



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 45th Year of Protecting Nature 1973 - 2018

JULY 2018

Volume 27 - Issue 7

Annual Picnic — Thursday, July 12, 6:00 p.m., Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, 11700 SW 100th Street, Denton

What's Happening at the Prairie?

by Arlys Reitan

How does it go, “the best laid plans . . .”? Just after announcing at the June general meeting that Wachiska’s annual summer potluck picnic would take place on East Campus, the plans changed the next day.



Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center (SCPAC) staff members have graciously agreed to host Wachiska’s annual potluck picnic on the regularly scheduled day, **Thursday, July 12**, beginning at **6:00 p.m.** Please bring one or two of your favorite summer dishes to this indoor picnic along with your own table service. Beverages will be provided. There is no admission charge for this picnic. Bring family and friends, eat lots of great food, hear the staff describe what’s taking place out there this summer, and top off the evening with a short hike on the prairie.

Educational classes with school kids will be conducted in the afternoon, so it will be best to arrive no earlier than 5:30 p.m. this time. Those finding it difficult to walk on the stone path from the parking lot may be dropped off at the service entrance. Drivers, then please continue to the parking lot.

Jason “the Birdnerd” St. Sauver, community education director at the prairie, will be on hand to entertain and educate us with his latest antics. As part of the Year of the Bird this spring, Jason spent all day May 5 searching for every bird species he could find in the Lincoln area. He finished with a spectacular 130 species. Using this event as a fundraising effort, Jason raised more than \$600 for his education supply fund. Wachiska will have a donation basket at our dinner for those wishing to show appreciation for the conservation and education work that continues at the prairie. We know that binoculars for children’s use are needed; they cost around \$25/pair.

Directions to SCPAC from South Lincoln: **NOTE that Southwest 84th Street between Emerald and Denton is under construction.**

Take Old Cheney Road to Warlick Boulevard at the first stoplight west of 14th Street. Turn southwest onto Warlick; drive through the Highway 77 intersection, reaching Denton in seven miles. At the four-way stop sign in Denton, continue straight ahead (west) another ½ mile before reaching Southwest 98th Street. Turn left (south) and drive another three miles. The Audubon sign and driveway will be on your left (east) immediately after the curves. This is a 20 - 30 minute drive from Old Cheney Road in Lincoln. For instructions from downtown or other directions, check the SCPAC website at www.springcreekprairie.org or call 402-797-2301.



Indoor “picnic” area at SCPAC

Calendar

July

- 9 Conservation Committee, Wachiska office, 5:30 p.m.
- 12 **Annual potluck picnic, Spring Creek Prairie, 6:00 p.m., program by SCPAC staff**
- 13 Newsletter deadline, Wachiska office, 5:00 p.m.
- 14 Field Trip to Nine-Mile Prairie, 8:30 a.m. (page 2)
- 17 Board Meeting, Wachiska office, 7:00 p.m.

Note: NO Legislation Committee meeting July
NO Education Committee meeting in July



Field Trip

by Carole Closter

Wildflowers at Nine-Mile Prairie

On **Saturday, July 14**, I will lead a two-hour wildflower walk beginning at **8:30 a.m.** at Nine-Mile Prairie. This is a 230-acre native tallgrass prairie in northwest Lincoln that I have been visiting for over 25 years. Learn more about butterfly milkweed, leadplant, and other summer bloomers. In mid-June I found two dozen flower species here. This native prairie in Northwest Lincoln was purchased by the University of Nebraska Foundation in 1983, and is a major educational resource for students and all Nebraskans. It is the longest studied natural area in Nebraska, beginning in 1920, by the father of grassland ecology, Professor John E. Weaver.

From NW 48th Street, go one mile west on West Fletcher Avenue to the parking lot. Beginning at 8:30 a.m. we will walk about two hours on uneven mowed trails, so wear sturdy shoes, expect heat and humidity, wear a hat/cap, sunscreen, bring a water bottle, and insect repellent. Binoculars may magnify flower parts for identification. The nearest restroom facilities are at Casey's at Highway 34 & NW 48th Street. We will cancel only if there are morning thunderstorms that day. The public is invited to join in this native prairie experience free of charge. For more information, call Carole at 402-475-9219.

Editor's Note: Nine-Mile Prairie got its name for its location five miles west and four miles north of downtown Lincoln. Wachiska Audubon had a hand in preserving this virgin prairie in 1979, due in large part, to the efforts of Ernie Rousek.

July Programs at SCPAC

by Kevin Poague

Third Tuesday Bird Walk – Tuesday, July 17, 8:00 - 10:00 a.m.

Join us for a leisurely stroll through the prairie, looking for and learning about the birds we manage for and those that might be migrating through. *FREE Tuesdays are always free admission at Spring Creek Prairie! Registration preferred.*

Paws on the Prairie – Saturday, July 28, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon

Here's your one chance to bring your furry and fuzzy friends with you to the prairie! We're partnering with the Capital Humane Society for this special event for prairie and pet lovers. Bring your dog or cat (on leash) and enjoy a walk on the prairie, fun and informal presentations on pet and wildlife safety, and see great pets available for adoption. Dress your furry baby in a nature-themed costume for our Pet Parade for a chance to win prizes for people and pets alike. Free admission, no reservations.

Full details of these and other programs on our website at springcreekprairie.audubon.org; to register, call 402-797-2301 or write scp@audubon.org.

Melinda Varley is Newest Board Member

by Richard Peterson

The Wachiska Board has filled the last vacancy for the director-at-large position. Melinda Varley has agreed to serve in this capacity. We sat down for an interview at The Mill in College View where I was able to fill in the blanks about our newest Board member.

Melinda was born and grew-up in Blair. Her dad delivered milk for the Alamito Dairy and worked for the Blair Telephone Company the last 15 years before retiring. During her father's later years, he would relax by watching and feeding the birds in their yard. Melinda has two brothers. One is a music professor at DeSales University in Pennsylvania; the second has retired from being a custom home builder and now lives in Phoenix.

After graduating from Blair High School, Melinda earned a degree in education and special ed from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. For 10 years, she worked with adults with special needs for the Lancaster Office of Mental Retardation.

She married and has two daughters. One daughter lives in Tekamah and the other in Tennessee. Melinda has eight grandchildren: Anthony, David, Jacklyn, Jessica, Zoe, Marin, Isabella, and Elena. After raising her family, she decided to return to school, graduated from the Southeast Community College nursing program, and became a licensed practical nurse. She then worked for Saint Elizabeth's Hospital in Lincoln. She has retired now but wanted to stay involved. She currently has the perfect schedule working part-time providing clerical support at Neurology Associates in Lincoln. She has also volunteered at the Lied Center and the Ross Theater.

When she introduced herself at the Board meeting, I learned she liked to run. She's been a member of the Lincoln Track Club for over 30 years and has been their volunteer coordinator the last four years. She loves to run, sometimes with her daughter, on the MoPac and other trails in and around Lincoln and elsewhere. She hopes to continue running as long as she's able.

At home Melinda does vegetable and flower gardening. She's a bird enthusiast who is currently trying to get the hummingbirds that frequent her yard to feed at her feeder. She has traveled a bit, especially enjoying Italy and Ireland and is now trying to convince her brother to go with her to Peru. She likes to cook but when eating out you will likely find her at El Toro or The Oven. Recent movies she's seen include "The Shape of Water" and "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri."

Melinda is a relative newcomer to Wachiska and just wanted to get involved. Asked where she felt she could help Wachiska, she said that getting younger people interested in wildlife and the outdoors should be a priority. She liked the idea of our Prairie Discovery Days event every fall.

A very warm welcome to Melinda Varley and she becomes more involved with Wachiska Audubon!



From the Board ...

by Bruce and Marge Kennedy
Legislation Committee

Aldrich Prairie - A Cautionary Tale

In the year 2000, Doane College in Crete was bequeathed the deed to 320 acres of mostly farmland in Fillmore County by the estate of Margaret Aldrich, a graduate of Doane. The land included approximately 50 acres of what became known as the Aldrich Prairie Research Site, consisting of tallgrass prairie, a small wetland area, and the easternmost colony of black-tailed prairie dogs in Nebraska. The site was used for education and research by Doane students and faculty. Those who knew Ms. Aldrich say she had wanted the land to stay with Doane forever and for the prairie dog town to be protected; unfortunately, she did not put those statements in writing or make them requirements in the land transfer.

Doane sold the 320 acres to an area farming family late in April 2018. The prairie dog town was quickly plowed under and planted to soybeans, with the displaced animals left to fend for themselves. Many were shot; others died from stress and lack of food.



Black-tailed Prairie Dog

Efforts to trap as many of the prairie dogs remaining as possible have been underway since late May. Those that are trapped will be relocated to the Hutton Niobrara Ranch near Bassett, which is owned and operated by Audubon of Kansas. AOK Executive Director Ron Klataske was assisted by Russ Soucek (Doane biology professor), Wachiska member Bruce Mellberg, retired Doane administrator Maureen Franklin, and others in procuring and setting up traps as well as checking them regularly. As of June 10, eight prairie dogs had been captured. Nebraska Wildlife Rehab began an intensive trapping effort immediately thereafter. As of this writing, we don't know how many they might capture in the end. All trapping must be done by June 30. Interested individuals are urged to consult the Wildlife Rehab website NebraskaWildliferehab.org for details and photos.

Expenses connected with this trapping and relocation have been considerable, and donations are welcome to both Nebraska Wildlife Rehab and Audubon of Kansas.

We were personally informed by a reliable source about four years ago that the site was being considered for sale by the Doane Board of Trustees, so it has been on our "watch list" for some time. Late in 2017, the source told us a sale appeared imminent. Wachiska's legislation committee discussed this over several months. For a time we were hopeful that some sort of easement might be placed on the prairie dog town prior to the

sale or there might be some other kind of protection that would allow the town to remain intact. Sadly, this did not come to pass; and even though we kept close tabs on what was happening, the conservation community could only observe the process like one would a train wreck.

Doane is by no means alone in the practice of selling off donated land, and it is actually a very common practice by institutions of higher learning. People who are contemplating donating a natural area to a college or university should negotiate terms in advance with representatives of the institution and put in writing requirements for the land transfer. Even better, the donors should place a conservation easement on natural areas they wish to have protected in perpetuity. It should be noted that in some instances, the institution would not want the property if it contained too many restrictions. In those cases, donors could perhaps make a deal with a nonprofit conservation organization such as Wachiska Audubon.

***Editor's Note:** As of June 23, 129 prairie dogs have been captured and relocated!*

30th Annual Birdathon Update - Good News

by Tim Knott

Wachiska members, friends, and supporters who donated to the Birdathon on Give to Lincoln Day this year did an outstanding job. Thank you to everyone for being so generous in helping Wachiska meet its budget goals. According to the latest information we've received from the Lincoln Community Foundation, Wachiska donors contributed \$18,415 on May 30. This includes our portion of the match which was \$1,656.99.

Don't forget the regular Birdathon. We are still hoping to get donations from as many of our members and friends as possible in order to accomplish what we need for the coming year. If you didn't participate in Give to Lincoln Day and have not yet sent in your blue and white envelope, please do so as soon as you can. Call our office if you would like another remittance envelope—but any envelope will be accepted! Let's make the 30th anniversary the best year ever for Birdathon donations.

29th Annual Backyard Garden Tour Report

Yet another Backyard Garden Tour is in the books for Wachiska, proving to be successful once again. The six host families for the seven sites did a stellar job of presenting their gardens to the Lincoln community and answering questions of visitors on Father's Day, June 17. The final tally showed that approximately 320 people visited the gardens. This major chapter fundraiser brought in over \$2,300 this year.

A hearty thank you to co-chairs Anne and Lynn Senkbeil and their dedicated committee once again!!! What's in store for the 30th annual event next year?

Birdathon 2018 Field Trips Synopsis

by John Carlini and Shari Schwartz

Ken Reitan, compiler

The cool weather brought a large volume of migrants into our area over Wachiska's 30th annual Birdathon Weekend, May 12 and 13. A variety of warblers provided a seemingly non-stop parade through the treetops for birders to relish, with many, such as Wilson's, making an appearance in notable numbers. Ken Reitan found more sora rails than one would expect at the Capitol Beach Nature Center. There were also possibly a dozen black-crowned night herons and half a dozen avocets seen at the nature center. Ironically, the **same number of bird species—148—were identified this year as in 2017.**

Included here are two photos taken by John Carlini during the Birdathon, one of a Wilson's warbler and the other of a black-crowned night heron. Below is the Birdathon species list that includes sightings by John Carlini, Shari Schwartz, Pete Maslowski, Esa Jarvi, Ken Reitan, and Larry Einemann as well as all the field trip participants who deserve mention for contributing to the list.

Common Loon
Snow Goose
Canada Goose
Wood Duck
Gadwall
Mallard
Blue-winged Teal
Northern Shoveler
Bufflehead
Green-winged Teal
Red-breasted Merganser
Sora
Ring-necked Pheasant
Wild Turkey
Northern Bobwhite
Pied-billed Grebe
American White Pelican
Neotropic Cormorant
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron



Black-crowned Night Heron

Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Turkey Vulture
Bald Eagle
Red-tailed Hawk
American Coot
American Avocet
American Golden Plover
Piping Plover
Semipalmated Plover
Killdeer

Lesser Yellowlegs
Solitary Sandpiper
Hudsonian Godwit
Spotted Sandpiper
Sanderling
Semipalmated Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper
White-rumped Sandpiper
Baird's Sandpiper
Pectoral Sandpiper
Stilt Sandpiper
Short-billed Dowitcher
Wilson's Phalarope
Franklin's Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Black Tern
Forster's Tern
Rock Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-dove
Mourning Dove
Barred Owl
Whip-poor-will
Chimney Swift
Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Red-headed Woodpecker
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Willow Flycatcher
Acadian Flycatcher
Least Flycatcher
Eastern Phoebe
Great Crested Flycatcher
Western Kingbird
Eastern Kingbird
Bell's Vireo
Yellow-throated Vireo
Blue-headed Vireo
Warbling Vireo
Philadelphia Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo

Blue Jay
American Crow
Purple Martin
Tree Swallow
Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Bank Swallow
Cliff Swallow
Barn Swallow
Black-capped Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
White-breasted Nuthatch
House Wren
Sedge Wren
Carolina Wren
Marsh Wren
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Eastern Bluebird
Swainson's Thrush
Wood Thrush
American Robin
Gray Catbird
Brown Thrasher
European Starling
Cedar Waxwing
Ovenbird
Golden-winged Warbler
Black and White Warbler
Tennessee Warbler
Orange-crowned Warbler
Mourning Warbler
Northern Parula
Magnolia Warbler
Yellow Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Blackpoll Warbler
American Redstart
Louisiana Waterthrush
Kentucky Warbler



Wilson's Warbler

Common Yellowthroat
Hooded Warbler
Summer Tanager
Scarlet Tanager
Eastern Towhee
Chipping Sparrow
Clay-colored Sparrow
Lark Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Grasshopper Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Lincoln's Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Harris's Sparrow
White-crowned Sparrow
Northern Cardinal
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Indigo Bunting
Dickcissel
Bobolink
Red-winged Blackbird
Eastern Meadowlark
Western Meadowlark
Yellow-headed Blackbird
Common Grackle
Great-tailed Grackle
Brown-headed Cowbird
Orchard Oriole
Baltimore Oriole
House Finch
American Goldfinch
House Sparrow

Wildlife Escape Ramps for Livestock Tanks

by Ross Scott, Conservation Committee

Water, while essential for life, can sometimes be a deadly attraction for birds and other small animals which venture into livestock water tanks for a drink. The slick, steep sides or low-water levels can make escape impossible. They swim round and round until exhausted, then inevitably die. To prevent this tragedy, wildlife escape ramps are recommended—even required if receiving cost share from a government agency. These ramps are designed to intercept the swimming animal giving them a safe, accessible 2:1 slope upon which to crawl up out of the water.



Recently Arnold Mendenhall designed two such ramps on new water tanks at Wachiska's Klapka farm. He and I installed the tanks, made of recycled earth-moving equipment tires. This procedure was especially challenging due to the curved interior walls. Arnold utilized hail screen and aluminum rods to conform to the sides and extend to the bottom of the tank. This prevents the animals from getting trapped behind the wire or not being able to reach the bottom of the ramp due to low-water levels.

Wachiska's water tanks are a definite win-win situation as they are safe for wildlife and utilize recycled tires. They reduce our carbon footprint while saving our beloved birds.

Native Prairie Plant Field Day

by Jim Locklear

Participants in the Nebraska Native Plant Society's field day on Saturday, June 9, had an outstanding opportunity to get



Prairie Anemone

acquainted with wet meadow tallgrass prairie, a rare and imperiled plant community associated with flood plain habitat in Nebraska.

Thanks to Mike Gutzmer for leading the tour of Witchey's

Island near Columbus and to Mike and his wife, Melanie, for providing a picnic lunch at Pawnee Park in Columbus.

Thanks also to the Wachiska Audubon Society for granting permission to access the Fertig Prairie near Schuyler and to Gerry Steinauer, state botanist with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, for leading the tour at the Fertig Prairie.

Around 25 folks participated in the field day, including two members of the Fertig family. Bobolinks were singing and displaying at both sites. It was a soggy, muggy, glorious day!

Showy Flowers of the Prairie

by Isaac Remboldt, Conservation Committee

White, purple, gold, and of course, lots of green were the colors encountered at Wachiska Audubon prairies during Wildflower Week in June. Each prairie has a different variety of flowers, and each week can yield a different array of early, midseason, or late bloomers.

Wildflowers aren't the only thing you'll encounter at the prairie. Plovers, chickadees, and red-winged blackbirds were all present. At the Berg West Prairie, you may even be lucky enough to catch another sighting of a bobolink.

Berg Prairie was burned in late January. Red clover had been invading the prairie but showed a large recession to native species this June. White anemone, penstemon, baptisia, yarrow, bindweed, purple phlox, and orange butterfly milkweed were all blooming during Wildflower Week, and a large portion of the prairie will be turned a bright yellow once the golden alexander blooms in late June or early July. Wild strawberry, garlic, and Indian plantain also made a showing at Berg Prairie.



Phlox

Dieken Prairie had similar flowers, with the addition of indigo spiderwort blooms, pink wild roses, and multicolored phlox. Watch in early July for a blooming western prairie orchid here! Porcupine grass, whose long thin seeds twist into the ground as they dry, was present in large amounts, as well.

Keep an eye out this fall for other blooming wildflowers such as culver's root and liatris. Prairie flowers can sometimes be found around town nestled into the landscaping, but some can only be found on prairies. The combination of tall grasses and flower density can make a visit to a Wachiska prairie well worthwhile.



Black-capped Chickadee



Spiderwort



Golden Alexander



Yellow Warbler

Climate Change Update

by Marilyn McNabb

Wind and Solar Energy News

The spring issue of *Audubon* magazine has an excellent article on how National Audubon and other wildlife defenders and wind companies are threading their way through the tensions between advancing the use of wind energy, which has killed birds, and slowing down climate change, which can eliminate whole species of birds. Find “How New Technology is Making Wind Farms Safer for Birds” on National Audubon’s website.

Several specific new technologies are described in the article and others are being developed and tested at government labs, universities, and tech companies. California condors are being protected by one system that has two basic parts: know if a bird is coming and make sure blades aren’t spinning when it arrives. If a condor comes within two miles of a turbine, a temporary shutdown is ordered until the bird is out of range. This occurs several times a week, depending on the season; so far, it’s working.

Clearly continuing vigilance will be needed with the best of systems. There will always be a pull toward avoiding shutdowns, which, if too frequent, could make a site economically unviable. But the key decision is siting. Projects must be outside migration corridors. As the Justice Department emphasized in the settlement agreement under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act for wind project bird kills by Duke (fined \$1 million) and PacificCorp (fined \$2.5 million), a turbine built in a high risk spot cannot be made safe by any known method.

For more on birds and wind project siting in Nebraska, Google the UNL site “Nebraska Wind Energy and Wildlife Project.”

June marked a year since President Trump announced his intent to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Agreement. In that time, two factors—the initiatives of corporate CEOs and the power of market forces—heighted the trend toward renewable energy. In April, early adopters Apple and Google met their targets for use of 100 percent renewable energy; 134 other very large companies have committed to a 100 percent clean energy future. For the list, see RE100.ORG.

Solar headlines seem often to be in superlatives. For example, in March, Microsoft announced “the single largest corporate purchase of solar power ever seen in the U.S.” Or Texas Public Radio’s June 12 story describing Austin’s “fastest-growing solar market in the U.S.” which signed a \$100 million deal. Best yet: “Warren Buffett secures amazing low prices for 1GW of solar.” Berkshire Hathaway signed a huge deal for six new solar farms to be built in Nevada, setting a record low price in the U.S. for solar power.

Wind and solar costs have fallen consistently for a decade. For 2016, the most recent year of available global data, about \$297 billion was spent on renewables compared to \$143 billion on new nuclear, coal, gas, and fuel oil power plants, according to the International Energy Agency which projects renewables will make up 56 percent of generating capacity by 2026.

It’s not enough. Even the Paris goals are not enough, but it’s moving in the right direction.

Fletcher Prairie Sign Repair

On May 9, a Wachiska member emailed the office that she’d seen that the Fletcher Prairie sign on the MoPac Trail needed some TLC; a board was missing and other boards appeared to be loose. This was relayed to the conservation committee. Then on May 11, two people with supplies in hand repaired the sign. On June 5, the same runner wrote back, “The new/repared sign looks great!” She included this photo of the newly repaired sign.



Butterfly

Lithe gentle spirit
flitting between fragrant petals
and new-mown grass.

Gracefully
you swoop before me,
stained-glass wings gliding
pausing
alighting
then lifting again
in your cheerful poetry of motion,

off in a spritely search
for other flowers,
other fields.

Lithe gentle spirit.



Nancy L. Savery

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Lincoln Journal Star

Letters to the editor, 926 P St, Lincoln NE 68508
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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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Lincoln NE 68506-5643

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American Goldfinch Family

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Monthly Programs/General Meetings.....	Arlys Reitan.....	WAS office 402-486-4846
Newsletter Editor.....	Arlys Reitan.....	WAS office 402-486-4846
Population/Environment.....	*Colleen Babcock.....	308-850-0445
Publicity/Public Relations.....	Jeanne Kern.....	402-423-0428

*Denotes Board member

OTHER ASSOCIATES

Bird Questions.....	Kevin Poague.....	402-797-2301
Facebook Coordinator.....	Benjamin Vogt.....	402-499-5851
Raptor Recovery.....	Betsy Finch (Elmwood).....	402-994-2009
Interim Executive Director Audubon Nebraska.....	Bill Taddicken.....	308-468-5282
Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center Director.....	Glynnis Collins.....	402-797-2301

NEBirds Website

Check out the email discussion at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NEBirds> to learn of the latest sightings and interesting tales of Nebraska's most avid birders and those interested in Nebraska birds and their ecology. Posts change daily—and even more often when excitement arises. Offerings of recent sightings, questions, and new photos are all welcome.

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

A Gift to the Future

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**.