

A Bird's Eye View

Audubon Society of Omaha
A Chapter of National Audubon Society



Volume 30, No. 3 March 2001

The Omaha Prairies: Glacier Creek Project

By Clem Klaphake

A prairie can be defined in a multitude of ways in peoples' minds. Richard Manning, author of *Grassland: The History, Biology, Politics and Promise of the American Prairie*, says, "We are all creatures of grass, if only because grassland defines a world we are not and so defines us like the black defines day. It is silent, we are not. It is free, and we aren't. It is large to a degree we cannot comprehend, so much so that we as a nation have spent 150 years in an assault on its whole, trying to reduce it to bits that fit our group."

On March 8 Dr. Tom Bragg from UNO will speak at the general meeting on the topic of Allwine Prairie and the Glacier Creek Project, which would add acreage further west of this prairie.

Tom will discuss his research as part of the Project, which is designed to expand Allwine Prairie to create the Glacier Creek Preserve consisting of an entire watershed as well as an environmental study center and natural history museum. Allwine Prairie is located near 144th & State Streets in northwest Omaha.

Dr. Bragg has taught at UNO for 26 years and has worked

on Allwine Prairie much of that time. A San Francisco native, he completed his B.S. in Business from Cal Poly University and his PH.D. in Ecology from Kansas State University.

Tom's research focuses on native tallgrass, loess hills, and Nebraska Sandhills prairies; reestablished native prairies; and woodlands adjacent to prairies.

His publications include *Ponderosa Pine Invasion of Nebraska Sandhills Prairie; Implications for Long-term Prairie Management from Seasonal Burning of Loess Hill and Tallgrass Prairies; Prairie Ecology-the Mixed Prairie; Climate, Soils and Fires: The Physical Environment of North American Grasslands; and Fire in the Nebraska Sandhills Prairie.*

Please come and learn about a local prairie from Dr. Bragg at 7:30 p.m. March 8, Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances Street (1 block south of 45th & Center).

His presentation will be followed by a short business meeting and conclude with coffee, cookies and conversation. Field guides for many nature-related topics, T-shirts, and many other items will be for sale before and after the program.



Candidates Presented

for April Election

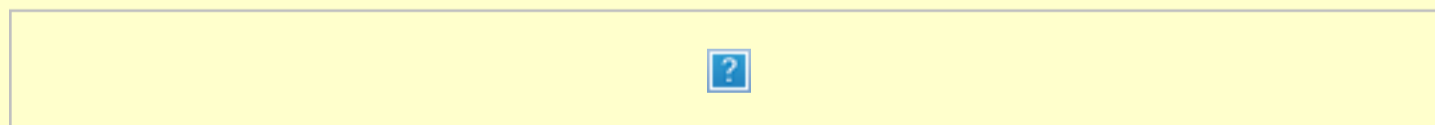
Candidates for the Board of Directors to be voted at the April general meeting have been selected, to take office July 1, 2001: Eric Scholar, President; Clem Klaphake, 1st Vice-President; Nelli Falzgraf, 2nd Vice-President; Garry Mick, Treasurer; Rosemary Holeman, Recording Secretary; Kay Strong, Corresponding Secretary; Bob Fuchs, Director; Sue Mattix, Director; Paul Kardell, Director. Jo Bartikoski, Jackie Scholar and Cal Wolf are completing two-year terms as Directors. All members present at the general meeting are eligible to vote.

Waterfowl Alert: Branched Oak Lake Destination for March Field Trip

On Saturday, March 24, we will meet with Don and Janis Paseka, who will help us find and identify the early spring migrants. Weather permitting, we should be able to see several species of ducks and geese in good numbers. We may also find Bald Eagles and other raptors as well as an early shorebird or two.

Dress appropriately for the weather and plan to eat lunch at the cafe in Malcolm. Binoculars are a must, and a spot

Continued on page 3



**Michael
Forsberg to
Sign Photos**

The Omaha Raptor Team

A Committee of ASO

and Stamp in Lincoln March 8



By Alison O'Connor

A photo of Nine-Mile Prairie near Lincoln, taken by Michael Forsberg, will adorn a new 70-cent international postage stamp, which is expected to be released March 6 in Lincoln.

On March 8 the U. S. Postal Service will join Forsberg at a stamp-and photo-signing session at the Great Plains Art Collection, Hewit Place, 1155 Q St, Lincoln. Cosponsors of the session are Audubon Nebraska and the Conservation Alliance.

Forsberg's photo, entitled "October in the Tallgrass," was taken in 1994 at Nine-Mile Prairie. He photographed from a ladder, wanting to give people a sense of what someone on horseback or in a covered wagon would have seen looking out over the grasses.

Onwards and upwards! The team is certainly keeping busy so far in 2001, and as always, we're so appreciative.

Along with our "on the road" programs, we've done a few this year at Heron Haven. We are pleased that more and more people are showing up at the Rookery for the programs Audubon has to offer.

So far 2001 has brought the Omaha Raptor Team a new feathered volunteer. His name is "Spike," and he is an Eastern Screech Owl, pictured here.

Spike is already pleasing audiences, as he is a fast learner and anxious to get to the volunteer duties!

He came to us from our friends at the University of Minnesota's Raptor Center. They cared for him for quite a few months after he was

struck by a car. Spike has nerve injuries to his wing, which has rendered him flight impaired. We're glad to have him as a member, and he looks forward to meeting all of you in the near future.

One Little, Two Little, Three Little Peeps – Shorebird Study

By Nelli Falzgraf

What distinguishes one little peep from another may be as nebulous as what sets apart shorebirds from others that live between land and sea.

Taxonomists use many criteria to group birds, with overall similarities and non-changeable differences separating the species.

Interbreeding is important: if two birds mate and produce fertile offspring, the first pair is likely to be the same species. Early taxonomists used morphological differences, such as leg muscles, to separate finches. The

Charadriiformes is a diverse order consisting of shorebirds, gulls, terns and auks.

These families have compact plumage and are strong fliers. The contour feathers that cover birds are distributed in patches (feather tracts), and there are naked regions between them called apteria. The apteria in this order are reduced in size and covered with down feathers. Auks have short wings, the others have long pointed ones.

Most have precocial young, are colonial

for a study of shorebirds that migrate through our area, at 7:00 p.m., Wednesday, March 21, at the Rookery next to Heron Haven. Questions? Please call 292-9687.

The next study on April 25 will be birds of the Sarpy County Spring Count.



Field Trip, Continued from page 1

ting scope may also prove to be useful.

Meet the Pasekas at the south end of the dam on the lake at 9:00 a.m. The trip will end about 1:00 p.m. Branched Oak Lake is located about 3 1/2 miles north of Malcolm, NE. Questions can be referred to Don or Janis Paseka at 727-9229.

tissue and fluid proteins of given animals are stable and are currently used in chemical analyses of cell structures and blood. Studies of DNA amino acids are used to confirm or differentiate species.

and are mostly white and gray or brown. Many take more than a year to mature to adult plumage, making them challenging to identify.

Please join Jerry Toll, our "Notes From Nature" columnist,



Thursday, May 10, is Annual Spring Banquet Date



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Environmental/ Legislative Action By lone Werthman



Is Anyone Listening?

I am a collector of quotations. Many writers express what I am thinking much better than I can. Among my souvenirs is an article written by Charles P. Alexander in *Time* magazine in which he wrote:

Throughout the past century humanity did everything in its power to dominate nature. We dammed earth's rivers, chopped down the forest, depleted the soils, caused dozens of animal and plant species to go extinct every day, and pumped billions of tons of greenhouse gases into the air, warming the planet in just a few decades. . .The goal for the new century must be "sustainable development": continued economic growth without environmental

the highway and an estimated 61 miles per gallon in the city, with a 700-mile range on one tank of fuel.

Who's listening?

As we know, carbon dioxide is considered the primary cause of global warming and is released into the atmosphere by the burning of fossil fuels – coal, oil and natural gas.

These three fuels account for more than 85% of that used in the United States.

According to figures from the Rocky Mountain Institute, a Colorado-based environmental research group, an average American household produces 23,000 pounds of carbon dioxide per year from electricity, natural gas, heating oil, propane and wood. Another 21,000 pounds is generated annually

lating clean air standards.

Who's listening?

Senator Murkowski (Republican from Alaska) must be deaf. His energy package bill calls for drilling in the Arctic Refuge even though it is estimated that would supply enough oil in America for only 200 days.

Senator Ben Nelson has been quoted as saying he thought drilling there could be done environmentally safe, whatever that means in today's language.

Action needed: Write to Senator Nelson and to President Bush. For addresses, see Page 8.

Tell them you do not want drilling for oil in the Arctic NWR, that the Refuge should become a "Wilderness" area and that America should incorporate conservation and

destruction. Is that possible? It depends on how well we understand that humanity is part of nature, not lord and master.

Who's listening?

A recent report in the February 21 *Omaha World-Herald* said that the Freightliner division of Daimler-Chrysler AG plans to sell the Unimog, a monster SUV 4-wheel-drive vehicle over 9 feet tall, 7 feet wide, 20 feet long, requiring a three-step ladder to reach the seat, getting a whole 12 miles to the gallon of diesel fuel.

Their goal is to sell the vehicle to "affluent off-road enthusiasts and moms who want to take it to the grocery store."

Compare those figures to the Honda Insight, our first gasoline-electric hybrid car, which I recently saw, that gets an estimated 68 miles per gallon on

from that same family's 1.8 automobiles. There is little doubt that we are witnessing some of the consequences of our actions. The effects of global warming are here, and according to United Nations-sponsored environmental scientists, we can expect more tropical disease, more droughts and floods, and more severe weather in general as a result of rising temperatures, rising seas and shifts in weather patterns.

Who's listening?

I haven't heard President Bush talk of conservation in his national energy policy. I haven't heard him talk of alternative fuels – wind, solar, biomass.

All I hear is exploration into our protected lands such as the Arctic NWR, tax incentives to promote oil and natural gas development, and waivers to states to run older power plants at peak capacity despite the potential for vio

alternative fuel measures.

A handwritten letter is always appropriate. To Congressmen and Presidents, a handwritten letter has always been interpreted to mean you care enough to write.

For the record: The United States has less than three percent of the world's known oil reserves.

Even if we opened up all our refuges, parks, and coastlines to drilling, we still wouldn't meet all our current oil demand or affect oil prices because the prices are set on the world market.

In addition, by opening up the Arctic Refuge for oil, for example, it would take at least ten years before any oil would get to the market.

Join us for our Legislative/Conservation meetings at our Audubon Office, 11809 Old Maple Road, to learn more – March 5, April 2, May 7.



Omaha Company, IBM and Gateway Recycle Old Computers

Think of 500 million personal computers predicted to become obsolete by the year 2007, and the scene is not a pretty one for landfill needs.

But if you own one that is already collecting dust or is threatening to grind to a halt, read on.

An Omaha business recycles old computers, monitors, printers, faxes, TVs, and stereos for a fee of \$.35 per pound or in cooperation with Keep Omaha Beautiful, at a 20 per cent discount this April - June. Volume discounts given. Ask for Dick McNeal at Carpet Pad Recovery, 331-1630. (The company also recycles nylon carpet and carpet pads.)

Consumers and small business owners can ship old computers of any manufacturer to IBM for \$29.95, including shipping. The company will reuse as many parts as possible or even revamp them to be donated to Gifts in Kind International. For instructions, contact IBM at www.ibm.com/environment or at 877-999-7115.

Help Needed for Maintaining Audubon's Prairie Preserve

By Glenn Pollock

It is time for an update on ASO's Prairie Preserve, sometimes known as Jensen Prairie.

I am pleased to report that our restoration work has progressed well since we acquired this important and enduring remnant of our area's natural grasslands.

The trees have been removed (yes, this is acceptable for a

Where We Need to Be

Now I come to the difficult part, and that is money. Many Audubon members and organizations such as Iowa West Foundation, Papio-Missouri River NRD, Nebraska Environmental Trust, Pheasants Forever, and National Fish & Wildlife Foundation have helped with gifts and grants.

Gateway, Inc. (www.gateway.com/recycle or 888-285-6201) will offer up to \$50 rebate on a new computer if you recycle your old one.

prairie). This was a laborious task but productive.

Sixty-five tons of wood chips made from the trees were recycled back to the soil in the "old field" area on the north edge of the prairie.

Two acres of this old field have been planted with seed from the virgin prairie. Fences have been built and repaired. An entrance path now connects the main road to the prairie.

A conservation easement was placed on the prairie, the first such easement in Douglas County.

This growing season we will undertake to burn the prairie in early spring, plant two more acres of the old field, and fight weeds.

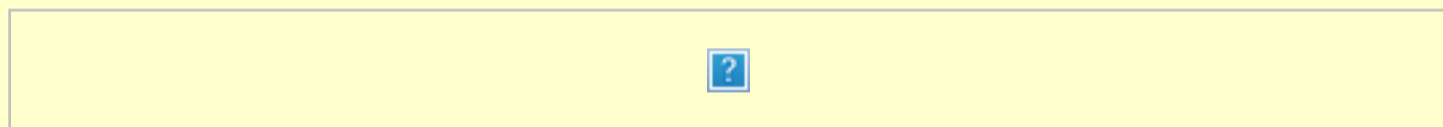
The work for this year will cost a minimum of \$1,500, but \$4,000 would allow ASO to build a parking area and signs.

We all hate to ask for money, but that is what I am doing, it being much easier in the newsletter than in person.

We would be most grateful for any contributions. If you can help, send your check to the ASO office and indicate it is for the prairie.

Also, if you know of any grants that might be applied for, please let me know.

If you wish to visit the prairie, contact the ASO Office for directions, as the site is well hidden.



Bluebird Trail

Subs Needed

Substitute monitors would be welcome for some of our regular bluebird trail monitors.

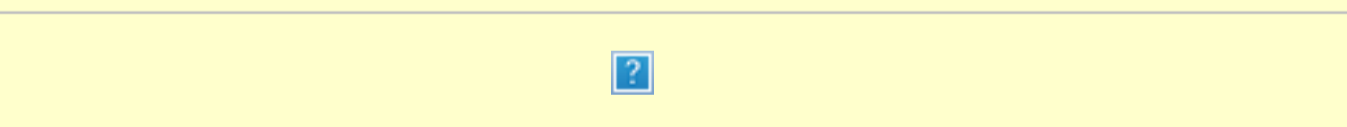
The work is enjoyable, the sites pleasant, the birds beautiful. Call Jim McLochlin, 933-4638, for details.

Where the Action Is

We will need help with the controlled burn and with collecting seeds, controlling the thistles, mowing (anyone know how to drive a tractor?) and planting the old field. If you would like to help, please contact me at 571-6230 or pollock@radiks.net. Many of the tasks can be done on your own schedule.



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



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Audubon at Work -2001

lone Werthman

Exciting News!

paul Tebbel, manager of Rowe Sanctuary, announced

March Birding

By Babs Padelford

Nebraska has two spectacular examples of migration—the Sandhill Crane stopover during March along the Platte River between Grand Island and Lexington, and concentrations of over a million Snow Geese and Greater White-fronted Geese in the Rainwater Basin.

Following is a partial list of birds that migrate through the midlands and approximate times to see them.

that by next year at this time the new Nature Center at Rowe should be open for viewing the cranes from indoors. The many-windowed center will offer views of nearly three miles of river.

This is just the first of 1,000 Centers National Audubon plans to develop in the next 20 years across America as the foundation of a "culture of conservation." These will feature programs for audiences young and old, from pre-schoolers to seniors. Donal C. O'Brien, Jr., Chair of National's Board, recently said, "I like to think of Audubon Centers as the means for families to get their children started in what will be a lifelong love of nature – an entry-level way of plugging into the conservation movement.

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Show

ASO and Sierra Club this month co-hosted "The Last Great Wilderness" featuring wildlife photographer Lenny Kohm and his program on the Arctic NWR.

Kohm has devoted his life to assisting the native Gwich'in people living adjacent to the Refuge to protect their traditional way of life and subsistence lifestyle.

An effort is underway by environmental groups across the country to sway Congress to permanently protect America's last great natural area by granting it "wilderness" protection.

The Refuge faces greater threats than ever because President Bush and the Alaskan congressional delegates advocate opening the Refuge to oil drilling.

Former Interior Secretary Babbitt recently said, "Make no mistake; unleashing oil development on the pristine Arctic NWR will be its death knell."

Loess Hills Preservation Society

Congratulations to the Loess Hills Preservation Society, now five years old, and especially to President Janice Marcantonio, who had the foresight to take action against the destruction being done to the Hills.

Through their efforts, a Loess Hills Land Trust was established, and Vincent Bluff, a native prairie in the Bluffs, is being acquired and preserved. Several ASO members on Earth Day 2000 helped in cutting down cedar and Russian olive trees that invaded the prairie.

Looking over the present list of the

Waterfowl: Good places for ducks in the Omaha area are Cunningham Lake north of Omaha, Wehrspann Lake southwest of Omaha, and Lake Manawa south of Council Bluffs.

Look for Cinnamon Teal, Eurasian Wigeon (rare), Greater Scaup, Oldsquaw, Hooded and Red-breasted Mergansers.

Forney Lake and Riverton Wildlife Management area in Fremont County, Iowa, usually have good numbers of Snow Geese and Greater White-fronted Geese.

There are very large numbers of Snows and Greater White-fronted at Funk Lagoon in Phelps County and Harvard Marsh in Clay County.

Look for Ross' Geese with flocks of Snows.



Raptors: Bald Eagle numbers usually peak in March. In the Omaha area, Lake Manawa, Carter Lake and Boyer Chute NWR are good places to see them.

Other raptors begin moving north by the end of the month. The ridges at Waubonsie State Park in southwest Iowa and Hitchcock Nature Area north of Crescent, Iowa, are good lookout

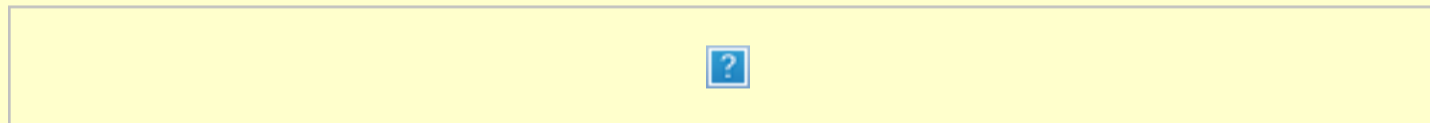
spots.

Shorebirds: American Woodcocks begin display flights in March. Look before dawn and at dusk around the parking lots on the south side of Lake Manawa.

Other early migrants are Killdeer and Common Snipe.

Gulls: Bonaparte's, Lesser Black-backed, Thayer's, California & Glaucous Gulls have all been seen in March at Cunningham Lake.

Birdline



For an update on the sightings in the state, call 292- 5325.

Report your sightings after listening to the tape.

Society's Board of Directors, I see more familiar Audubon names. Many ASO members are active conservationists. We encourage more of our Iowa members to join this Preservation Society.



Hitchcock Nature Area Hawk Watch

By Mark Orsag

In contrast to a mediocre 1999, our fall 2000 season was an excellent one, with many important "firsts." September 24 was our first 500+ bird day. October 1 was our first 1,000+ bird day. We achieved new records for both diversity and overall numbers. Numerous new day and seasonal records were established.

Total Species were Turkey Vulture 1,762; Mississippi Kite 38; Bald Eagle 341; Osprey 82; Northern Harrier 229; Sharp-shinned Hawk 947; Cooper's Hawk 198; Northern Goshawk 18; Red-shouldered Hawk 7; Swainson's Hawk 1,452; Broad-winged Hawk 230; Red-tailed Hawk 2,6784; Ferruginous Hawk 1; Rough-legged Hawk 36; Golden Eagle 12; American Kestrel 104; Merlin 29; Peregrine Falcon 43; Prairie Falcon 3; unidentified raptor 141.

Total species count was 19; total individuals 8,357; days 89.

New seasonal records were made for Turkey Vulture, Mississippi Kite, Osprey, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned

many of us imagined. It can no longer be said that the Great Plains contains no major points of concentration for migrating raptors. Plans for the construction of a new nature center at Hitchcock with a hawkwatching/observation deck on the roof of the Lodge, equipped with "Bigeye" optical technology, are a hopeful sign that Hitchcock's best days as a hawkwatch are still ahead.

Thanks are in order to Hitchcock Nature Area Rangers Chad Graeve and Darrin Jones. Darrin became one of the regulars this season, and Chad's dedication to and vision for Hitchcock Nature Area are an inspiration for all of us.

Without the Hitchcock regulars, the intrepid band of hawkwatchers most frequently suffering through scorching early September heat or a bone-chilling mid-November Alberta Clipper, there wouldn't be a hawkwatch at Hitchcock.

Darrin Jones, Howard and Sue Mattix, Clem Klaphake, Don Maas, Jim Meyer, Mark Orsag, Babs and Loren Padelford, Don and Janis Paseka, and Jerry Toll deserve thanks and acknowledgment for their dedication to a

Questions and Answers

By Jerry Toll

In the January "Bird's Eye View,"

I asked, "Which bird has the largest eye of any living creature? Why is it a bird and not, let's say, a mammal?"

Answer: Although the ostrich has the largest eye of any living bird, it may not be the largest of any living creature's.

My resource did not make that claim. It did say that any eye has an upper limit to its size because at that point it becomes less efficient at gathering light, and the image produced on the retina diminishes in quality.

The ostrich eye is at that limit but may not be the only living creature's at that limit. This also explains why an elephant or whale has such small eyes in relation to body size.

Question 2: "Which bird has the smallest eye in relation to body size of any bird?" Answer: Kiwis, which spend their lives foraging in low-light conditions under forest canopy and apparently depend less on an efficient eye when compared to other birds.

As a follow-up to my

and Cooper's Hawks, Northern Goshawk, Swainson's and Rough-legged Hawks, Merlin, and Peregrine Falcon. Bald Eagle and American Kestrel numbers declined.

The new counting point at Badger Hill (used mostly on weekends) was a major factor in our success. Many raptors moving along flightlines to the east of the main counting point at the Lodge were included.

In past years many of these "interior line" birds were missed. Limited counting in August was also undertaken for the first time.

This season's numbers serve as new benchmarks against which we will measure future flights and reveal a hawkwatch with greater potential than

worthy enterprise.

A host of other people lent their time, skills and support this year: Mark Armstrong, Roland Barth, Aaron Brees, Duane Bright, Jackie Canterbury, Janet Catterall, Barbara DiBernardi, Nelli Falzgraf.

Bob Fuchs, Shirley Gilster, John Hall, Brian Jensen, Paul Johnsgard, Karen Kahle, Tim Knott, Wolf Oesterreich, Darrel Orth, Jim Sinclair and Pat Williams.

Thanks also to Betsy Hancock and Laurel Badura, who have helped us develop a worldwide web presence.

February "Nature Notes" on screech owls, these are the results of the Owl Census I conducted at DeSoto NWR February 6. I normally complete 35 stops but was unable to do the last five because of snow drifts on West Dike Trail. Still, the results were good compared to past years.

Twenty-two screech owls, 8 Barred Owls, and 3 Great-horned Owls answered the owl playback tape. East Dike Trail continues to be the most reliable place to find owls, probably due to screech owls' habit of using Wood Duck houses for roosting and nesting. East Dike Road parallels the lake where personnel have placed many houses close to the trail.

In 1999 the numbers were 29 screech owls, 8 Barred Owls, and 3 Great-horned Owls. In 2000, the best count was 12 screech owls, 5 Barred Owls and 4 Great-horned Owls.



National Audubon Society

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The *Audubon Magazine* and your membership card will be sent to this address:

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