



Wachiska
Audubon Society

Wachiska Audubon Society's vision: To share the experience and love of nature—that life may flourish in all its natural diversity

The Babbling Brook

Our 49th Year of Protecting Nature 1973 - 2022

AUGUST 2022

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Wachiska Program — Thursday, August 11, 7:00 p.m., via Zoom web conference (registration required)
Link to register: https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYqcumrpz4sGtTVXPnX-b_s7TBt-KLIU6k

Nebraska Walleye Spawn

by Marcus Miller, Conservation Technician, North Platte Fish Hatchery

Springtime in Nebraska is often full of life. The weather begins to warm, and the flora and fauna start to come alive. For members of Nebraska's state fish hatcheries it means one thing, Walleye Spawn.

Walleyes are one of the most sought after freshwater sportfish across the Midwest. In Nebraska, that continues to be true as walleyes play a huge part in most of the state's waterbodies. They are wonderful table fare which contributes to their popularity among anglers.



Marcus Miller
displaying a walleye

In order to keep Nebraska's reservoirs up with the demand of walleye anglers, walleyes must be raised and stocked each year. Roughly 130 million walleyes are spawned annually to fill the stocking requests of the state's public waters. Nebraska Game and Parks fisheries workers set out each spring primarily to three main waterbodies: Sherman Reservoir, Merritt Reservoir, and Lake McConaughy.

Marcus Miller has seen firsthand the effort it takes to raise walleyes for Nebraska's anglers. His experience primarily highlights the spawning efforts at Merritt Reservoir. Walleyes upwards of 12 pounds are frequently handled and selected to produce the progeny that will serve Nebraska. Marcus enjoys handling those big fish and doing the collection work involving gill netting, trap netting, and electrofishing. He is also involved with the culture process that takes place once the eggs have been fertilized. This process is the "bread and butter" of hatchery work and encompasses enumeration, egg treatments, egg hatching, and fry stocking.

Marcus grew up just a couple miles from the North Platte Fish Hatchery. His childhood years were spent doing anything outdoors that involved hunting, fishing, or just flat out being outside—all things that he still enjoys now. He obtained a Bachelor of Science degree from UNL, majoring in fisheries ecology and management and minoring in water science. Upon graduation, he began working with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission where he has been for six years. Currently, Marcus is a conservation technician at the North Platte Fish Hatchery. Fishing is his passion, and he couldn't imagine a career not working with fish.

Join Wachiska Audubon for our next Zoom program on **Thursday, August 11, at 7:00 p.m.** This free, public presentation is available to those who register at this link:

https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYqcumrpz4sGtTVXPnX-b_s7TBt-KLIU6k

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email with the meeting number and password. Save that email; a few minutes before the program is to begin, click on that confirmation email, and you'll be invited into the meeting. Encourage friends and colleagues to join us.

Calendar

August

- 1 Education Committee via Zoom, 6:00 p.m.
- 6 **"Tour the Wild Side," 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.** (pages 3 & 8)
- 8 Conservation Committee via Zoom, 6:30 p.m.
- 11 General Meeting via Zoom, "Nebraska Walleye Spawn," by Marcus Miller, 7:00 p.m. (**NOTE required registration**)
- 15 Newsletter deadline in Wachiska office, 5:00 p.m.
- 16 Board Meeting via Zoom, 7:00 p.m.

Executive Director's Message

by Mark Brohman

It seems the world is full of doom and gloom when it comes to the environment recently. I read that only 75 Southern Resident orcas (killer whales) are left in the world, and 13 of them were recently designated as particularly vulnerable. North Pacific right whales are down to around 30 individuals in their eastern population, making them the world's most endangered whales. While the North Atlantic right whales, numbering around 336, received some protection in a recent court decision banning lobster fishing lines in certain waters October to January, they continue to struggle. There were 53 confirmed cases of large whales entangled in gear in the U.S. in 2020, which was a 25 percent reduction from 2019. More than half of those entangled were humpback whales.



Mark Brohman

About half of the contiguous U.S. is in drought, including a massive drought in the Southwest that scientists say is the worst in at least 1,200 years and driven by climate change. Wildfires have burned 3.6 million acres already this year, the most in a decade. People around the world are suffering through deadly flooding and extreme heat made more likely by climate change.

Recently the U.S. Supreme Court has thrown up a new barrier against climate action. The high court in *Virginia v. EPA* blocked the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from writing or enforcing broad rules designed to shift the power sector toward cleaner energy sources. By preventing the EPA from making utilities switch away from fossil fuels, the court's decision casts serious doubt on the Biden administration's ability to deliver on its goal of powering the country with carbon-free electricity by 2035.

U.S. Senator Joe Manchin, a West Virginia Democrat with financial ties to the coal industry, has announced he will not support government incentives for electric vehicles, solar, and wind. Manchin has taken more campaign money from the gas and oil industry than any other senator.

Audubon reports that, along with its human health hazards, climate change is the single biggest threat to birds. Two-thirds of North America's avian species face the threat of extinction as the planet heats up, but limiting warming to 1.5 degrees C. will avoid that threat for some 150 species, Audubon scientists reported in 2019. The danger extends beyond birds; rising temperatures put nine percent of all species worldwide at risk of extinction in about a decade, according to the United Nations.

My cousin sent me a sad photo of a roadkill armadillo from central Nebraska. I had just read some research published in the May journal *Ecology and Evolution* that the nine-banded

armadillo (the only armadillo species found in the U.S.) burrows are used by at least 64 other species. From bobcats to skinks and 40 bird species use their burrows. A few are discovered in Nebraska every year, and they appear to be expanding their range annually. Maybe in the future, armadillo burrows will replace prairie dog burrows, creating habitat for many species in Nebraska.

On a somewhat brighter note, an oak tree previously thought to be extinct was discovered in Big Bend National Park in Texas on May 22, 2022. One *Quercus tardifolia* (or Lateleaf oak) was discovered. Unfortunately, the trunk was scarred by fire and shows signs of severe fungal infection. What was believed to be the last tree perished in 2011. More than 10 institutions have been searching for the species since then. This specimen is about 30 feet tall and in poor shape. It is facing fungal infection and elevated fire risk due to climate change. The National Park Service is attempting to reduce those threats, as a drought or fire has the potential to kill this lone tree.

All is not lost—we as individuals and Wachiska as an organization will continue to do what we can. A person I greatly admire, Jane Goodall, once said, "Only if we understand can we care. Only if we care will we help." It reminds me of the story of the little boy walking along the beach after a big storm and throwing star fish that had become beached, back into the ocean. An older gentleman approached the young boy and asked why he would waste his time on such a fruitless endeavor. The boy simply replied, "I'm sure each starfish I save appreciates my efforts."

Please continue to do your small or large part. Try to attend some, if not all seven of Wachiska's "Tour the Wild Side" sites on Saturday, August 6, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. You can learn more about this event in this issue of *The Babbling Brook* (with a two-page descriptive article in last month's newsletter). See some of the native plants you can plant in your yard to do that little thing to help pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. That bee or hummingbird will appreciate your efforts.

Second Saturday Seeds Continues through Summertime

by Beth Coufal, Conservation Committee

Second Saturday Seeds continues throughout late summer and into fall. August 13, September 10, and October 8 will all take place at Dieken Prairie. This drier prairie is closer to Lincoln, just south of Unadilla. This location will be our best opportunity to collect seeds, including purple and white prairie clover, rudbeckia, and three species of *Liatis*.

Dress for rough walking and the weather. Bring gloves, clippers, and a bucket for seed collecting. If it is raining, we will cancel. Check Wachiska's website for directions to Dieken Prairie. If you would like to carpool, call the Wachiska office at least five days before the event and leave your name and phone number. If you have any questions, call Beth at 402-417-3928.

TOUR THE WILD SIDE

Sat., August 6 10am – 2pm



Using Native Plants in your Landscape

By growing native plants, you create a patch of habitat that becomes part of a collective effort to repair and sustain the living landscape for birds, bugs, and people, lessening the local effects of our changing climate. To introduce and educate more people to the benefits of native plants, Wachiska Audubon Society and Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center are organizing this self-tour of private yards and public spaces around Lincoln for a second year! Owners and Naturalists will be on hand to help answer questions, and live raptors will be at one location with native plants available at another. Join us for the fun!

For more tour information and locations, see the websites to the right.

Wachiska
Audubon Society

Audubon
Spring Creek Prairie
Audubon Center

All Around Lincoln

Visit several private yards all around Lincoln to see & learn!

No tickets necessary, donations are always welcome.

springcreek.audubon.org

Locations

- **Wachiska/Walt Branch Library Native Plant Garden**
6701 S. 14th St. in back of Walt Branch Library
*** (This site will have Live Birds & Kids Activities)*
- **Peg and Larry Fletcher's Prairie** (25 acres)
1900 S. 105th St.
*** (Masks are required at this Tour Stop and will be available at the check-in table.)*
- **Tim and Carol Hinkle's**
1305 Plumridge Rd. (near Holdrege and 148th St.)
- **Aldersgate United Methodist Church**
8320 South St
- **Dave & Linda Titterington's**
6324 Starling Circle
- **Arapahoe Community Garden**
Corner of S 14th St and Arapahoe

Sponsors



Some Hummingbird Females Look Like Males to Evade Harassment and Get More Food

from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website

New research on the white-necked jacobin hummingbird reveals nearly 20 percent of the species' adult females have male-like plumage. This strategy is all about dodging bullies and getting better access to food. The findings were published in the journal *Current Biology*.

"What's interesting about the white-necked jacobin is that all the juveniles start out with male-like plumage," explains lead author Jay Falk. "Among most other bird species, juvenile plumage looks more like the female's, presumably to be less obvious to predators." Falk did this work while a Ph.D. student with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and is currently at the University of Washington.

As the birds mature, all the jacobin males retain the fancier plumage but so do nearly 20 percent of the females among the population Falk studied in Panama. The remaining 80 percent of females still develop the muted green and white coloration of a typical adult female. Though plumage is usually attributed to sexual selection and attracting a mate, researchers ruled out that explanation for this species after field experiments.

Scientists observed the reactions of live jacobin hummingbirds toward stuffed mounts placed on nectar feeders during breeding season. The mounts were of adult white-necked jacobin males, typical adult females, and female adults that looked like males.

"If females having male-like plumage is the result of sexual selection, then the males would have been drawn to the male-plumaged females," says Falk. "That didn't happen. The male white-necked jacobins still showed a clear preference for the typically plumed adult females."

So, what's the benefit to females of this species when they look like a male? To get to the root of that puzzle, Falk and his assistants put radio frequency ID tags on birds and set up a circuit of 28 feeders wired to read the tags. By tracking the number and length of visits, they honed in on the answer.

"Our tests found that the typical, less colorful females were harassed much more than females with male-like plumage," Falk says. "Because the male-plumaged females experienced less aggression, they were able to feed more often—a clear advantage."

The researchers found that the male-like females got to feed longer than the typical adult female—about 35 percent longer at feeders filled with high-sugar nectar. That can make a big difference because hummingbirds have the highest metabolic rate of any vertebrate. They need to eat constantly in order to survive.

Bottom line: Female white-necked jacobins retain the male-like plumage of their youth for social reasons—they avoid the bullies

by looking like them. It is still not clear whether male-like females behave just as aggressively as the males. The actual physical mechanism that allows females to retain male-like plumage is also not known.

The white-necked jacobin is hardly alone when it comes to having some females that look like males. Falk says studies have found that 25 percent of the world's 350+ hummingbird species also have some females that look like males.

The Famous Nebraska Limpkin

by Mark Brohman

A limpkin discovered in Nebraska last month has become a celebrity. Bird watchers from around the Midwest have been flocking to the Omaha area to see the rare bird that had never been recorded in Nebraska. It was first seen by photographer Karen Kader in a wetland mitigation pond in the Chalco Hills Recreation Area between Gretna and Omaha. A single limpkin has also been seen in Iowa recently.



The limpkin is a tropical shorebird from southern Florida and Central America. They have a long, slightly downcurved bill, long legs, and large webless feet. These avians are brown or dull grayish-green with white spots. One of the tallest shorebirds, they are over two feet tall with a wing span up to 42 inches.

Limpkins were seen in Texas, Minnesota, and Kansas last year. It appears this individual is feeding on the invasive Chinese mystery snail found in large numbers in this pond at Chalco Hills.

If you are wondering where the limpkin got its name, it is for its unusual limping gait.

Here's What To Feed Your Summer Bird Feeder Visitors

from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website

Many people choose to feed birds year-round, which can be especially helpful at the end of the breeding season when exhausted parents and newly fledged chicks are all gaining strength as fall approaches. It's a fun time to try offering different foods to see which new species show up. Check out this (gigantic) link for some tips for creating a safe summertime avian buffet:

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/heres-what-to-feed-your-summer-bird-feeder-visitors/?utm_source=Cornell+Lab+eNews&utm_campaign=ed4fd1aa53-Cornell-Lab-eNews-July-2022&

National Audubon Society Creates a John James Audubon Naming Task Force

by Theresa Pella, President

In the June 2022 *Babbling Brook* there was an article about Wachiska's name and how much we don't know—what it means, the origin of the word, why it became the organization's name, and what responsibilities come with the use of an indigenous people's word.

Our parent organization, the National Audubon Society (NAS), is also struggling with a similar issue—in this case about a person. In the spring of 2021, self-described obsessed birder and author, J. Drew Lanham, wrote an article for *Audubon* magazine that, in his words, dissected John James Audubon. He wrote about Audubon's history, not only as someone who introduced birds to America as beautiful creatures, but also about Audubon's treatment of other human beings. To read the article, "What Do We Do About John James Audubon?" refer to this site: <https://www.audubon.org/magazine/spring-2021/what-do-we-do-about-john-james-audubon> for details.

This and other issues have NAS's board of directors wrestling with the question of how to balance history with understanding and the need for appropriate actions to be a more inclusive organization.

At the February 2022 meeting, the NAS board created a task force to research and make a recommendation to the full board regarding whether the name of the organization should be retained, changed, something else, etc.

During the June 2022 meeting, the task force presented its process and timeline to the full board. Scholars have been engaged to research the history of Audubon the person and the history of the conservation movement. Those results will be used to engage stakeholders, both internal and external, to the Society to seek further information and perspectives. Doing case studies of organizations that have changed names is also planned. The task force will then digest what is learned and prepare a recommendation for the full board to consider during the February 2023 meeting.

Editor's Note: Theresa Pella joined the National Audubon board as the Central Flyway-North Regional Director in February 2022.

Adopt a Bluebird Trail

A productive and scenic bluebird trail east of Walton on the MoPac Trail is available for monitoring. The two-mile long trail is between 134th Street and 162nd Street and has 11 boxes that can be accessed by bicycle or on foot. The boxes should be checked weekly from April through September. If interested, contact Joyce Vannier at jmvannier@yahoo.com.



The Coyote

by Richard Peterson



Coyotes just seem to appear unexpectedly whether loping across the road in front of you while you're driving or scurrying off to avoid your interest; elusive and a survivor, it is as New World as it gets. The coyote's scientific name, *Canis latrans*, translates as "barking dog," because of its vocalizations. It is sometimes called the "American jackal," or the prairie wolf. Unlike wolves, which have somewhat improved their public image, attitudes toward the coyote remain largely negative.

When Europeans arrived in America, coyotes were confined to the open plains and arid regions of the western half of the continent. The early traders and trappers were well acquainted with the coyote on the upper Missouri. Lewis and Clark wrote about them. The animal was first scientifically described by naturalist Thomas Say in 1823 during the expedition of Major Stephen Long when they were near Council Bluffs, Iowa.

With the clearing of the eastern forests and the extermination of wolf populations (the coyote's main competitor), the coyote moved into the void. There are 19 coyote subspecies. Two subspecies that may occur in southeastern Nebraska are the *northeastern coyote* and the *southeastern coyote*. In most of Nebraska, however, *Canis latrans latrans*, or the *plains coyote*, is at home. Its range extends from Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan in Canada south to New Mexico and the Texas Panhandle. The other subspecies range from northern Alaska to Panama in Central America. Males weigh up to 44 pounds; the female up to 40 pounds. They walk from 3-10 miles a day along trails, logging roads, streets in towns, sand bars, as well as across iced-over rivers. Like other canids, they are competent swimmers. When walking, loping along, or running the coyote carries its tail downward.

The coyote's gestation period is 63 days with the average litter size being six. Pups are usually born in an abandoned and cleaned out badger or marmot den. Dens have also been found in hollow trees, under ledges, in abandoned farm outbuildings, and in drainage pipes. The den can have several entrances, and passages and can be used for a number of years. Pups are blind for the first 10 days, then become increasingly more active and are running around at six weeks.

Primarily a meat eater, the coyote diet consists of groundhogs, pocket gophers, prairie dogs, chipmunks, rabbits, hares, birds, reptiles, fish, and invertebrates. In our cities, they eat anything that's out and about. Although they are a crepuscular hunter (active during twilight), some hunt at night, presumably to avoid humans. Individuals usually hunt alone. Their social organization is very flexible, living either in a family unit or in a loosely knit pack of unrelated individuals. The coyote is not as specialized a pack hunter as the wolf. It hunts in small groups if the prey requires it.

Climate Change Update

by Marilyn McNabb

Two certified family ranches in Nebraska have joined 19 others across the country in producing beef and bison that will be marketed with a seal announcing "Grazed on Audubon Certified Bird-friendly Land." Beginning in July, Audubon-certified meat will be available through the Panorama Organic Grassfed Meats Network at 90 retail locations in nine states. Not yet available in Nebraska (except for online at Crowd Cow), Open Harvest in Lincoln is looking into it. You might let them know if you would purchase it.

National Audubon is partnering with this company which assists every enrolled ranch to develop a working habitat management plan using rotational and regenerative grazing practices. Rotational grazing leaves more residual vegetation cover, benefitting birds and proven to assist with carbon sequestration and improving the water cycle. What they don't use: chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides. Audubon's Conservation Ranching also requires animal health and welfare criteria, increasing bird habitat. Grassland bird populations have declined by more than half since 1970, mainly due to habitat degradation and loss of grasslands to other agriculture or development. See [Audubon.org/ranching](https://www.audubon.org/ranching) for more on Audubon's conservation ranching program.

When I hear meat eaters being told we need to give up meat to save the climate, I worry. Americans giving up their hamburgers and steaks? Really? But this project gives me hope. It blazes a path forward for eaters, ranchers, grasslands, and birds. It's the largest market-based conservation partnership in the U.S. It's a great start.

In Bloomberg Green, July 8, 2022, Peter Yeung writes about the Great Salt Lake, the largest body of water in the U.S. after the Great Lakes. It has shrunk as of July to an area less than a third of that recorded in 1987. View the satellite images here: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-07-08/drought-leaves-salt-lake-city-with-a-looming-water-crisis?cmpid=BBD070922_GREENDAILY&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&utm_term=220709&utm_campaign=greendaily.

Yeung writes, "As the lake has dried, the complex web of life that these brackish waters support has been imperiled, including hundreds of bird species that rely on the insects and shrimp that breed there." He quotes Ella Sorensen, manager of the Audubon Gillmor Sanctuary, a 3,597-acre wetland preserve on the lake's southern border: "This is a key stop on the migration route," but "it's mind-boggling dry these days."

The effects of climate change globally have increased the frequency, severity, and duration of droughts according to a United Nations report in 2021 (<https://www.undrr.org/publication/gar-special-report-drought-2021>).

Utah's legislature and governor appropriated \$40 million in March to create the Great Salt Lake Water Trust to address the problems of the Great Salt Lake. At least 25 percent of the funding will be used to restore wetlands habitat. In June, the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands announced that National Audubon and The Nature Conservancy will receive these grant funds to co-manage the Trust.

Utah House Speaker Brad Wilson said the selection of Audubon and TNC to co-manage the Trust "reflects both organizations' scientific expertise, nonprofit credibility, commitment to collaboration, and long-standing conservation records at the Great Salt Lake."

The bill that funds the Trust also has provisions for a range of water conservation measures. For more information, check National Audubon's website.

Here's how National Audubon described the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *West Virginia v. Environmental Protection Agency*: It "severely curtailed the ability of the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate carbon pollution and respond to the threat of climate change."

To see how Audubon scientists now estimate how climate change will affect Nebraska's birds, check out: <https://www.audubon.org/climate/survivalbydegrees/state/us/ne>. Three warming scenarios are used for each species. The Audubon study concluded, "by stabilizing carbon emissions and holding warming to 1.5 degrees C. above pre-industrial levels, 76 percent of vulnerable species will be better off, and nearly 150 species would no longer be vulnerable to extinction from climate change." That's worth working for.

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center Upcoming Programs and Events

Birding is for Everybody: Accessible Bird Outing

Monday, August 15, 8:30 - 9:30 a.m.

Read more at <https://www.birdability.org/>. Free admission.

Third Tuesday Bird Outing

Tuesday, August 16, 8:00 - 10:00 a.m.

Register online.

Discovery Leader Training

Friday, August 19, 9:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon

If you would like to help, contact our education team for more information.

Tastes in the Tallgrass

Sunday, September 18, 4:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Tickets available now on our website.

More information on these and other programs can be found on our website, <https://springcreek.audubon.org/events>. Send questions to 402-797-2301; scp@audubon.org.

Public Officials

President Joe Biden

1600 Pennsylvania Av NW, Washington DC 20500-0001
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Phone: 202-456-1414 Fax: 202-456-2461
E-mail at website: <http://whitehouse.gov/contact>

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1128 Lincoln Mall Ste 305, Lincoln NE 68508
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Wash. DC phone: 202-225-6435 Fax: 202-225-0207
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Capitol Hill Switchboard

888-436-8427 or 202-224-3121

Governor Pete Ricketts

Capitol Bldg, PO Box 94848, Lincoln NE 68509-4848
Phone: 402-471-2244 Fax: 402-471-6031
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State Senator _____

District ____ State Capitol, PO Box 94604, Lincoln, NE 68509-4604

State Capitol Switchboard

402-471-2311

Lancaster County Commissioners

County-City Bldg, 555 S 10th St Rm 110, Lincoln NE 68508
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Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird

County-City Bldg, 555 S 10th St Rm 301, Lincoln NE 68508-2828
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Lincoln City Council

402-441-7515
E-mail: council@lincoln.ne.gov

Lincoln Journal Star

Letters to the editor, 21st and N St, Lincoln NE 68508
E-mail: oped@journalstar.com

Join now! Become a Friend of Wachiska Audubon Society!

This local chapter membership provides you with voting privileges and access to all our events, programs, and committees, **plus 100 percent of your membership donation goes directly to the Wachiska chapter. In addition, Friend members receive our monthly newsletter, *The Babbling Brook*, in their choice of print or electronic form.**

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Select the level of support that is right for you and make your check payable to **Wachiska Audubon Society**. All funds will remain with our local chapter and are tax deductible. Mail to:

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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