

# The Meadowlark



October 2011

Volume 40 Issue 8

*ASO is a Chapter of the National Audubon Society Serving Eastern Nebraska and Western Iowa*

## Little Known Western Hemisphere Raptors

by Clem Klaphake

If most of us here in the United States were asked to name raptors we are familiar with we would most likely name such species as Red-tailed Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Bald Eagle, American Kestrel, and maybe 10 or 12 more. If someone from a location such as Argentina, Brazil, or Venezuela were asked the same question, they might come up with twice or three times as many species. As we travel to the equatorial and more southern portion of the western hemisphere, the number of raptors increases tremendously.

If you want to learn more about raptors how to identify them, you will definitely not want to miss ASO's General Meeting on October 13<sup>th</sup>. Our speaker will be Sergio Seipke who is an expert at identifying raptors in flight or if they are perched. He also is very good at identifying and explaining raptor feathers and the whole process of molting. You will also learn about the raptors from the other half of the Western Hemisphere. And of course there

are "our" Swainson's Hawks that share both halves of the hemisphere that Sergio would be more than willing to discuss from a southern perspective.

In 2005 Sergio became a Hawk Mountain Sanctuary International Intern in Pennsylvania. At that time he also started work on the Raptors of South America project with support from Hawk Mountain.

He has traveled through a number of Central and South American countries to observe and photograph raptors, and has spent time in the field with raptor expert Bill Clark (author of *A Field Guide to Hawks of North America* (Peterson Field Guide Series), *A Field Guide to the Raptors of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa*, and co-author of *A Photographic Guide to the North American Raptors*). He also has

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**The ASO General Meeting is Thursday, October 13th at 7:00pm at the Hanscom Park Methodist Church.**

## October Field Trip

by Justin Rink

Join Justin Rink on Saturday Oct 15th for a trip to Spring Creek Prairie. We will be searching for fall sparrows, Sprague's Pipits, Smith's Longspurs (if we're lucky), and anything else that may be passing through. Meet at the Spring Creek Prairie Visitor Center parking lot at 9:00am. The Prairie is south of Denton, NE. Be sure to bring warm clothes, a hat and optics.



*Broadwing Hawk by Phil Swanson*

## BIRD SEED ORDERS DUE SOON

The deadline for bird seed orders is October 7th; seed pickup dates are October 22nd and 23rd. See page 4 for more information.

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## **T**he Passage of Time Fall Migration at Hitchcock HawkWatch

September migration begins slowly for raptors but not so for other migrating creatures. Migrating perching birds are already in full flight. Many fly at night so are not seen, but kingbirds and Red-headed Woodpeckers fly in the mornings and late afternoons. Purple Martins likewise are tracking south and soon they are joined by other swallows: barn, cliff and tree. Monarch butterflies on some days are everywhere hanging from the bur oak branches in the morning, flecking the sky and making it nearly impossible to pick out migrating raptors. If you look toward the sun on a day of north winds, you can see gossamer webs of migrating spiders drifting by, sometimes by the thousands.

Ospreys and Mississippi Kites are the early raptor migrants. They are joined mid-month by Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks. Juvenile Red-tailed Hawks start to be seen in numbers about this time. Gulls, mostly Franklin's, are migrating through by the third week of September. One year, a storm front pushed thousands of Franklin's Gulls before it, filling the sky. Soaring flocks of pelicans herald the coming of the Broadwing Hawks, whose presence is short-lived but spectacular with swirling kettles.

One year a late afternoon thunderstorm brought the broadwings down to hide from the storm in the trees surrounding the Nature Center. The next morning, they lifted off by the hundreds to the warming rays of the sun.

By the last of September, most of the broadwings have continued their journey, but they herald the beginning of the Swainson's Hawk flight. They too are long distance migrants, flying all the way to Argentina. By the time they reach Hitchcock, they can be in large flocks seen swirling in a thermal of rising air, then stringing off in a line from the top. That is when they are counted. The Swainson's flight has been poor for the last four counting seasons, but it seems to have bottomed out and is rebounding.

Three of the four falcon species are coming through during this time as well. Peregrine Falcon migration seems to coincide with the swainson's appearance and is also short-lived at Hitchcock. Many of the peregrines seem to be of the arctic subspecies that migrate to South America. Long distance migrants do not tend to dawdle. Merlins and kestrels, on the other hand, can be seen from September through November.

October is peak hawkwatching time. The swainson's flight is usually over after the first week of October but Red-tailed Hawks,

Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks are most numerous throughout the month. Turkey Vultures are present through the third week of October, but because they have the habit of wandering the sky during most of the daylight hours, it is difficult to determine when they migrate. Other raptors usually show a clear movement southward, which turkey vultures do not. Through October, it becomes increasingly evident that they are migrating through. They are the most numerous species counted at Hitchcock.

October is time for the elusive Saw-whet Owl to migrate down the corridor of the Loess Hills. A trickle in early October becomes regular by mid-October, and their numbers peak during the last week of October and the first week of November. Hitchcock is currently the only place in our area to reliably see Saw-Whet Owls because they are captured, banded, and released here. By mid October, some of the rarer raptors start to be seen. Goshawk, red-shouldered, golden eagle, and the "F"bird, Ferruginous Hawk, the rarest regularly seen raptor migrant. Usually only one is seen during a season. Waves of robins are common in mornings. Double-crested Cormorants and ducks, mostly Mallards, are seen along with Canada and White-fronted Geese. By mid to late October the first skeins of Snow Geese are seen.

*Continued on page 3*

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**Postcards** *continued ...*

November is a time of transition. With colder temperatures, nature is shutting down. Trees shed their leaves, the harvest is usually over, and creatures big and small are seeking ways of surviving the coming winter. Bright, warm, sunny days with redbills drifting by alternate more frequently now with gloomy dark overcast days.

By mid-November, winds from the north begin to dominate, and with the wind comes the Snow Geese, perhaps on that perfect November day when hundreds of thousands of them can be seen filling the sky from horizon to horizon. Their chorus can be heard most evenings in the sky overhead.

With the Snow Geese come the Bald Eagles. The jury is still out whether Bald Eagles follow the Snow Geese scavenging cripples or their migration coincides because they both are pushed south by freezing lakes and rivers.

Red-tailed Hawks still predominate the flight until mid-November, but the peak is past and 100+ days become fewer as the month progresses. Rough-legged Hawks take up winter residence about this time in the Great Plains. A few Prairie Falcons make an appearance from the northern and western summer range.

By December, in most years, migration is mostly over, but not always. Some years, particularly if November stays warm, the largest flights of Snow Geese and Bald

Eagles can occur. It is a time when there are days that hawkwatchers outnumber the raptors seen. The warm-weather (-blooded) hawkwatchers are in hibernation, but an intrepid small band of dedicated (crazy!) hawkwatchers persist until 20 December when the season closes. They are willing to endure Blue Northerners when temperatures can drop into the teens, and strong north winds drop the wind chills well below zero. Their reasoning (if a frozen brain is capable of reason) is it can be amazing what raptors those horrible days can bring to them. Rough-legged, Prairie Falcon, Ferruginous Hawk are all incentives to endure the misery. Perhaps some day, a Gyrfalcon will be seen. Then there is the story-telling factor. The adventure can be woven into a yarn and retold at the season wrap up.

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***Little Known Raptors***

*continued ...*

spent time in the field with Jean-Marc Thiollay, Russell Thorstrom, and Keith Bildstein other raptor experts.

Currently Sergio is working on a guide to the raptors of South America. I have seen some of the plates he will be using in this new guide, and I must say they are very impressive. The entire project will probably extend over a ten year period before it is completed.

Sergio also leads birding/raptor tours to Argentina and surrounding areas. He grew up in Eldorado, Argentina and currently lives with his wife Juliana and year old son Sean in Lincoln, Nebraska.

As many of you know, September and October is peak raptor migration time in Nebraska and Iowa. So this presentation couldn't occur at a more appropriate time. Hitchcock HawkWatch just north of Council Bluffs, Iowa will be at prime migration activity.

Sergio is also a good photographer and is willing to discuss issues related to raptor photography. He also is using an innovative technique for his book that involves photographs and computer painting. I won't try to say any more about that for fear I will mess up the terminology. He will also discuss why film is often better than digital for close-up work on such features as feathers.

**So mark your calendars to attend the ASO General Meeting Thursday October 13th at 7:00pm at the Hanscom Park Methodist Church, 4444 Frances Street (1 block south of 45th & Center). A brief business meeting will follow the program, and a social hour will conclude the evening.**

## BIRD SEED ORDERS

The deadline for bird seed orders is October 7th; seed pickup dates are October 22nd and 23rd.

Order forms have been mailed to all members and previous customers. If you would like extra order forms to share with friends and neighbors, please call Carole and Dick Rasmussen at 731-3939 or Kathleen Crawford-Rose at 292-8912. You can also find order blanks on our Audubon web site, Audubon-omaha.com.

Des Moines Feed, our supplier, has given us bad news this year. The weather in the southern U.S. has been too hot for crops and the weather in the northern U.S. was too cool and wet during the planting season. Grain and seed prices are at an all time high and expected to stay that way. If there is an early freeze, prices may go even higher. This has been especially hard on that bird favorite, Black Oil Sunflower Seed. If you have had good luck feeding safflower seed to your birds, you might want to use more of it this year as it's price is considerable lower.

**More hands are needed for loading the bags of seed for customers on Oct. 22nd & 23rd. Make a three hour commitment to our major Audubon fundraising project. Call Jerry Toll, 453-9239, coordinator of volunteers, to volunteer.**

## Watching Magnificent Martins and Spectacular Swifts

James E. Ducey

By June 5, 2011, Purple Martins had arrived at their midtown roost, with an early number of 100 present the following day. Numbers in the hundreds were reached by June 23rd, with more than 1,000 by mid-July.

Numbers increased day-by-day and there were about 6500 on July 21st. By this time, Nebraska Medical Center personnel had placed banners on the crosswalk windows to create a visual barrier and reduce the likelihood of a martin hitting the glass.

The watching season at the martin mecca midtown was notably subdued this season. There were consistently fewer watchers of the magnificent flight behavior as the birds came in each night to their normal roosting site. An early peak was August 13th, when an estimated 45,000 were present. There were fewer birds for a few days, but then a multitude occurred once again. As numbers increased, so did the delight of observers. The peak count of the season, ably made with the assistance of Justin Rink - the Purple Martin Ambassador - was 65,000 in early September.

A brief article in the local newspaper brought out more enthusiasts, with at least 262 watchers on the 4th. Numbers quickly though, with only 6,000

on the 7th. The last few birds were seen on the 12th, ending another season. This was within a day of the last martins noted in 2009.

The Nebraska Medical Center deserves recognition for timely placement of banners, and then adding others - when requested - within the north walkway as birds were watched bouncing off that glass.

A significant difference this year was a shift of the last martins to using a couple of trees in a green space along Capitol Avenue, about a block west of 42nd street.



*United Methodist Church*

## Swift Chimneys

The next grand spectacle to enjoy during the autumn season is the gathering of Chimney Swifts at prominent chimneys of various buildings in eastern Omaha. Fine numbers will continue to gather through mid-October. On the evening of September 10th, a chimney near 44th and IZard Street was used by an estimated 925 Chimney Swifts. This same evening, nearly 400

*continued on page 5*

### ***Watching Martins and Swifts continued...***

Common Nighthawks were observed flying southward and generally about the same vicinity; one of the highest number of this species to have ever been noted in the region.

Early on the morning of the 11th, perfect timing allowed a count of 1,025 bug-eaters leaving the big chimney at Duchesne Academy, along North 38th Street, in the Cathedral neighborhood.

That evening a most spectacular sight was the twittering gathering at the many-sided chimney of the church at 36th and Farnam Street. The birds kept coming, but eventually - within minutes - all disappeared into the brick structure. There were an estimated 1,400, based on counts of groups entering the roost. The same event was enjoyed two nights later.

Swift action can be enjoyed in many places about Omaha. Numbers vary, but can be readily seen in downtown Omaha, especially the south side of the Old Market, South Omaha, the Blackstone area, Benson, in Dundee near 50th and Dodge, and scattered elsewhere. Particular chimneys are often used again and again.

Swift watching is as easy as watching martins, and with a little planning, can be enjoyed from the comfort of a car. It can be a uniquely different birding outing.

### **Nelli Falzgraf Recognized for Volunteer Work**

One of our own, Nelli Falzgraf, was recognized recently for 17 years of volunteering with the Fontenelle Nature Association.

*The Leaflet*, FNA's publication for July-September 2011, lists her activities as including "virtually every program offered."

*Nelli Falzgraff*

Over the years she has assisted with Traveling SUN (Seniors Understanding Nature), Wild Wednesdays programs, monitoring a bluebird box route, preparing apple pies, conducting critter encounters, working educational stations during special events, and taking on offices for the FNA Guild and Bird Club.

For nearly two decades, Nelli has served Audubon on the Board of Directors variously as President, Treasurer, 2nd Vice-President, and Finance Chair. She organized

Naturestudy, assists on committees and staffs annual events.

She has been a valuable member of Audubon as well as of the Fontenelle Nature Association. She is to be commended for her years of service to both organizations. Good work, Nelli

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### **The Lure of the Prairie: Festival August 28**

In spite of initial raindrops, a sky with weather fronts threatening to approach from opposite directions, and lightning (distant), a group of hikers of about 30 showed up on Sunday, August 28, for the Festival at Audubon Prairie. The weather had cleared and the rest of the day brought temperate weather.

Visitors were led on a guided tour by Glenn Pollock, who manages the prairie and shares his knowledge of the grasses' amazing properties. Clem Klaphake and Jerry Toll led a bird, butterfly and "more" hike, finding and identifying these for guests' enjoyment. Both adults and children find the hikes to their liking.

Nelli Falzgraf, Jackie Scholar, Laurine Blankenau and Kathy Schwery served as "caterers" of cold drinks and cookies.

## **Audubon's Speaker's Bureau**

ASO members may be unaware of the chapter's public program service. We call it our Speaker's Bureau, headed by Eunice Levisay. It provides nature-oriented programs in the community for a modest honorarium and has been warmly received by local libraries and community groups.

Birds are a specialty, of course, but the topics are not limited. If you want to be involved in this outreach as a volunteer speaker, or if you are a member of a local group in need of such a program, please contact Eunice at 402-393-0545.

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## **Hollywood Movie about competitive birders**

A Hollywood movie inspired by Mark Obamskik's best-selling book, The Big Year, will be released October 14th. The story follows three birders competing to find the most species. The movie stars Steve Martin, Jack Black and Owen Wilson and is also entitled The Big Year.

The September/October 2011 *Audubon* magazine had an article interviewing the 3 actors, and

David Yarnold (CEO and President of National Audubon Society) sent an e-mail about the movie and the opportunities it can provide to reach out to our community.

"Audubon served as a resource for the filmmakers, contributing both expertise and Audubon branded materials for set-dressing. You'll be pleased to see Audubon make a few appearances in the movie itself. After our exclusive preview, our take is that it's a positive, engaging look at birding and birders. It even presents a fairly accurate version of Audubon's founding and its history."

"Clearly, it's not every day that a major film with high profile talent injects birds and birding into the pop culture mainstream. This is a rare opportunity to engage both current members and new audiences."

National Audubon Society plans to take advantage of this opportunity "...the idea is to take the wonder of birds as they exist in the natural world and recreate it online. And not just on one or two websites, but across the 'Net. We have an extraordinary opportunity to inform and transform the public's perception of birds and birding."

## **Memorials Received**

From Ruth Nicklin in honor of Edith Wilson and Harry Duncan.

From the following in honor of Charles Kinney, Jr.

Shirley Kinney

William or Dorothy Dorste

Jacqueline Langston and/or Donna Jensen

Cheri Tefft

Rose and Chuck Kinney

Joseph Hromadka, Vice President-Administration Services, Woodmen of the World

Audubon thanks the gracious donors.

### **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

## Addresses to Remember

### President Barack Obama

The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington D.C. 20500-0001

Comments: 202-456-1111

### Senator Ben Nelson

U.S. Senate, Washington DC 20510; 202-224-6551  
fax 202-228-0012; Lincoln phone: 402-437-5246;

Omaha phone: 402-391-3411;

Omaha address: 7602 Pacific St, #205, 68114

### Senator Michael Johanns

U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 202-224-4224

Lincoln: 402 476-1400

100 Centennial Mall N Rm 294, Lincoln NE 68508-3803

### Representative Lee Terry

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515

Phone: 202-225-4155; Fax: 202-226-5452

Omaha Address: 11717 Burt St, Omaha 68154

Omaha phone: 402-397-9944

### Representative Jeff Fortenberry

House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515

Phone: -202-225-4806

Lincoln phone: 402-438-1598

Lincoln Address:

### Governor Dave Heineman

Capitol Bldg, Box 94848 Lincoln, NE 68509

Phone: 402-471-2244; Fax: 402-471-6031

### Mayor Jim Suttle

Omaha/Douglas Civic Center

1819 Farnam St, Omaha NE 68183

Phone: 402-444-5000 Hot Line: 402-444-5555

Lincoln Capitol Switchboard: 402-471-2311

Washington Capitol Switchboard

Senate: 202-224-3121; House: 202-225-3121

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

We offer two choices of membership: one includes membership in National Audubon as well as in our local chapter, receiving the *Audubon* Magazine and our newsletter, *The Meadowlark*. A portion of the dues is returned to our local chapter.

The other choice is local membership only: this includes receiving *The Meadowlark* and participation in all of our local activities. Dues all go to our chapter.

### **Membership in the National Audubon Society**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**Introductory Membership (1st & 2nd Year) \$20**  
**Make check payable to National Audubon Society**

Mail to Audubon Society of Omaha  
19612 Ridgeway Road

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**Make check for \$20 payable to Audubon Society of Omaha**

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19612 Ridgeway Road  
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Please send address changes to Kathy Schwery at [djschw@windstream.com](mailto:djschw@windstream.com).

### **Bequests**

A bequest to Audubon is a gift to those who will succeed us; a gift to secure our natural heritage.

Audubon Society of Omaha Mailing Address: P.O. Box 3542, Omaha 68103 - 0542

Phone: 402-451-3647 - <http://audubon-omaha.org>

Office: 1941 So. 42nd Street, Omaha, NE 68105

Elected Officers:

President	Jerry Toll	453-9239
1st Vice President	Jackie Scholar	551-5045
2nd Vice President	Linda Dennis	733-6548
Past President	Clem Klaphake	292-2276
Treasurer	Dennis Kingery	556-9082
Recording Sec'y	Laurine Blankenau	451-3647
Corres. Sec'y	Vacant	

Elected Directors:

Jamie Vann	733-1891
Justin Rink	904-415-3282
Elliott Bedows	292-5017
Kathleen Rose	292-8912
Helen Bartee	391-3386
Jason McMeen	445-8279

Standing Committee Chairpersons:

Conservation	Bob Fuchs	553-8242
Education	Clem Klaphake	292-2276
Field Trip	Justin Rink	904-415-8279
Finance	Nelli Falzgraf	292-9687
Fund Raising	Vacant	
Membership	Kathy Schwery	296-4788
Program	Clem Klaphake	292-2276
Natural Areas Mgt	Eric Scholar	551-5045
Publication	Laurine Blankenau	451-3647
Publicity	Jackie Scholar	551-5045

Other Activities:

Bird Seed Sale Chairs	Kathleen Rose	292-8912
	Carol Rasmussen	731-3939
Speakers Bureau	Eunice Levisay	393-0545
Historian	Eric Scholar	551-5045
NAS Board Member	Peter Cannon	608-251-1276

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audubon-omaha.org](http://audubon-omaha.org)

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