

The Meadowlark

October 2010

Volume 39 Issue 8

*ASO is a Chapter
of the National Audubon
Society*

*Serving Eastern Nebraska
and Western Iowa*

Birding with a Purpose

Iowa's 2nd Breeding Bird Atlas

On Thursday, October 14, Billy Reiter-Marolf, Iowa, Breeding Bird Atlas Volunteer Coordinator, will present an update on Iowa's 2nd Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA).

The Iowa BBA is a five-year project (2008 - 2012), similar to Nebraska's BBA, where volunteers search for evidence of birds nesting throughout the state to enhance our understanding of these species, their breeding range and their habitat selection.

As the third breeding season of the BBA winds down, birders have a lot to show for their efforts. Statewide, volunteers have logged almost 5,000 hours of observation time, visited all of Iowa's 791 blocks, and recorded 191 species to date.

Members of the audience will be informed on these topics:

• Emerging trends of select species such as Henslow's Sparrow, Bald Eagle, Trumpeter Swan, Eurasian Collared-Dove and Eurasian Tree Sparrow,

among others.

• A wide variety of birding opportunities across the Missouri River in Iowa.

• How to participate, how to determine breeding bird status, and how to turn in observations.

Everyone is invited to participate, from beginning birders to the avian elite!

Billy Reiter-Marolf is an AmeriCorps member serving with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. He grew up in eastern Iowa and studied wildlife biology and management at the University of Wyoming.

The meeting begins at 7:00 p.m. 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.

Visitors are invited to attend this and all of Audubon's general meetings.

Field Trip October 16 at Spring Creek Prairie

Join Justin Rink for a trip "out west" to Spring Creek Prairie to search for fall grassland birds.

Sightings may include many species of sparrows including LeConte's. Sprague's Pipits and Smith's Longspur are also possible. Bring optics, a hat and warm clothing.

We will meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot of

By Justin Rink

Merle's Food and Drink in the town of Emerald on Route 6 (West O Street) before heading down to Spring Creek Prairie.

You may wish to pack a lunch, or we can stop at a place in Emerald or Lincoln.

For more information, call 451-3647 - Laurine.

Bird Seed Sale Deadline for Orders October 9

Volunteers Needed - Page 3

Postcard from the President

By Jer Toll

Future Energy Needs - Oil Demands an Increasingly Heavy Price.

After five months of ejecting oil into the Gulf of Mexico, the well is finally sealed. It has been estimated that over 205 million gallons of oil are affecting 110 miles of fragile coastline, but the majority remains in the deep water of Gulf in droplet form. Much remains to be done.

The cleanup of the coastline with its fragile wetlands will continue, rescue efforts of birds, turtles and mammals will still be needed, and the oil remaining in the deep water has unknown consequences. National Audubon and the Gulf Coast Chapters have been central in mobilizing volunteers for the cleanup and rescue efforts.

With the capping, the largest single-source environmental disaster will fade from public view. And with it, much of the political will to affect change toward sustainable energy consumption will also fade. Fossil fuel is a diminished resource. We have passed the point where it is easily extracted and abundant.

Energy companies are using increasingly complex technology to extract oil from marginal resources that are or have the potential to be environmentally disastrous. Extracting oil from the tar sands in Alberta Canada is a case in point.

The tar sand is strip-mined, then separated from the sand using high pressure steam. According to the March 2010 *Audubon Magazine* article, it is the "world's dirtiest oil. Extracting the tar and purifying it into synthetic crude oil uses much more natural gas than conventional North American oil production and creates about three times the greenhouse gas emissions."

The process requires enormous amounts of water which is then contaminated, which, in turn, is creating health problems for the local Athabaskan people. It is projected to strip-mine hundreds of square miles of boreal forest, the world's largest intact forest. Currently roughly 9% of our foreign oil imports come from the tar sands. It is projected that by 2035 roughly 37% of our oil imports will be from the tar sands. The expansion will have a direct affect on Nebraskans. TransCanada is planning to run a 36-inch high pressure crude oil pipeline through the Sandhills of Nebraska

from its source in the tar sands of Alberta, Canada to refineries on the Gulf coast.

Running the pipeline through the Sandhills, with the underlying Ogallala aquifer, would put Nebraska's largest source of drinking water at risk for contamination. A pipeline leak, like the one that occurred recently at Kalamazoo, Michigan, which leaked a million gallons of oil, would have a devastating effect on the aquifer and the economy of Nebraska.

A number of environmental groups are opposed to the building of the pipeline, including the Audubon Society of Omaha. To find out a great deal more about the proposed pipeline, go to www.Boldnebraska.org/pipeline-background-resources. It includes a petition in opposition that you can sign which will be presented to the U.S. State Department who will make the final approval.

Information was obtained from *Audubon Magazine*, *Omaha World-Herald* and Boldnebraska website in the making of this article.

To Guard Our Health

By Laurine Blankenau

The outbreak of salmonella from eggs that visited our population in the past months is a warning and a reminder that more needs to be done to make our foods safe.

It is possible and preferable to buy organic from the small producer, but many shoppers at the store will choose the inexpensive, mass-produced items. These can carry dangers, and we all need to be protected.

Strong legislation is lacking and desperately needed to solve the problem. In July 2009 the Administration created a rule that would safeguard consumers, with a year for producers to comply. Since then the House passed a strong bill, which the Senate weakened and stalled. More frequent inspections and greater penalties for violations are needed for our protection.

Please phone your senators (see numbers on the back of this issue) and urge them to pass a new and strong version of the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act.

Water, the Vital Element -

In Visual Imagery

"Watered Down" is a striking art installation at the Lied Art Gallery on the Creighton University campus. It is described as using the "power of visual imagery to address the social, economic, and environmental issues surrounding the global water crisis." The exhibition "comments on the challenges that face the Midwest and the United States as well as the dire situations that exist around the world, especially in developing countries where water is almost impossible to access."

The visually beautiful exhibit was created by artist Matthew Dehaemers of Kansas City, Missouri, who has created public art projects in Kansas City, Los Angeles and other sites around the country.

The exhibit runs until October 15. The Lied Gallery is free and open to the public from 1 - 4 PM daily, including weekends, during exhibitions. Visitor parking is available at 24th & Cass at the Lied Gallery. For information, contact 280-2261 or liedartgallery@creighton.edu

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Prairie Festival Sunday,

August 29, Draws Enthusiasts

Approximately 50 persons endured the heat on Sunday, August 29, to experience the allure of Audubon's Prairie Preserve. The site is a natural plot of prairie saved from cultivation by the owners, purchased by our Chapter and managed by ASO member Glenn Pollock.

The occasion was our 3rd Annual Prairie Festival organized by Eric Scholar, giving visitors a view of the Nebraska landscape before the plows cleared the plains.

The scheduled events began with a prairie and wildflower hike led by Glenn Pollock and Eric Scholar, followed by a birding hike led by Clem Klaphake. Hikers were introduced to facts about the amazing prairie plants as well as the birds, butterflies and other insects found on this late summer day. The sun and 90-something heat was tolerable thanks to strong breezes, though the wind strength reduced the number of bird sightings. Hikers proved hardy enough to endure the rigors of the weather, fortified and refreshed with cold drinks and cookies.

Thanks to guides Eric, Glenn and Clem and helpers Jackie Scholar, Nelli Falzgraf and Laurine Blankenau.

The Midtown Martin Mecca

Hundreds of people so far have experienced the swirling masses of large swallows above their heads. Many have shrieked at the thrill of experiencing a "Martin Vortex," "Martin Storm," or "River of Martins" 100 feet in the air. Some lucky participants have even been grossed out by the fact that they had been "Martinized." How did this birding spectacle come to be?

We have to go back to 2007 to really appreciate the beginnings of the Martin Roost at 44th and Farnam. While working at Indian Creek Nursery on Saddle Creek Road in mid-summer, I would notice thousands of Martins streaming overhead. This would occur frequently especially in advance of incoming storms. I reported my Martin sightings to the Nebraska birding listserv whenever I would observe large numbers.

The next year, it began again and a gentleman by the name of Jim Ducey witnessed the birds en masse over a different section of midtown. He followed the birds on his bike to the University of Nebraska Med Center at 44th and Farnam. Of course I was the first one he told about it.

We made it an annual visit, sometimes traveling to the roost three or four times a week. I believe the security and hospital personnel were a bit confused and perplexed as to what we were doing. We were approached by security several times while watching the Martins. After they knew what was actually going on, they would leave us alone with a somewhat dumbfounded look on their faces. The birds would swirl, swoop, and lower until coming to rest and chatter in three uniform Green Ash trees on the edge of 44th Street.

Numbers of birds would rise during late summer. That year, our high estimations were around 25,000. The roost also grabbed the attention of the local newspaper, which did a short story on the roost, as well as an Omaha-based news station. The roost also drew in Purple Martin advocates such as Dennis Devine - the Purple Martin Man Of Council Bluffs.

However, with the lively roost unfortunately came death. Jim and I

By Justin Rink

better known and respected by the employees at the Med Center. This was the first year that the banners went up, and it reduced Martin mortality... slightly.

Once again the newspaper wrote a short article about the roost, and the local news station did a slightly longer and more in-depth story about the roost. Though their facts were somewhat misinterpreted over the airwaves, it was still a fairly accurate broadcast.

Jim and I would watch the Martins and answer visitors' questions about this mysterious natural occurrence. And it wasn't just Martins. Several grackles and starlings utilized the roost as well. Raptors needing a quick snack also swept through, including a Peregrine Falcon and Cooper's Hawk. The numbers continued to rise, and the birds peaked out at an estimated 45,000 in early September. Midway through that month, the birds had vacated the area. Cold front after cold front swept through, bringing the birds' numbers down to nothing.

In 2010 the Martins started arriving in small numbers in early July, and may have possibly been using the roost as early as late June. The newspaper wrote up a few stories about the roost during the late summer months. This attracted a large number of people from the Omaha area. Sometimes as many as 175 people would gather to watch this dramatic avian spectacle, and for good reason. In 2010 the numbers peaked out at an estimated 65-70,000 birds! Martins covered the sky, and later bowed the roost trees as they swept in hundreds at a time. I was designated the "Unofficial Purple Martin Roost Ambassador" as I did what I could to answer visitors' inquiries about the Martins and the Roost. I would also walk around to the masses of people and ask if they had any questions or comments about the event that was unfolding. Hopefully my enthusiasm in answering questions was helping the conservation and the future of this roost.

In talking to hospital personnel, I estimate that the roost has been active for the past 6-10 years, though they did not believe it was anything significant.

noticed that Martins were hitting the glass walkway with as many as eight birds hitting it a night during peak. In the following years, the hospital would try their best to reduce this by placing banners over the windows. The Martins hung around until cold fronts would push numbers down. Jim and I observed the last five birds in early October.

The next year, 2009 the Martin Roost was a bit

For another year, other species than the ubiquitous large swallows would materialize. Waves of grackles and starlings arrived, usually in advance of the Martins. Other species this year included a Peregrine Falcon, Red-tailed Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, and most recently a juvenile Merlin searching for a snack on the go. One of the strangest regular visitors to the

Cont. on page 5

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National Audubon - Letter From the President

By David Yarnold

I am now a few days into my new role as President of the National Audubon Society. It is a blend of discovery and delight. In every encounter, I learn something new about Audubon's conservation initiatives, achievements and opportunities. And I have been reminded time and again of the importance of the Chapter network in delivering real conservation success.

Even before I started, I had the opportunity to meet with several current or past Chapter leaders in my home county. To a person, they told me about their passion for Audubon and how much their engagement means in their communities, with their friends and with their families. That kind of engagement is precious in our fast-paced world and it represents great opportunity.

Staff members have gone out of their way to make me feel welcome and connected to our far-flung network. They are generous with their insights and eager to hear about my experiences, impressions and plans for the future. We are already collaborating on many fronts. The good work of the Policy and Communications teams led to publication of my first opinion piece as Audubon's CEO on Day Two. My op-ed urging the Senate to take decisive action to ensure the long-term restoration of the Gulf Coast ran in newspapers from the *Miami Herald* to the *Juneau Empire*, as well as on a number of national web outlets.

I am also working closely with staff on the first trips I'll make to Audubon field locations through mid-October. The primary purpose of these visits is to let me

experience the unique ways in which birds connect people with nature and inspire the concern, commitment and action that

I will make numerous follow-up trips to meet the many special people whose commitment and extraordinary contributions

I look forward to future opportunities to meet face-to-face and to the many and varied victories we will achieve together for

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King Rail at LaPlatte Bottoms

**Martin
Mecca,**

Cont. from page 4

roost was a Peach-faced Lovebird that would follow a flock of Starlings. A Lesser Yellowlegs was an interesting flyover at the roost during a cool cloudy day in September.

Up to this point, the numbers of Martins are holding steady in the low hundreds. It is possible they may stick around until October, similar to their behavior in 08'.

Hopefully 2011 will bring more Martins, more fun, and more people hungry for bird knowledge. In my opinion, I think everyone should experience a Martin spectacle at least once in their life. As the word gets out, I think we can expect more folks to view this unique occurrence in Omaha's Midtown.

The Midtown Martin Mecca is located at 44th and Farnam at the Nebraska Medical Center in Midtown Omaha, Nebraska.

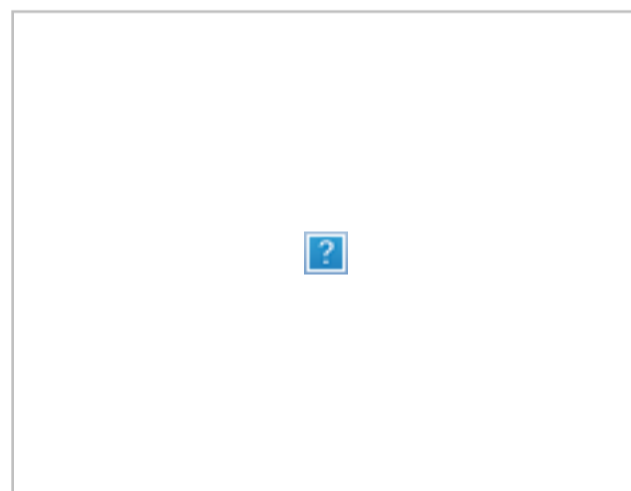
King Rail

On the evening of July 24, Kathy and Duane Schwery of Plattsmouth discov

World O! Water Festival 2010

By Nelli Falzgraf

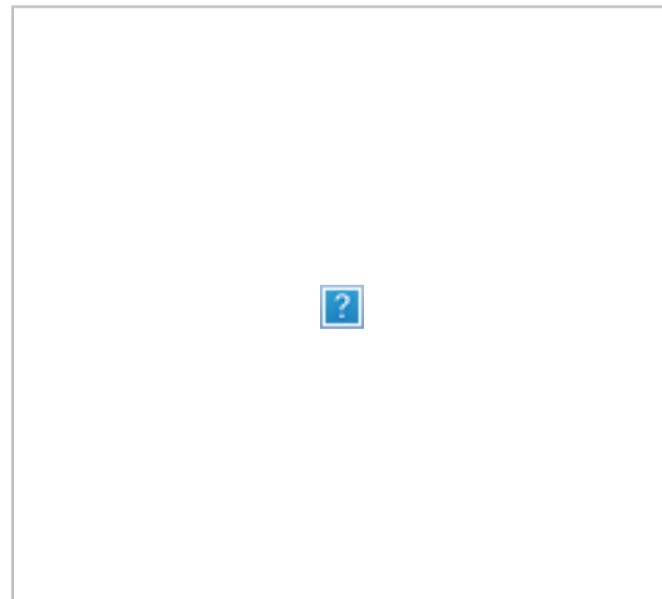
This second year that we joined the World O! Water Festival was as much fun as last year's event. Hundreds of families and scout troops came to the Chalco Hills Recreation Area for the September 19 event, which was sponsored by the Papio Missouri NRD, Papillion Creek Watershed Partnership, and Keep Omaha Beautiful.



Brian Jensen with audience

Brian Jensen, a past ASO Education Chairman, came as Doctor H2O and taught children about the Missouri River, wildlife near waterways, and water conservation. The NRD generously lent us a mounted bird specimen, which served as a starting point for questions about raptors and river habitats.

The ASO booth was at the Windmill Children's Activities area, along with Gifford Farm, Henry Doorly Zoo, Lauritzen Gardens, MORE Nature, National Park Service, NRD, Raptor Recovery, and Sierra Club. There were live animals, bird feeders, face painting, mud painting, water rockets, dripping water, running water, and other engaging ways for youths to learn about a precious resource, water.



Many booths, such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Casting Instruction (to catch fish), were located at the Chalco Hills Resource Center, and live entertainment was presented behind the Center. Free canoe rides were offered at the boat launch area, and free lunches from Hy-Vee were brought to vendor booths.

We appreciate Brian Jensen's leadership and staffing by Gail Allbery-Jensen and Nelli Falzgraf.

King Rail, *Cont. from page 5*

known as the LaPlatte bottoms wetlands in Cass County. In rainy years, this area has numerous flooded farm fields that have standing water throughout the spring and summer.

As they arrived, Kathy saw the rail standing near huge clumps of grasses. They watched for nearly 20 minutes from only a short distance away. The site, near their home, is one they had been visiting regularly to enjoy the water birds, but had not found anything to match the King Rail for excitement.

On July 31, a few days after their sighting, Stephen Dinsmore reported seeing a King Rail along with three Least Bitterns at Forney Lake. Subsequent sightings were reported regularly at Squaw Creek NWR.

Gail Alberry & Brian Jensen with audience

A TRUE PIONEER STORY

Karlene Kingery, a member of the Audubon Society of Omaha, has recently published a pioneer story about a family who came from Indiana to southeast Iowa in 1836.

The story, written by Mary Ann Maulsby Mills, who died in 1909, is edited by Karlene, and includes footnotes and illustrations. In the story Mary Ann recalls her childhood experiences, her encounters with wildlife, and the hardships the family faced from 1836 to 1843. It is available at several bookstores in Omaha and Council Bluffs.

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**2nd Vice President Linda Dennis..... 733-6548
Past President Clem Klaphake..... 292-2276**

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Education Clem Klaphake..... 292-2276**

Field Trip Justin Rink

Finance Nelli Falzgraf..... 292-9687

Fund Raising Vacant

Membership Kathy Schwery..... 296-4788

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