Local Feeders

By Clem Klaphake

On Saturday, January 22, the ASO field trip will be led by Clem Klaphake. It involves observing birds at three feeder stations locally.

This is a trip ASO has done in previous years and attracts a good turnout of birders. It is a nice deviation from the usual outdoor field trips and avoids the potentially cold January weather.

We will meet at the Fontenelle Forest Nature Center at 8:00 a.m. and then caravan to the other two locations.

The hosts at these two locations have always been very gracious to us and provide great snacks. Hope to see many of you on the 22nd.

Postcard from the President

By Jer Toll

*Across the Appalachian region, hibernating bat colonies are being decimated by a fungus, *Geomyces destructans*. Since its appearance in 2006, it has been spreading rapidly southward and westward to caves where the constant temperature and humidity allow it to thrive. It has infected the hibernacula of bats from Vermont to Tennessee. Much is unknown about the disease, called white nose syndrome because of the fungal white fuzz on the muzzles of infected bats. It is*

suspected that white nose syndrome kills by acting as an irritant while bats are most vulnerable, during hibernation when their metabolism, body temperature and probably their immune response is low. Lesions on the wing cause early arousal from hibernation, using up precious stored energy, exposing them to starvation or freezing. More than half of the species of North American bats hibernate, making them vulnerable to the disease. - Jer Toll

Hibernating Bat Colonies Are Being Decimated

by Russ Benedict Ph.D.

This fungus is terrifying from the perspective of a bat biologist. It has the potential to cause extinctions in a matter of decades, and likely will reshape bat communities across the eastern U.S. and possibly nationwide.

At the moment, it appears that bats in the genus *Myotis* are most heavily impacted, with mortality rates of nearly 90% recorded in some caves. The fungus has been recorded as close by as northeast Missouri, with a few infected bats found in one hibernaculum. If it spreads to the surrounding major hibernacula in southern Missouri and the surrounding region, which it likely will, then it will have a major impact on bats in the Midwest.

Overwintering in these caves are many Midwestern bats including Indiana bats (an endangered species) and evening bats, a common species across the eastern half of Nebraska.

This is a case where our lack of knowledge about bats really becomes visible. For instance, big brown bats, little brown bats, northern long-eared bats, and eastern pipistrelles all are found in Nebraska and they all hibernate in caves; in fact, these same species are abundant in the big hibernacula in southern Missouri.

The THOUGHT is that the Nebraska populations of these species hibernate in Nebraska in buildings, mines, and crevices in rock ledges or cliffs. But if some individuals of these species fly to the big caves in southern Missouri to hibernate, they could bring the fungus with them when they return. One of the key questions to answer about this disease is whether bats can carry the

fungus with them when they leave the caves in spring.

One way or the other, it appears that this fungus will spread across the eastern half of the United States, and probably all the way to the Pacific. Just last year, the fungus was discovered in Missouri and western Oklahoma _ a huge increase in range for what we were hoping would be a disease confined to the eastern states.

How much of an impact it has in Nebraska is hard to say. Most bats in Nebraska hibernate in smaller settings, not in big caves holding hundreds of thousands of bats. (The only possible candidates for large hibernacula are limestone mines near Weeping Water and Plattsmouth.) Thus far, the research focus has been on big caves, so it is not clear what kind of impact the fungus has on small populations of bats hibernating in houses or rock crevices.

In the worst case scenario, Nebraska populations of the little brown bat and northern long-eared bat could decline seriously, as is happening across the eastern U.S. Both of these species are moderately common in larger forests in parts of Nebraska, so their decline could have an impact on populations of insects.

Interestingly, Nebraska may be spared some of the worst impacts. First, Nebraska does not have any endangered species in the genus *Myotis*. Not far to the east are populations of Indiana bats (*Myotis sodalis*) and gray bats (*Myotis grisescens*), two endangered species that may be extinct in a decade or two if the fungus is as bad as currently thought. Second, little brown bats are incredibly

Continued on page 3

Many people seem to run out of bird seed by winter's end, so ASO will be doing a winter bird seed sale. We will be providing the same high quality seed and variety used at our fall sale.

About January 21 the order form will be sent out to those people who have provided the birdseed sale with their e-mail address. Over 150 people have done so. Print the order form, fill it out with your order of seed and mail it with your check to the address on the form.

A few days before the pickup date of February 12th, a reminder will be sent via e-mail to pick up your order. All the bird seed will be at one location near 40th and Farnam St. It will be for one day only:

February 12th. Oxide Design at 3916 Farnam has generously contributed space at the rear of their building for the sale. If you have not shared your e-mail address with the bird seed sale and would like to be contacted, please e-mail Jer Toll, geritol48@cox.net. The order form will also be available at our website: <http://audubon-omaha.org>.

ASO Offers Local-Only Memberships

We are now offering local memberships in addition to memberships including National Audubon. With the local membership, *The Meadowlark* will be received, and the *Audubon Magazine*, National's publication, will not be included.

Please see page 7 for an application form and complete information about the local membership.

The Audubon Society of Omaha offers its sincere sympathy to the family of Fred Davis upon his recent death.

Fred Davis served as treasurer for ASO for two years, was an avid hawk counter at the Hitchcock HawkWatch for several years, and participated in our annual Christmas Counts.

"Fritz," as he was known to most of us, will be missed along with his dry sense of humor and anecdotes about his early experiences birding in the New York City area.

In Memory of Fred Davis

Announcing Audubon Art Contest Date: Saturday, April 2

Saturdays: March 12, April 9, and May 7
8:00 a.m. - Noon - Fontenelle Forest Nature Center

\$20.00 fee includes all three sessions

For ages 12 and older

Registration required: Contact Clem Klaphake at 292-2276 or ckavian@cox.net

The class is limited to 15 participants.

With over 50 million `birders' in the U.S., bird watching is the fastest growing outdoor activity today. This three-part class, led by Audubon Society of Omaha members Clem Klaphake and Justin Rink, includes local field trips and instruction on how to identify birds. No prior knowledge of bird identification is needed.

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Bats,

*Continued
from page
2*

common across the eastern and northeastern parts of the U.S. but do not have high population densities in Nebraska.

Therefore, even though this species likely will be impacted in Nebraska, their populations were never so large that they had a huge impact on insects. Places like Minnesota, Wisconsin, and New York State, on the other hand, could see noticeable increases in numbers of some kinds of insects.

On a personal note, I have fallen in love with Indiana bats ever since I moved to Iowa. These gentle, beautiful little bats are listed as federally endangered for exactly the reason we are seeing here: 90% of this species hibernates in a small number of caves making it vulnerable to a quickly spreading disease. This species currently has some of its highest population densities in south-central Iowa and northern Missouri, but has never been recorded in Nebraska.

I have been studying this bat for the past eight summers, and I am bracing myself for the predicted outcome of the white-nose fungus on Indiana bats. Some people think it could be gone in as few as ten years. We will see.

Russ was a naturalist at Fontenelle Forest. Since attaining his Ph. D., he has taught biology at Central College in Pella Iowa.

A Triple Treat of Birding Events March 9 - 20

Three bird-related conferences will be occurring from March 9 through March 20. Sandhill Cranes, water birds and others will be attractions.

Joint Meeting of the Association of Field Ornithologists, Cooper Ornithological Society and the Wilson Ornithological Society

The ornithological groups named above will meet Mar. 9 - 13, in Kearney. All information can be found at <http://snr.unl.edu/kearney2011>.

Activities include symposia, paper and poster sessions, council and business meetings, plenary lectures, opening and closing receptions and closing banquet. These will be held at the Younes Conference Center, Kearney.

Daily morning and evening trips to the cranes at Rowe Sanctuary, trips to the Rainwater Basin for geese, ducks, shorebirds and eagles, and trips to the Sandhills for lekking grouse and prairie chickens are offered. Day trips to area attractions are also planned.

Early registration is highly recommended for the cost savings and to help planners of the conference. Register online at snr.unl.edu/kearney2011/registration.asp

The costs - January 15 (online or postmarked on or before): \$245 for professionals; \$160 for students. \$130 for guests/accompanying persons. Single-day registration fee is \$75; it includes admission to daytime scientific sessions.

Water Bird Society Annual Meeting

The Water Bird Society will meet in Grand Island Mar. 13 - 16 (Sunday through Wednesday) jointly with the North American Crane Working Group.

Field trips, presentation of research papers, symposia, workshops and social events are on the program. The meeting's theme is Migration and Migratory Landscapes.

Planned topics are Central Flyway migration, mid-continent wetland habitats, climate change and threatened species, reintroduction strategies, roosting habits and local movements of waterbirds, oil spill impact to waterbirds, and management of large landscapes.

Daily opportunities to view cranes, waterfowl and shorebirds will be available via blinds and field trips.

The conference will be held at the Holiday Inn Midtown in Grand Island; room rate for participants is \$79 for one to four persons. Lodging is available at other nearby places.

Further information is posted at www.waterbirds.org/annual_meeting and the North

American Crane Working Group: www.nacwg.org

The last conference of the month will be the beloved Rivers and Wildlife Festival.

Sandhill Crane Migration Focus of 41st Annual Rivers and Wildlife Celebration

by Kevin Poague, Audubon Nebraska

The 41st annual Rivers and Wildlife Celebration will be held Mar. 17-20 in Kearney, Nebraska.

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 Wild Experience Room with free activities and wild animal shows for the whole family on Saturday, and daily visits to river blinds at 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. Main speakers are Dr. Richard Beilfuss, CEO and President of the International Crane Foundation; Rick Wright, managing director of WINGS, a worldwide birding tour organization; and National Audubon's new president and CEO, David Yarnold.

The celebration is open to the general public. Registration materials can be found beginning in January at www.nebraska.audubon.org. Or contact Audubon Nebraska to be put on the mailing list: Nebraska@audubon.org; 402/797-2301. Rowe Sanctuary has information about viewing the Sandhill Crane migration, 308/468-5282; www.rowesanctuary.org.

Great Backyard Bird Count

February 18 - 21.

The 2011 GBBC is a chance to join a nationwide citizen science project.

Briefly, you will count the highest number of species seen at any one time in your yard or elsewhere at one or all three of the days of the Count. Then report the findings online.

The web site: birdcount.org now offers step-by-step instructions to print ahead of time and have handy during the count. These explain exactly how to make the checklist and how to enter the count online.

The February *Meadowlark* will include additional information.

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Other Activities:

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Carol Rasmussen.....731-3939

Speakers Bureau Eunice Levisay.....393-0545

Historian Eric Scholar.....551-4045

NAS Board Member Peter Cannon.. 608-251-1276

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