



Field Trip

by John Carlini, Field Trip Chair

Search for Seven Swans A-swimming

Trumpeter Swans are making a comeback! North America's largest waterfowl formerly occurred from coast to coast but because of drainage to wetlands, along with hunting and collection of their feathers, this iconic species was extirpated from much of its range. The last wild nesting pair in Iowa was seen in 1893, but by 1993, exactly 100 years later, humans had evolved, and efforts were being made to mitigate our misdeeds with projects such as a re-introduction program by Iowa's Department of Natural Resources.



Trumpeter Swans

Thanks to the success of human intervention in various states, Trumpeter Swans are finally becoming less of a rarity and are starting to grace more of our landscapes each winter. The annual swan count tally in Iowa increased from 193 in 2010 to 1,823 in 2016, and Dr. Paul Johnsgard recently reported a continuing

increase of wintering swans at the Loess Bluffs National Wildlife Refuge (formerly Squaw Creek NWR) in northwest Missouri, where our swan search will take place. This outing will consist of stops along the refuge road and will require little to no walking. Other winter residents at the refuge are Bald Eagles and possibly Tundra Swans.

We'll meet at **9:30 a.m. on Saturday, January 18**, in the Wachiska office parking lot located at 4547 Calvert Street. Participants can caravan or carpool for the 110-mile drive to our destination. We plan to arrive at the main parking lot for the refuge headquarters building a little before 11:30 a.m. for anyone preferring to meet up with the group there on Highway 159 west of 1-29 exit 79. Unless the roads are icy or impassable, winter weather will not deter us. Bring binoculars and scope if you have them. There is no fee required, and the public is welcome. If you have questions, call John at 402-475-7275.

Bee Nest-building Contest

Calling all makers, crafters, artists, teachers, shop class instructors, environmentalists, bee lovers, and community doers! Enter the Wild Bee Nest Design-Build Contest. Winning entries will be installed on the 13th Street Pollinator Flyway in downtown Lincoln. Submissions are due April 1. Get all the details at <http://www.nebraskawildlife.org/13th-street-pollinator-flyway/>.

Fond Memories of a Day without Coats

by Shari Schwartz, Field Trip Committee



Harris's Sparrow

A number of fantastic elements coalesced for the November field trip at Pioneers Park which resulted in a thoroughly enjoyable morning. Our knowledgeable leader Esa Jarvi led a sunny stroll through the prairie as he shared insightful tidbits on bird identification, the weather was outstanding, the company was superb, and the birds were cooperative. Sparrows

lurked in the brushy edges of the prairie and Harris's, Tree, Song, and Fox were either seen or heard. A Cooper's Hawk was spied perched motionlessly on a distant tree, and handsome Cedar Waxwings gave us a show as they munched appropriately on cedar berries.

An unexpected highlight we encountered was a bird-banding station for research that's being done by an ornithology professor and his students on the feeding behavior of wintering residents such as woodpeckers, who increase their feeder visitation during inclement weather. The research has revealed that chickadees and nuthatches do not show that same increase in feeder usage when the weather's bad, possibly due to personal food caches. Our good fortune of having a beautiful 73rd day was underscored when just two days later it snowed and dropped into the single digits!

P&E Committee Made Strides in 2019

by Mary King, Population/Environment Committee Chair

The population and environment committee (P&E) continued to collaborate with the Lincoln's libraries in 2019, organizing the seventh annual Bird EnCOUNTER in February at Eiseley Library. Many families braved snowy conditions to view elegant live raptors presented by Raptor Recovery volunteers. There was also bird feeder making, bird song singing, bird viewing, and drawing of birds.

P&E sponsored family-friendly activities with a migratory bird theme at April's Earth Day celebration. There were birds on sticks to assemble and then 'fly' on a bird-focused treasure hunt.

Volunteers continue to fill feeders at two of the four feeder stations at libraries that hosted the Bird EnCOUNTER the first two years. Anderson and Eiseley feeders have been filled regularly, while there was minimal seed at Gere due to renovations that took out bird-friendly plantings. However, with some Wachiska encouragement, a small oak has recently been planted and feeding there will resume. The Walt Library feeder is damaged and up for discussion.

"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."

— Albert Einstein

Audubon Nebraska at the Nation's Capital

In October, Kristal Stoner, executive director for Audubon Nebraska, met with representatives in Washington, D.C. These meetings resulted in positive actions for birds and Nebraska.

Kristal and Audubon CEO David Yarnold met with Senator Ben Sasse's staff to discuss the extension of the Platte River Recovery and Implementation Program (PRRIP). Shortly after their meeting, Senator Sasse signed on as the fifth federal representative to co-sponsor the extension in the Senate. This is critical because the PRRIP addresses issues for threatened and endangered bird species like the Interior Least Tern, Piping Plover, and Whooping Crane. The PRRIP is important to ensure habitat is maintained for these highly imperiled birds, while creating a framework that allows irrigation and recreation projects to continue. Sasse now joins Senator Fischer and Congressmen Bacon, Fortenberry, and Smith as Nebraska supporters of the PRRIP extension.

The wide-sweeping support for Platte River conservation is due to the collaboration with our PRRIP partners including Audubon Rockies, Crane Trust, Headwaters Corporation, and The Nature Conservancy.

While in D.C., Stoner also met with Congressman Don Bacon who, in June, signed on as a co-sponsor for the BEST Act (H.R. 2986), a bill to invest in research, development, and deployment of cost-effective energy storage technology—innovation that will be key to making our grid more efficient, resilient, and reliant on clean energy. At the meeting, Congressman Bacon agreed to support renewable energy tax extenders. These extenders would temporarily prolong the tax credits that have helped grow the utility-scale renewable energy industry over the last decade. This was a significant win for Audubon Nebraska's climate strategy.

Kristal met with Congressman Fortenberry's staff to thank him for his leadership on the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA). They discussed how to continue to build support for this important legislation that would change wildlife conservation from being reactive to proactive.

These policies would not be possible without the support from our federal representatives. Audubon Nebraska would like to thank the representatives from our state plus those from Colorado and Wyoming in support of PRRIP and all state representatives who cosponsored the BEST Act and RAWA.

Audubon Nebraska received multiple wins in D.C., but there is more to be done. To learn more about Audubon work across Nebraska, go to www.ne.audubon.org or email nebraska@audubon.org for more information.

"Nature is painting fur us, day after day, pictures of infinite beauty."

— John Ruskin

Bird EnCOUNTER at Walt Library February 15

by Chuck Francis, Population/Environment Committee

Here's a special FREE event for your children and grandchildren to celebrate birds and the coming of spring! The annual Bird EnCOUNTER sponsored by Wachiska Audubon will be held at Walt Library on South 14th Street, from 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon, on Saturday, February 15. As in previous years, there will be bird-centered events especially for the younger set:

- ◆ Build a pine cone feeder to take home
- ◆ Learn to recognize common bird songs
- ◆ Build-a-Bird with your own imagination
- ◆ Sing along with Jim King—songs about birds
- ◆ Use binoculars to identify local birds
- ◆ Play a matching bird game
- ◆ Draw birds with Dr. Paul Johnsgard
- ◆ See live Nebraska raptors up close

Especially popular have been the presentations of live raptors and the pine cone feeders to hang in your own backyard. Our own Wachiska bird specialist, Paul Johnsgard, who has written and illustrated more than 80 books on birds of all types, will be on hand to encourage youngsters to draw birds. To be sure your kids can learn to identify local birds, we will have some permanently perched in trees and on the ground—they will not fly away while children learn to focus binoculars and get help to name what they can find.

For those who would like an immersion in the bird education experience, volunteer for an hour that morning. We can shuffle you around to help with different activities. To volunteer, contact Barb Francis, 402-483-6727 or barbfrancis8@gmail.com or Arlys at the Wachiska office and leave your name and contact information.



Paul Johnsgard drawing with family



Tim Knott at bird ID station

Walt Library is located at 6701 South 14th Street near Lincoln Southwest High School and the Cooper YMCA. The Bird EnCOUNTER is organized by Wachiska's Population and Environment Committee.

Holiday Potluck Brought Everyone Out

by Arlys Reitan, Program Chair

We work on plans for the annual holiday party throughout the year as it seems to be a highlight for our members, Friends, and supporters. This was certainly the case this year when I snagged Mike Forsberg at the previous event in December 2018 and asked if he could provide the next year's program. Graciously, Mike agreed, and we kept in touch during the year.

The party began with a silent auction which ran throughout the evening as people enthusiastically chose which items they hoped to take home. Over 40 items ranging from books, art of various mediums, t-shirts and sweatshirts, to bird items in pictures and jewelry and feeders and ceramic knickknacks were snatched up. Of particular interest were several handmade Japanese boxes, valentines, and notecards made by Jeanette Nakada. Wachiska netted \$547 from the auction.

You can see from the photos that there were many large tables set up for the potluck dinner and every table was full of delicious,



Photo by Jeff Meyer

festive food devoured by well over 100 people. When time came for the program, another 30 or so slid into whatever chairs they could find to watch and hear Mike Forsberg and his colleagues Grant Reiner, Ethan Freese, Brooke Talbott, and Mike Farrell describe their projects associated with the Platte Basin Timelapse which began in 2011. The photos and videos were beautiful, and we learned much about the Platte River Basin and where Nebraska's water comes from.



Photo by Gary Fehr

There were many people involved during the evening's activities, but special mention goes to Richard Peterson and Jeanette Nakada for helping with the pre-planning of the silent auction. It requires a lot of work but is rewarding when people happily

carry away their favorite items. Also, Mike Forsberg and his ensemble of presenters were the main reason so many came for the program.

Mark December 10th on your planning calendars for the next holiday party/potluck.

"Faith is the bird that feels the light when the dawn is still dark."

— Rabindranath Tagore

Regal Fritillary

by Richard Peterson

The Regal Fritillary is only found in some of the last remaining tallgrass and mixed grass prairies in the upper Great Plains. It's also found in wet meadows in woodland



areas that sometimes border those prairies. Historically, the Regal Fritillary ranged from eastern Colorado to Maine. Nebraska is home to some of the Regal's last remaining preferred habitat and is found locally only in restricted areas.



The Regal Fritillary [*Speyeria idalia* (Drury, 1773)] is in the Lepidoptera family Nymphalidae. Adult wingspan is ca 3-4 inches. The upper side of the front wing is bright orange-red with black markings. The upper and lower sides of the hind wings have distinctive bright white spots. Adults feed on a variety of nectar including milkweed, thistle, red clover, coneflowers, blazing star, bergamont, goldenrod, and ironweed.

Regal Fritillaries have a single generation per year. Adults emerge in early June along with the first milkweed and the other early bloomers they utilize for nectar. Mating (copulation and the transfer of sperm) takes place in early July.



The female then enters a six- to eight-week reproductive diapause. Development of the eggs does not begin until August when the eggs are then fertilized, and egg-laying begins. Females cruise close to the ground in search of places to lay their eggs. Over 1,000 eggs are laid in areas the female determines will produce the violet host plants for the larvae to feed upon in the spring. The larvae hatch from late September into October and immediately seek protection in the ground litter where they then enter larval diapause. The adults do not migrate, but die, and the larvae overwinter unfed.



In the spring, the larvae emerge and begin searching out food plants. The required host plant is violets (*Viola* spp.). In the U.S. there are 14 other fritillary species in the genus *Speyeria* that feed on violets. In Nebraska there are seven violet species, all of which should be considered possible food plants. Their common names are

Canada violet, Nuttall's, bird's-foot, prairie, blue prairie, downy yellow, and downy blue violet (Farrar, *Wildflowers of Nebraska and the Great Plains*). The larvae grow and develop through six instars until late May when they pupate and transform themselves into adults.



Wachiska's Legislation Committee Year-end Report

by Marge Kennedy, Legislation Committee

The legislation committee is primarily concerned with Nebraska state legislation that affects wildlife and conservation. As has been the case for several years, the committee's budget provided \$3,000 towards a lobbyist, Katie Zulkoski. Lobbying costs are shared by Wachiska, Audubon Society of Omaha, Audubon Nebraska, and Ducks Unlimited. The lobbyist lobbies for legislation that benefits conservation easements, the Nebraska Environmental Trust, and water issues (and conversely lobbies against legislation that could be detrimental to these three areas). Zulkoski also keeps track of other wildlife and conservation-related matters that come up in the Unicameral. Much of her work is done behind the scenes visiting personally with state senators and their staffs. There are several "bad bills" each year that do not advance out of committee (and sometimes fail to get introduced) in part due to the lobbyist's efforts.

During 2019, the committee made recommendations to Wachiska's Board (which were accepted and acted upon) on various bills and proposals: (1) We opposed the proposed trans basin water transfer from the Platte to Republican rivers; this has also been actively opposed with our encouragement by Audubon Nebraska/National Audubon (NAS). (2) We opposed the route approved by USFWS for the R-Line in the Sandhills due to potential adverse effects to Whooping Cranes. Audubon Nebraska filed an amicus brief in a lawsuit against USFWS which is pending. We strongly encouraged this action by Audubon. (3) Lancaster County (NE) Roadside Seeding - The committee has worked with the Lancaster County Engineer for several years to get native plantings in ditches to benefit wildlife. A test plot is planned in the ditch in front of Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center in the spring of 2020. (4) The committee and Board took a position of general opposition to large poultry farms in the county for several reasons, including water pollution. One such operation was approved, and one was rejected by the Lancaster County Board this year. (5) Lincoln Electric System proposed a large solar farm on the outskirts of Lincoln which is supported by Wachiska. The committee will draft a letter for Board consideration urging native plantings in the solar field area. (6) For several years, a representative from the legislation committee has testified on behalf of Wachiska in support of a bill to repeal the state's Prairie Dog Management Act. (7) Topics of discussion every month at committee meetings include news about the Niobrara River and the Nebraska Environmental Trust. Relevant information is reported to the Board. At the recommendation of the committee, Wachiska sent a letter in support of continuing authorization for an instream flow permit on Long Pine Creek which feeds into the Niobrara. (8) The committee/Board sent letters to our congressman and to NAS opposing new guidelines for the Endangered Species Act. (9) A representative from the committee testified at a hearing in support of additional conservation license plates, proceeds going to the Game and Parks Wildlife Conservation Fund. (10) Wachiska sent a letter of

support regarding a bill to allow lawsuits by landowners if a company installing transmission lines uses eminent domain to cross the land of someone who objects to this.

The legislation committee functions as a public policy group, addressing local and national issues.

Please consider joining this committee in 2020. Contact the Wachiska office or the committee's chair for dates of committee meetings while the legislature is in session.

2020 Spring Seminar Series Focuses on Current Issues in Nebraska Water

The Nebraska Water Center (NWC), in partnership with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's School of Natural Resources, will begin its free annual Spring Water Seminar Series in January. The public series takes place most Wednesdays throughout the spring from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the Hardin Hall auditorium on East Campus. A full schedule can be found at https://watercenter.unl.edu/resources/events/Water%20Seminar%20Series_2020.pdf.

This year the series includes a wide range of lecturers from across the country and around the state. Together they will provide diverse perspectives on water from groundwater modeling to supplying water to thirsty cities. With the recent devastating flooding, recognizing the state's ever-changing water issues is as essential as ever. Established in 1968, the series provides a forum to increase awareness and to allow for meaningful conversation regarding these issues.

This year's presenters include:

- January 22 – John Nieber, University of Minnesota, "Vadose Zone Processes and Modeling" (Williams Lecture)
- February 5 – Shannon Bartlet-Hunt, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, "Water Quality + Citizen Science Project"
- February 19 – Laura Johnson, Heidelberg University in Tiffin, OH, "Nutrient Dynamics in Agricultural Ecosystems"
- March 4 – Roric Paulman, Paulman Farms, "Through a Farmer's Eyes" (Kremer Lecture)
- March 18 – Keith Miller, Hastings Utilities; Jim Shields, Metropolitan Utilities District; and Steve Owen, City of Lincoln, "Municipal Water Management"
- April 8 – Christopher Olson, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, "Know Your Well Project"
- April 22 – Sorab Panday, GSI Environmental Inc. and University of Nebraska-Lincoln, "Understand Your Water Resource with Groundwater Modeling"

Climate Change Update

by Marilyn McNabb

Jeff Fortenberry, our congressman, is now one of the sponsors of the bill to extend solar tax credits another five years. The Renewable Energy Extension Act, H.R. 3916, allows owners of new residential or commercial solar systems to deduct 30 percent of the cost of a solar energy system from their federal taxes. The current tax credit will expire in 2022.

Bipartisan support, the Solar Energy Industries Association points out, has been the hallmark of solar tax policy: “Passed by the Republican-led Congress and signed into law by President George W. Bush, the (tax credit) has created hundreds of thousands of jobs, sparked more than \$140 billion in private investment, and helped grow solar deployment by more than 10,000 percent.”

Another bill with bipartisan and Audubon’s support that we would like Congressman Fortenberry to cosponsor is the BEST bill, H.R. 2986. BEST—Better Energy Storage Technology—would support a grid-scale energy storage research and development program to assess costs, reliability, safety, etc. Storage is important to increase the use of wind and solar energy. In the Senate, Deb Fischer is one of 21 bipartisan cosponsors of BEST, S1602.

[Call or write Rep. Fortenberry and thank him for his support of the solar tax credit bill and ask him to cosponsor the BEST bill. Also thank Senator Fischer for cosponsoring the BEST bill.](#) (See contact information on page 7.)

Here’s National Audubon’s assessment of where we stand in getting effective climate legislation from Congress:

“With one more year left in this session of Congress, we have seen some progress in the right direction as the House and Senate advance bills that could reduce emissions in a piecemeal manner. While we likely won’t see a comprehensive climate bill next year, in combination, these energy bills could drive innovation and deployment of clean energy technology and could attract a coalition of legislators ready to take bigger steps.”

In some ways, American business appears to be responding more realistically to the climate crisis than Congress. In December, 631 companies with assets worth more than the GDP of the U. S. and China together called for a phase out of thermal coal power plants worldwide, an introduction of a “meaningful” price on carbon, an end to fossil fuel subsidies, and for higher goals for emissions reductions beyond those pledged in Paris to keep average global temperatures below 1.5 C. These institutional investors included insurance companies, pension funds, and banks (check out <https://www.ceres.org/news-center/press-releases/record-631-institutional-investors-managing-more-37-trillion-assets-urge>).

Also in December, Cargill committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions in its entire supply chain by 30 percent per ton of product in the next decade. The goal aligns with Paris. “Climate change left unchecked will destabilize the food system as well as farmers and ranchers at the heart of it,” said Cargill’s CEO, David MacLennan (<http://www.startribune.com/cargill-expands-commitments-on-climate-change-fortifies-support-for-paris-agreement-goals/565739742/>).

Another example: Walmart’s explanation of why the Paris agreement is good for the global economy and pledging, “We’re Still In” is reported at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/06/opinion/climate-change-walmart-paris.html>.

The Financial Times, 10/1/19, reports that the world’s largest multilateral financial institution, the European Investment Bank, will end all financing of oil, gas, and coal projects after 2021.

Prescribed Burns on Wachiska Prairies

by Ross Scott, Conservation Committee Chair

On December 4, volunteers from Wachiska’s conservation committee completed a prescribed burn on Berg Prairie East (10 acres) and Berg Prairie West (12 acres). We are following a management contract written by Kent Pfeiffer of Northern Prairies Land Trust to control invasive species like red clover and brome by deferring haying to allow season-long plant growth to shade out the invasive red clover and build up the fuel load. We follow up with a burn to set back the fall growth of the red clover and brome while the warm season plants are dormant.

Volunteers from Wachiska included Tim Knott, Ethan Freese, Stu Luttich, Arnold Mendenhall, and Ross Scott. We have a spray rig on-site that lays down a wet line as we start a backfire on the downwind side. After the “black line” is wide enough, we proceed to light the head fire. We are currently in the third year of a four-year contract with Northern Prairies Land Trust and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and have burned it twice. Next year we won’t burn but will hay early enough to allow for regrowth for warm season grasses and wildflowers.

The plant communities found on Berg East are lowland prairie with prairie cordgrass and western wheatgrass. The main forbs are compass plant and golden alexander. Berg West has lowland and upland plants with prairie cordgrass, big bluestem, and a widely diverse population of wildflowers. For birders, Berg West usually has a bobolink in the summer.



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Lincoln Journal Star

Letters to the editor, 926 P St, Lincoln NE 68508
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Wachiska Audubon Society
Attention: Membership Committee
4547 Calvert St Ste 10
Lincoln NE 68506-5643



American Goldfinches

___ **I prefer to receive my newsletter by email.**

Please note: If you are already a member of National Audubon Society (NAS) you automatically become a member of Wachiska, but not a Wachiska Friend member. Only Wachiska Friends receive the printed newsletter each month. If you wish to join NAS or receive *Audubon* magazine, please contact the National Audubon Society directly.

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*Denotes Board member

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Wachiska Audubon Society's financial records are available for examination in the office.

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A bequest to Wachiska Audubon Society is a gift to future generations enabling our natural heritage to continue. For wills, trusts, and gifts, our legal name is **Wachiska Audubon Society**. Our Federal Tax ID number is **51-0229888**.