Over 50 years ago, large nighttime kills of birds were reported from TV towers, especially in eastern North America. Shortly after dark, large flights of migratory birds were forced to fly low because of dropping cloud ceilings. Birds were attracted to lights on towers and many died upon impacting guy wires. Over 50,000 birds died at a single tower in one night. It has become apparent that perhaps an even larger number of birds collide with windows—maybe a billion birds a year. As lamentable as even a single death is, the real question is whether these sources of mortality affect entire populations. After all, the fate of every living thing is death, but we hope that populations persist. In the presentation at the November meeting, I will review how my colleague, Todd Arnold, and I have approached this problem and share our findings about the role of collisions with towers and windows in causing changes in bird populations.

Professor Bob Zink has held faculty positions at Louisiana State University and the University of Minnesota, where he was the Breckenridge Chair in Ornithology for 22 years. In 2016, he followed his wife to UNL, where he is currently a member of the School of Natural Resources and the School of Biological Sciences and also a curator in the Nebraska State Museum. His main research focus has been on the evolution of bird species and, more recently, on conservation genetics. At UNL, Bob’s lab is focusing on wildlife genetics, conducting ongoing projects with wild turkey, ring-necked pheasant, and deer. He is an avid fisherman, deer hunter, and bird hunter and spends as much time as possible at his cabin in northern Minnesota. Bob has written a book entitled The Three-Minute Outdoorsman.

Join Wachiska Audubon on Thursday, November 9, at 7:00 p.m. for this free public lecture and discussion at the Unitarian Church, 6300 A Street, in Lincoln. Park in the church lot; there is overflow parking in the Pius High School lot across the street to the west. Close, easy access to the building requires no steps to climb. There is plenty of space inside for mingling while enjoying refreshments and conversation after the program.

Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>November</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Population/Environment Committee, Mary’s house (call for address), 7:00 p.m.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Education Committee, Wachiska office, 6:00 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>General Meeting, “Things that Go Bump in the Night,” by Dr. Bob Zink, Unitarian Church, 7:00 p.m.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Newsletter deadline, Wachiska office, 5:00 p.m. (earlier date due to holiday)</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Field Trip to Pioneers Park Nature Center, 9:00 a.m. (page 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Field Trip to Nine-Mile Prairie, 10:00 a.m. (page 2)</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Conservation Committee, Wachiska office, 5:30 p.m.</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Legislation Committee, DaVinci’s, 11th &amp; G sts., 6:00 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Board Meeting, Wachiska office, 7:00 p.m.</td>
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Annual Meeting

The November general meeting is also the annual meeting with election of officers. See page 2.

NOTICE

See Malawi trip updated announcement on page 2.
Beyond the Backyard: Pioneers Park and Nine-Mile Prairie Visits

A weekend of tallgrass prairie exploration at the edge of Lincoln will offer two opportunities to see which birds might be calling the prairie home as the season transitions. As in the previous two November outings, we will be birding close to home, and you will not need a park sticker. Bring binoculars if you have them. We will also have a few pairs of binoculars to lend. If you have questions, call Esa at 402-440-6357. Both events are free and open to the public.

Saturday, November 11 - 9:00 a.m.
Meet at the parking lot of Pioneers Park Nature Center which is located southwest of West Van Dorn and South Coddington streets. We'll look for sparrows on our walk as well as blackbirds and waterfowl that could be present. Our route will follow maintained trails, but some areas could be damp.

Sunday, November 12 - 10:00 a.m.
Meet at the gravel parking lot for Nine-Mile Prairie located at the west end of West Fletcher Avenue, which runs west from NW 48th Street. This second prairie outing will give us another chance to search for grassland residents and sparrows along the woodland edges. The prairie has trails, and we will try to avoid wet spots if there are any. There are no facilities on the prairie; however, a gas station is nearby off NW 48th Street.

Annual Meeting in November

Wachiska’s November general meeting also serves as the annual meeting according to the chapter’s bylaws. On November 9, the following slate of officers for 2018 will be presented by the nominating committee:

President – Gary Fehr
Vice President – Stu Luttich
Recording Secretary – Richard Peterson
Treasurer – Bill Gustafson

Before the vote takes place, nominations will be accepted from the floor with the condition that each nominee is currently a Wachiska member and has given consent to be nominated.

If you are interested in running for one of the above positions, chairing a standing committee, or serving as a director at large, contact Gary Fehr, fehrgary@gmail.com, 402-570-4382; or the Wachiska office, office@wachiskaaudubon.org, 402-486-4846. Officers serve a one-year term which may be extended two times. Terms will begin January 1, 2018.

Lincoln’s Annual Christmas Bird Count

by Lauren Dinan

Calling all birders! Time is nearing for Audubon’s 118th Annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC), one of the longest-running citizen science projects in the world. The CBC is an amazing event where birdwatchers across the nation collect bird counts from both the field and yard feeders over a 24-hour period. Each year the CBC is held between December 14 and January 5. Data collected provides a snapshot of the status and distribution of various bird species and provides data that can be used to track long-term trends in bird populations. This data is available online and is used by many to better understand the population trends of various bird species and guide conservation efforts.

The Christmas Bird Count has become an annual holiday tradition for thousands of birders; it is easy to participate and is a fun, rewarding way to contribute to bird conservation annually. This year join us for the Lincoln area CBC which will be held on Saturday, December 16, and help us continue the annual holiday tradition of collecting vital bird data. Participants are needed at all birding levels. Arrangements can be made to pair up novice observers with more knowledgeable birders. To participate in the Lincoln area CBC as either a field or feeder counter, contact Lauren Dinan at ngpc.nongamebird.temp@nebraska.gov.

Note: Any rescheduling due to inclement weather will be communicated via email.

Malawi Trip Rescheduled

Wachiska has received several inquiries for the trip to Malawi that was proposed for this coming January; however, due to the need to have reservations and other pertinent arrangements firmed up by this time, it has been decided to postpone this idea for a year and, hopefully, a January 2019 trip can become reality. At this point, there are about a half dozen interested people. The ideal size of such a trip would be 8-20. If you were contemplating taking part, please contact Nancy Hamer at 402-499-1306, travelwachiska@gmail.com, or the Wachiska office directly.

 Belize Announcement

While waiting for Malawi to happen, you may want to investigate a trip to Belize this coming March 3-11, 2018, with the Audubon Society of Omaha. Check out this website for trip details, photos, and contact information: https://audubon-omaha.org.presencehost.net/go-birding/international-birding.html. Note on the website that there is a $100 discount for those registering by December 1. Check out opportunities for snorkeling, bird banding, bat mist-netting, etc.
Cane Toads
by Richard Peterson

The cane toad (Rhinella marina), also known as the giant neotropical toad or marine toad, is native to the Americas ranging from South Texas through Central into South America and the Amazon. Initially the toad was introduced into other countries as a predator on various insect pests. Away from home they seem to thrive in close proximity to humans. Australia has a toad problem worse than most with 1.5 billion cane toads as the result of 3,000 introduced in 1935. It is considered an invasive species in over 20 countries.

They have found a home in South Florida. How they got here is due to the exotic pet trade and an accidental release in 1957. Today, the toad is well established from the Florida Keys to north of Tampa and are gradually moving north. Temperatures below 45°F seem to limit their march but, with global warming, they may be moving to a town near you.

Cane toads are not small by toad standards. They range from five to six inches from head to tail with the largest ones recorded at over nine inches long, and they can weigh up to five pounds. Females are considerably larger than males and can live 10-15 years in the wild. Besides insects, they gobble up worms, snakes, grubs, snails, mice, small rats, bats, young birds, pet food, and all manner of human leftovers. These toads have been seen eating pizza toppings at a dumpster. Did I mention they are poisonous? Located in the skin and the paratoid glands behind the eyes, the white, viscous substance (biogenic amines and steroid derivatives) produce muscle spasms, constrict blood vessels, and cause heart arrhythmia. Curious dogs are frequent victims.

At night cane toads can be seen sitting in groups under street lights waiting for the next bug to drop. When Floridians awake, the toads are seen squatting on the front walk, in the coils of the garden hose, by the hot tub on the patio. They sit and look at you as if you owe them money. They make a sound described as a slowly pulsed, rattling trill, like an idling diesel engine.

Pest control companies don’t know how to get rid of these cane toads, as the usual poison baits are for warm-blooded animals. The state has no limit on how many cane toads you can harvest. When properly prepared, the meat is considered a healthy source of omega-3 fatty acids. The toxin has been used in Japan as an aphrodisiac and a hair restorer. Even dead toads have value, being made into leather items or being stuffed, posed, accessorized, and sold on the tourist market.

The October 19 Prairie Preservation Luncheon drew over 25 participants, all who share a love of prairies and a desire to see them preserved for future generations. After a delightful lunch of lasagna, salad, and homemade pies, the program featured a sharing of prairie experiences and the challenges Wachiska faces as we work to protect this rapidly disappearing ecosystem.

Dr. Paul Johnsgard kicked off the program with descriptions and photos of his prairie experiences. Students from the Bluestem Montessori School joined us for this part of the presentation. They listened with rapt attention as Johnsgard detailed how tallgrass prairie originally sprang from the enormous stretches of sandy beach left behind by a great inland seaway once covering most of what is now the Great Plains. He showed photos of the many amazing grasses, flowers, and insects which populate today’s prairies.

Discussion turned to Wachiska’s preservation efforts. Arnold Mendenhall, a career grasslands manager and longtime Wachiska volunteer, described the enormous amount of work going into managing the prairies that Wachiska protects—burning, fence repair, managing grazing, increasing challenges controlling invasive species, annual easement inspections, paperwork required for CRP contracts, tenant leases, legal issues. The workload has grown past the point where it can be adequately handled by volunteers alone.

“Think about what we’ve taken on: 32 prairies dotting an area from the eastern border of Nebraska to U.S. Highway 81, from near the Kansas border to 180 miles north. Wachiska has agreed to protect these prairies in perpetuity. Think about that. Perpetuity is a long time.” – Arnold Mendenhall

Because of these responsibilities, Wachiska established the Prairie Management Fund and Prairie Legal Defense Fund in 2015, with the ultimate goal of establishing a $1 million endowment to provide funds to hire a prairie manager. Currently these funds total about $225,000 and are held at the Lincoln Community Foundation.

At the luncheon, we discussed the many ways individuals can make donations to the Prairie Management Fund, and several donors described their experiences:

- Nancy Hinnah says every year she directs the required minimum distribution from her IRA to charities of her choice, including Wachiska. “It’s simple,” says Nancy. “I just tell my advisor which organizations I want to give to, and he takes care of all the details. And I make these gifts tax-free.”
- Linda Brown has given some appreciated stock. “I contacted the Lincoln Community Foundation. They handled all the transactions, so the full value went to Wachiska without any capital gains tax. Win-win!”
- Marilyn McNabb is planning a charitable gift annuity. “The Foundation will set this up so I’ll get a 5.7 percent payout for the rest of my life, and Wachiska will get the balance when I’m gone.”
- Elizabeth Nelson described how she gives monthly. “It’s easy to set up regular monthly gifts, either by using the Lincoln Community Foundation website or calling their office.”

There are many other ways to give, and Wachiska can help you find what’s best for you. Gifts should be directed to the Wachiska Prairie Management Fund #710146 at the Lincoln Community Foundation. Contact your financial planner, the Foundation, or Wachiska Donor Development Committee Chair Elizabeth Nelson at 402-770-3485, enelson555@gmail.com.

Peg and Larry Fletcher created their prairie from cropland over the past 17 years. The Fletchers showed off bags they used to collect seeds from other native prairies and then sowed on their land. “We have seen wonders upon wonders on our prairie, and we’re grateful that Wachiska will be monitoring our prairie conservation easement for many years to come.”

Larry and Peg Fletcher
We Can’t Do this Alone
You Are What Hope Looks Like to a Bird

This spring Arlys Reitan suggested I check into details for the National Audubon convention to be held in Park City, Utah, in July. I looked into registration and found scholarships were available. I applied and was surprised that I received a $600 stipend. Now I wondered what was next because I know so little about our organization—prairies, plants, birds, ecosystems . . . not to mention the additional trip expenses including that my car had 222,000 miles on it already. I’d have to rent a car and drive through the mountains.

My daughter arranged for time off from work. I got registered online while wondering how I would fit in with Auduboners from around the country and even internationally. These people have been working on Audubon issues for years—decades for some. My resume showed I’ve just volunteered for seed collecting, office work, birdseed sales, prairie education, backyard tours.

We traveled 2,276 miles roundtrip, taking two days to arrive in Utah. A beautiful mountain setting known for ski resorts, we stayed a few blocks from convention central. The first morning walk to the site was quite a strenuous hike uphill as my muscles seemed lethargic and breathing was strenuous. But it was a purely gorgeous, cool morning—not the 97 degrees and humidity we had been experiencing back home.

The opening convocation was given by President David Yarnold, the tenth Audubon president just finishing his seventh year at the helm. His message was uplifting and didn’t dwell on the current political situation. His short talk included a film of Auduboners telling who they were, where they live, and why they had joined Audubon to carry out their passions. Included was a short clip of our Jason St. Sauver at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center giving three of his crow bird calls and comments. It made us laugh and we recalled his talk during the rest of the time.

Each day we heard more about the different ways to network for conservation. There were 435 attendees from 80 chapters in 37 states and nine countries. This included six high school students from I MATTER and a 12-year-old Florida girl who has been following Audubon online and wanted to come.

Every day we were hearing ways to bring young, old, other cultures, and more diversity to Audubon and telling our stories of how we come together through the flyways. There is so much to do, and we can hook up with schools, churches, families,

legislatures, city-county, and state groups with like interests. Making our activities more family friendly seemed to be popular. Moreover, giving our presentations for some of the many centers in Lincoln would be beneficial outreach—the Indian Center, Malone Center, People’s City Mission, to name a few.

All our delicious meals were catered in a huge white tent outside the hotel. While we were presenting our posters from our Audubon chapters, someone encouraged us outside to see a huge double rainbow that seemed to go all the way down the valley. Then on the weekend we saw the hot air balloons in the sky overhead. My daughter saw a moose at Silver Lake. We visited the Swaner Preserve ecosystem on the edge of town.

All in all, we had a wonderful experience. I’m wondering how many of our members have been to a National Audubon convention? We’d like to hear your stories.

(Editor’s Note: At right is Lana’s poster describing Wachiska’s prairie project.)

Spoiler Alert: Reserve December 14 to witness first hand Lana’s remarks of Jason St. Sauver’s bird calls which he will demonstrate at our holiday party.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Needs Our Help Once Again and the Time is NOW

On October 19, the U.S. Senate voted 52-48 against an amendment that would have removed from the Congressional budget, language that would open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas development. Both of Nebraska’s senators voted with the majority. While the amendment failed, we still have a path to victory that keeps the Arctic Refuge wild. But we need all hands on deck to help us.

How you can help:

- Write a letter/email to the editor of the Lincoln Journal Star. With the Senate vote receiving significant coverage in the media, this is a perfect time to help raise the profile of the Refuge and call for its protection.
- Share information on your own social media network. Go to Audubon.org to the Arctic Refuge site and press “Take Action” where you can send a message directly to senators Sasse and Fischer. This site has lots of information and lists reasons why this move will be disastrous to birds as well as other wildlife. (Keep in mind the green button pictured in the left column of Lana’s article above—we are the only hope that birds have in this dire situation.)

The Babbling Brook

November 2017

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Climate Change Update  
by Marilyn McNabb

Effects of Hurricane Harvey on Birds and their Habitat

National Geographic reporter Craig Welch contacted climate scientists with national reputations at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Colorado, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the Department of Energy’s Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. All of them agreed the volume of rain from Hurricane Harvey was almost certainly driven up by temperature increases from human carbon dioxide emissions. Heavy rains caused extensive damage but so did the fact that the storm stalled over Houston. The failure of the storm to move on was probably not due to climate change but rather to the coming together of two high pressure systems driving Harvey in opposite directions.

Hot, wet ocean air gives storms their energy. The potential for wind speeds to rise rapidly increases under warmer conditions. Late summer temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico now average more than two degrees Fahrenheit warmer than they did 30 years ago, according to the National Center for Atmospheric Research. It is more likely than not that climate change contributed to a late surge of Harvey’s wind speed before land fall. So the volume of precipitation and wind speeds at landfall were likely made worse by climate change; the stalled dump of rains over the city is likely attributable to weather and bad luck.

Someday, one imagines, our popular press will be able to report news with multiple causes. That complexity could improve debate on public policy.

On its website http://www.audubon.org/, National Audubon reports on the sites owned or managed by Houston Audubon or Audubon Texas that were affected by Harvey. Urban sites suffered heavy damage. More than 170 coastal islands, some not much bigger than sandbars, are owned or leased by Audubon Texas.

After the storm moved on, National Audubon staffer Preeti Desai accompanied the first trip of Audubon specialists to the islands off the coast of Galveston. They wanted to assess loss of land and plant cover and its possible effects on nesting species in the future. At their first stop at a long low island, they determined that only a thin strip, about three or four feet above sea level, stayed above water during the hurricane. Shells and rocks had been washed onto the land, burying prickly pear cactus that birds use for shelter. Similarly, shells, rocks, and trash had littered the next island they visited, but it also was lively with recently fledged and adult birds.

The initial estimate was that four acres of land were lost. Later, aerial imagery will help to assess more precisely land loss and habitat damage. The full effects of the hurricane will not be known until next year’s breeding season. Even before the hurricane, there has been competition for space between species such as reddish egrets, tricolored herons, and brown pelicans. Much of the cleanup and restoration will be conducted by an Audubon community science program of volunteers.

If you come across what looks like alternative facts attacking electric cars, it’s probably part of a campaign well-funded by the oil billionaire Koch brothers. If you’re curious, there’s a lot of information at kochvsclean.com. In the meantime, a Chinese official announced in September that they will be setting a timetable for the end to gas and diesel car sales in China. Others have already done that: Norway by 2025, India by 2030, Scotland by 2032, France and Britain by 2040. (See David Roberts in Vox, 9/13/17.)

What’s New at SCPAC?

Nocturnal November – Friday, November 10, 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. Come out and experience the sounds of November! Learn about nocturnal prairie creatures followed by a walk to listen for owls, coyotes, and more. $5/person or $8/family.

Holiday Open House – Sunday, December 3, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. We’re celebrating winter and the holiday season on the prairie with activities for the whole family, great (and green) holiday decorating ideas, live music, snacks, cider, and more. Free admission, no registration needed.

(Full details at springcreekprairie.audubon.org, 402-797-2301, or scp@audubon.org.)

Looking for Writers

Prairie Citizen, an online forum of ideas about nature, community, and life in the grasslands, is looking for writers. Our team includes several writers from Prairie Fire (which you may remember) and the PF production team. We are very much following in the spirit of PF to be a platform for environmental, social, and cultural writing and discussion, with a focus on the Great Plains bioregion. A voice for the environment and social justice is needed now, and we need many voices to be part of our community.

We’re in a “soft launch” as we tweak the website and add more content. We’re hoping to have a launch party this winter or next spring.

To find out more about us and our mission, go to prairiecitizen.com.

To submit your writing, visit prairiecitizen.submittable.com/submit.
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.

Friends of Wachiska (local membership)

Name__________________________
Address________________________
City_____________ County_________ State___ Zip ________
Phone___________________________
E-mail__________________________

--- $25 Individual/Friend
--- $35 Family Friend
--- $50 Black-capped Chickadee Friend
--- $100 Northern Cardinal Friend
--- $250 Western Meadowlark Friend
--- $500 Bald Eagle Friend
--- $1000 Peregrine Falcon Friend

Select the level of support that is right for you and make your check payable to *Wachiska Audubon Society*. All funds 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

--- 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 monthly newsletter each month. If you wish to join NAS or receive *Audubon* magazine, please contact National Audubon Society directly.

American Goldfinch family
Wachiskans Are THE Best

Once again it’s apparent that Wachiska has the very best volunteers.

Last month Linda Sullivan, our newsletter layout person and computer guru, was in a horrible auto accident on I-80. Thankfully, she is recuperating wonderfully and getting back to her full schedule, using only one crutch at this time; however, she was still in the hospital when the October issue of The Babbling Brook was due. Kevin Poague stepped in to fill the gap without missing a beat after having been away from the Wachiska newsletter process for several years. THANK YOU, KEVIN!! And it’s good to have Linda back to work on this November issue, too.

— Editor

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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.

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.