

May 11 Banquet

By Laurine Blankenau

Our annual Spring Banquet was held May 11 at Johnny's Cafe, beginning with a social hour. A buffet dinner was preceded by an inspiring invocation given by expert birder, longtime friend and charter member Fr. Thomas Hoffman, since deceased. (An item by Neal Ratzlaff remembering Fr. Hoffman appears on page 3). We are grateful for one last opportunity to hear from and visit with him.

Following the buffet dinner our speaker, Ruth Green, took us on a trip through the "Flora and Fauna of the Sandhills." Along with her beautiful photos, she related little-known facts and anecdotes about colorful characters and history of the region. We were also enlightened about the area's plants, birds, mammals and reptiles as we experienced the allure of our beloved Sandhills.

An Award for Outstanding Service voted by the Board of Directors was presented to Eric Scholar for his dedication to our chapter and our work. In the presentation announcement, he was praised for his enduring service over many years and for the many offices and responsibilities he accepted. Foremost among these was his position as President for a three-year term, preceded

by those of 1st Vice-President, Director, Field Trip Chair, and Naturestudy Chair. Many other responsibilities, including that of Photo Contest Chair, fell upon his shoulders. After a brief departure from the Board of Directors, he will again serve as Director July 2006-2007. We congratulate Eric as the recipient of this award for his enduring spirit and dedicated service.

**Nelli Falzgraf
Presents**

**Award to Eric
Scholar**

All ASO members are invited to a picnic on Saturday, August 19, at Gifford Farm. Starting time is 6:00 p.m.

chiggers could be making the most of the last days of summer. Questions? Call 932-8205.

The event is potluck, with table service and drinks provided. Bring a prepared dish of your choice, and any large serving pieces required.

To reach Gifford Farm, from Bellevue Boulevard take Childs Road east which turns into Gifford Road. Continue east past the railroad tracks and the Fontenelle Wetlands Learning Center. Continue on the winding road until you come to a picnic area and the Retreat House parking. **The event will be indoors, but be sure to**

bring repellent if you wish to hike in the woods. In late August ticks should not be a major problem, but

Invitation to Wachiska Meeting July 13

We are invited to attend Wachiska's general meeting Thursday, July 13, when Don Gabelhouse of Nebraska Game & Parks will speak. His topic is a recent statewide survey assessing the state's natural amenities and how these can aid our economy. For details, call (402) 486-4846 or go to wachiskaoffice@cornhusker.net or www.wachiskaaudubon.org.

Current Currents

Environmental Topic of the Year: Global Warming

By Elliott Bedows

No topic has stirred more emotion this past year than the now well-documented climate-altering issue of global warming. In this column alone, I've pointed out that increases in hurricane activity, threats due to potential drilling in the Arctic NWR, the "nice" but overly warm winters we now enjoy, ongoing migrational advancement and disappearance of Nebraska's wetlands are all a result of the gradual, continuing warming. Many others have expressed their opinions on this topic, a few of which are encapsulated below.

A key distinction between historic and current climate change is that while plants, birds, and other organisms have survived through previous large-scale climate shifts, there are orders of magnitude of difference in the rates of climate change historically vs. currently. Whereas historic changes took place over thousands of years,

since the dinosaurs disappeared, 65 million years ago."

The report also pointed out that based on the present pace of extinctions, despeciation is estimated to be occurring 1,000 times faster than at any other recorded time in history, thereby defeating the goal set at the 2002 U.N. summit in Johannesburg "to achieve, by 2010, a significant reduction in the current rate of biodiversity loss." The "Red List" compiled by the World Conservation Union lists 844 animals and plants that have faced extinction in the last 500 years.

While the report notes no current signs of any respite in the direct causes of

allowing organisms time to shift their distributions accordingly, current climate change is occurring in spans of decades or, at most, a hundred (or two hundred) years. This rate outpaces the ability of most organisms to follow. Although mobile birds can easily disperse further north or upslope, less mobile trees and plants cannot move so quickly. Also, it is well known that some birds and certainly plants have poor dispersal abilities.

It is clear that climate change will not eliminate all life unless it becomes a runaway event as seen on the planet Venus, where the accumulation of greenhouse gases overwhelmed the planet's ability to buffer the warming trend. As much life survived through the event that eliminated most of the dinosaurs, some life will likely survive any forthcoming climate-driven mass extinction event. But life will not be the same as it is today, and many species will go extinct. While we could not prevent or influence previous extinction events, we are directly implicated in this one.

A 2002 United Nations report (see <http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/5796.html> for details) has held humans responsible for the extinctions of hundreds of species of life since the disappearance of dinosaurs and for contributing to the loss of biodiversity. The U.N. has called for unprecedented efforts to reverse the trend and slow the losses by 2010. The Convention on Biological Diversity stated that habitats such as coral reefs and tropical rainforests are facing immense threats and that humans are "currently responsible for the sixth major extinction event in the history of earth, and the greatest

biodiversity losses such as habitat and climate change, the 2010 target may still be accomplished if better efforts to safeguard habitats ranging from deserts to jungles and better management of resources ranging from fresh water to timber are taken at the right time. There is also an urgent need to initiate more work in the realm of pollution control and curbing industrial emissions through burning fossil fuels, which largely contribute to global warming.

About 6 million hectares of primary forests are destroyed each year and about a third of mangrove swamps have been lost since the 1980's, according to the report. In the Caribbean, average hard coral cover has declined from 50 percent to 10 percent in the last three decades. Up to 52 per cent of the higher bird species studied are threatened with extinction, and the number of large fish in the North Atlantic has declined by two-thirds in the last 50 years.

The report revealed that annual financial aid to slow biodiversity losses had declined to \$750 million from \$1 billion in 1998. The report said, however, that the number and size of protected areas are increasing, though most types of natural environment fall short of the target to protect 10 per cent. About 12 per cent of the land surface is protected, compared to 0.6 per cent of the ocean surface.

Other examples demonstrating the fragility of our ecosystem are provided by ornithologists regarding the effects of global warming on avian species and humans. Dr. David A. Rintoul, Associate Director of Biology Division at KSU, Manhattan, Kansas, and co-list owner of BIRDCHAT, a major on-line voice of ornithology worldwide, states that "perhaps we can use some actual science, rather than speculation or prediction" concerning species decline. For a synopsis of an article in the highly

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Father Thomas A. Hoffman, S.J. - In Memory

By Neal Ratzlaff

On May 23, longtime ASO member and friend Father Thomas A. Hoffman passed away just one day after his 81st birthday. Father Hoffman, a native of Milwaukee, came to Omaha and the Jesuit Community at Creighton in 1970 where he taught theology until 1990 when illness forced his retirement from active teaching. Although declining health imposed limitations, he remained active in the Jesuit Community. He also served as Librarian for the Jesuits and the Creighton Theology Department.

In addition to teaching and theology, Father Hoffman had a passionate interest in natural history, especially birds. It cannot have been very long after his arrival in Omaha that he joined the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union and the Omaha Bird Club. By 1971 the Omaha Bird Club became the Audubon Society of Omaha, and Father Hoffman was one of its charter members. In the 70's and 80's, he was an active participant in ASO, serving a short time as chapter president when a vacancy developed in that office. He enjoyed the field trips and for many years was the captain of Christmas and Spring Bird Counts for the

Glenwood, Iowa, quadrant.

Fr. Hoffman's activities as a Jesuit included trips to the Middle East and New Zealand, which provided material for chapter meeting presentations on "Holy Land Plants" and "Birds of New Zealand." Illness limited his activities after 1990, but he maintained his relationship with ASO and was an active and regular participant at our general meetings. He also continued observations and meticulous documentation of bird life on his regular visits to the Jesuit retreat near Cedar Bluffs.

Father Hoffman will be remembered by many Audubon members for his invocations, a feature of our annual banquet, including the most recent on May 11, 2006, only a few days before his death. Surely he would wish that we remember the eloquent but simple message presented in the form of a prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving to the Creator of this beautiful planet we call earth with the reminder that it is our responsibility to care for it.

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 7 Hitchcock WMA, IA Field trip Jerry Toll Hitchcock WMA, TBA

Dec 18/19 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 22 So. NE, Indian Cave Park Field trip Silcock or TBA ca. 8:00 AM

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

Current Currents,

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regarded British Journal, *Nature*, documenting declines in Pied Flycatcher populations in Europe, go to http://www.livescience.com/environment/060503_warming_birds.html.

As the springtime temperatures warm, caterpillars (the favored food of flycatcher nestlings) peak earlier and are not available at the peak of the nestling-feeding period.

Therefore, it appears that at least this bird species is failing to adapt to the rapid climate change we are experiencing. And where there is one noted example, there are dozens or even hundreds that go undocumented.

Clearly, the unprecedented rapid warming of our planet and all of the life support systems it hosts will alter our natural history forever.

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Successful Sarpy County Spring Bird Count

By Clem Klaphake

Despite the windy weather, 16+ local birders went out determined to find as many bird species as possible in Sarpy County on May 13. Guess what? We counted more species than ever before.

Our total was 143 species with the previous high being 134. The birding parties were split into 4 areas of the county: (1) Fontenelle Forest and Bellevue (2) eastern sector of the county west of Hwy 75 and east of Hwy 50 (3) Schramm SRA and the southwestern part of the county, and (4) everything west of I-80 to the Platte River.

Some of the `better' birds (figuratively speaking) seen were Scarlet Tanagers (6), Summer Tanager, Hudsonian Godwits, Semipalmated Plover, Least

catcher, Magnolia Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler and an Osprey.

Some birds we have seen in past counts but missed this time were Yellow-headed Blackbird, Kentucky Warbler, Northern Mockingbird, Savannah Sparrow, Bobwhite, Screech Owl, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and Wilson's Phalaropes.

I want to thank everyone who helped out on the 13th with the Sarpy Count. Without the number of birders who turn out, we would not be able to cover the entire county. Spring Counts take more time and eyes than the winter Christmas Bird Counts, mainly because of the number of species present and the foliage on the trees.

Nebraska Alliance for Conservation and Environmental Education Conference at Fontenelle August 4-5

The 2006 Annual Nebraska Alliance for Conservation and Environment Education Conference will be held August 4-5, 2006, at the Buffett Forest Learning Center., Fontenelle Forest. The theme of this conference is "Building Bridges...Making Connections" because NACEE is working to build relationships with those who care about conservation and environmental education in Nebraska.

A diverse lineup of speakers and presentations is scheduled. Keynote speakers are Steve Moran of the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture, and Craig Utter, a Nebraska rancher. Other speakers include:

• Habitat Restoration on Prairie Lands, Laurel Badura

• Place-Based Learning: What is It? Ron Bonnesetter

• Wetlands: How and Why to Protect Them, Ted LaGrande

• Outdoor Classroom: Better Education Through Schoolyard Teaching, Anne James and Roger Lawson

• Mountain Lions in Nebraska, Sam Wilson

• Grant Writing: Hows and How Nots, Speaker TBA

• Food, Land & People, Donna Christiansen

• Creative Ways to Market Your Programs, Speaker TBA

• Water Quality: Understanding the Basics, Amy Leising & Lindsay Rogers

• Bluebirds Across Nebraska, Bill & Sandy Seibert

Two field trips, a Missouri River Boat trip to learn about fisheries research on the river, and Hiking in the Forest are opportunities to enjoy.

The cost for Friday and Saturday conference days for members is \$45 before July 8; \$55 after July 8. For nonmembers, \$60 before July 8; \$70 after July 8. Cost includes lunch and dinner on Friday; breakfast on Saturday. Vegetarian entree for Friday dinner is available on request.

The cost for Friday only before July 8, member \$35; after July 8 \$45; Before July 8 nonmember cost is \$50; \$60 after July 8. Cost includes lunch and dinner. Vegetarian entree for dinner is available on request.

The cost for Saturday only before July 8 is \$20 for members; after July 8 \$30; For nonmembers before July 8 \$35; after July 8 \$45. The nonmember fee includes a 1-year NACEE membership. Cost includes breakfast.

For other information, go to www.nacee.org. Register online by July 8 for a discount. You may sign up for Friday & Saturday or for a single day.

DeSoto Spring Bird Count Totals

Bob Barry, Coordinator of the DeSoto Spring Bird Count, reports on the findings of the May 6 Count. Nine persons employed their birding skills to assist.

A good variety of waterfowl were present, as were some marsh birds and shorebirds: American Bittern (1), Sora (1), Greater Yellowlegs (11), Lesser Yellowlegs (90), Baird's Sandpiper (13), Stilt Sandpiper (7), White-rumped Sandpiper (5), Long-billed Dowitcher (6), Short-billed Dowitcher (28), Solitary Sandpiper (14), Pectoral Sandpiper (19), Least Sandpiper (122), Semipalmated Sandpiper (67), and Common Snipe (1). Encountered on this count but not Sarpy's were Wilson's Phalaropes (7).

Five Sedge Wrens were unusually early. Also making the list were Swainson's Thrush (8), Hermit Thrush (1) Wood Thrush (3), Blue-headed Vireo (3), Red-eyed Vireo (4), Yellow-throated Vireo (3), and outdoing the other Vireos by far, no surprise: Warbling Vireo (51).

One lone Dickcissel sang or showed up and 12 species of sparrows: Clay-colored (17), Lark (17), Grasshopper (2), Swamp (2), Song (23), Field (46), Chipping (31), White-throated (44), White-crowned (15), Harris' (54), Lincoln's (34), and, not found on the Sarpy Count, Savannahs (6).

Not to omit the 10 species of warblers, they were Ovenbird (2), Orange-crowned (25), Tennessee (1), Yellow (30), Black & White (2), Palm (17), Blackpoll (2), Common Yellowthroat (38), Northern Waterthrush (8), and Yellow-rumped, the highest species number of the Count (220), one more than Red-winged

Photographers Show Talents

Photographers whose works were displayed at the Banquet May 11 pleased the audience with wildlife art.

The following were winners:

Best of Show, a Cedar Waxwing by Lea Blake.

Most Popular by vote of those present: a scenic by Jim Hughes.

1st place for birds category - the Cedar Waxwing by Lea Blake; **2nd place for birds** - Yellow-headed Blackbird by Duane Bright.

For **Flowers Category - 1st Place** - Purple trillium by Ruth Green; **2nd Place** Iris by Duane Bright.

In **Insects Category 1st Place** - Bugs by Jim Hughes; **2nd place** Butterfly on Flower by Ruth Green.

And finally, the **1st place winner for Scenics/people in nature/humor in nature** went to a photo of geese and sunset by J. Ritikis; **2nd prize** for person in red coat and trees in background by Jim Hughes.

Thanks to Eric Scholar for coordinating the contest, to Donna Kimbrell for judging., and to all of the photographers who submitted their works for our enjoyment.

Ruth Green

Duane Bright

Blackbird (219).

A total of 116 species and 3,363 individuals were identified.

Thanks to Jerry Toll, Jan and Don Paseka, Dick Rasmussen, Steve Lamphere, Jim & Sandy Kovanda, Rick Schmidt, and Bob Barry, who assisted with this important Count.

*When people live far from
the scenes of the Great
Spirit's making, it is easy for
them to forget His laws.*

Walking Buffalo, 1959

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Bookbreaks

By Nancy Leonard

If you are like me, you take lots of breaks: coffee breaks, lunch breaks, email breaks, and breaks to call family and friends. But my favorite breaks are my book breaks—interludes in my business-as-usual life, when I can sit down, think, learn something new or visit some new landscape, whether fictional or real. In this column I want to share some of my favorite breaks with you. I hope you will share some of your favorite books with me. Send your reviews or recommendations to me at neleonard@gmail.com

Global warming is a confusing issue. Our common sense and observation of nature tell us that it is probably occurring. But most of us lack the scientific background to understand the

preparing to let the oceans reclaim some of their land. Rural land is being bought up so it can be deliberately flooded in an effort to save populous centers. Holland's largest construction firm is building a development of "amphibious homes," homes that are moored to a metal pole and sit on a series of hollow concrete pontoons. When water levels rise, they will bob up and down, and if the levels fall, they will come back to rest on ground. The company is also experimenting with buoyant roads and greenhouses.

As she travels around the world, Kolbert notes shifting ranges of butterfly species in England, rapidly diminishing glaciers in Iceland, Alaska and Glacier National

implications. Scientists and policymakers speak in a language we only dimly understand: greenhouse gas emissions, the Keeling Curve, forcings, dangerous anthropogenic interference, and greenhouse gas intensity. Global warming has been the subject of books, speeches, and even movies. Until recently most of those have only presented one side of the issue. Elizabeth Kolbert has written a book, *Field Notes From a Catastrophe*, that changes that. Not that her book doesn't take sides, it does. But it draws its conclusion from the evidence she presents.

She begins by talking to the residents of Shishmaref, an Inupiat village lying five miles off the coast of the Seward Peninsula in Alaska. Although inhabited for hundreds of years, the village is being abandoned. Later formation and earlier breakup of the ice pack has made traditional seal hunting too dangerous and subjected the village to dangerous storm surges. Soon Shishmaref will be no more.

Moving south to Fairbanks, she and Vladimir Romanovsky, a geophysicist and permafrost expert, tour a landscape riddled with gaping holes. These "thermokarats," which can easily be six feet in length and more than five feet deep, are formed when the permafrost gives way as the ice beneath melts. Romanovsky has taken the temperature of the permafrost in Fairbanks and on the North Slope and found that in many places it is only one degree below freezing. Permafrost stores greenhouse gases, and as it melts, these gases will escape into the atmosphere, further increasing global warming.

In Holland, the forward-looking Dutch are already

Park, and the way warming has begun to drive evolutionary changes in mosquito populations. She writes clearly and without bias of interviews with researchers and environmentalists and explains the science in terms a nonscientist can understand. In an attempt to illustrate the implications for our societies, she studies Tell Leiban, a city in the Akkadian Empire, which was a thriving city 4,200 years ago in what is now Syria. Harvey Weiss, a Yale archaeologist, and his team uncovered Tell Leiban, a city of more than 30,000 people which boasted a rich culture and was a wealthy trading center. But in addition to riches, the team uncovered a layer of dirt containing no signs of human habitation. In fact, there were no signs of any living creatures, even earthworms. After many analyses of soil samples, Weiss theorized that Tell Leiban had been abandoned after years of a drought so severe that it qualified as "climate change." Since Weiss published his theory, climate change has been linked to the demise of multiple civilizations, including the Mayan, the Tiwanaku, and the Old Kingdom of Egypt, to name a few.

The final chapters are about choice and our will to implement these choices. *Field Notes* has been likened to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a book that served as a walk-up call for changes. I don't know if it will be successful in galvanizing people to switch from our business-as-usual lifestyle. But I do believe this is an important book, one that everyone who cares about life on this planet should read.

Addresses to Remember

President George W. Bush

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Comments: 202-456-1111; fax:
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Senator Chuck Hagel

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When sending your gift, please identify the person you wish to memorialize and the name and address of the person to be notified.

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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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Phone: 451-3647 - <http://audubon-omaha.org>

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