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 41st Year of Protecting Nature 1973 - 2014

General Meeting—Thursday, November 13, 7:00 p.m., Dick Administration Building, Union College, Lincoln

Understanding and Assessing Climate Change: Implications for Nebraska

by Dr. Clint Rowe, Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, UNL

At our November general meeting, Dr. Clint Rowe will present a short overview of the science of climate change and then focus on observations of change that has already occurred and projections of change in the future, proceeding from a global perspective to a more regional/local one (i.e., central Plains and Nebraska). The discussion will cover the potential impacts of climate change, focusing on ecosystem impacts in our region. This will include a discussion of how the timing of critical biological events (such as bud burst, emergence from overwintering, and migrations) has shifted, impacting both species and their habitats. Climate change can also increase the vulnerability of ecosystems to extreme events (which may themselves increase in frequency or magnitude as the climate changes) and to fire, insect infestations, drought, and disease outbreaks.

Clint Rowe is a professor in the meteorology-climatology program of the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where he has been on the faculty for more than 25 years. Rowe received his PhD in climatology from the University of Delaware in 1988. His research interests are focused on the interaction between the land surface and the atmosphere. His primary tools in this endeavor are computer simulation models of the land surface and the atmosphere, although he also has been involved in observational field programs in Greenland and the Nebraska Sand Hills. With support from the University of Nebraska’s Holland Computer Center, Clint and colleague Bob Oglesby have established a research group dedicated to filling a major gap in climate change research capability at the regional, national, and international levels: the need for accurate and precise information on climate change at local and regional scales that will enable more accurate projections for informed decision making about adaptation to climate change. As part of this effort, they have conducted downscaling simulations of global climate model output for Mesoamerica, Bolivia, and South and Southeast Asia. Moreover, they continue to conduct training workshops in Mesoamerica and Asia to make this information available in an understandable and accessible format to the stakeholders and policy makers who must develop and implement strategies for adapting to climate change. (Editor’s note: Professor Rowe is co-author of UNL’s climate assessment which was just released September 25.)

Join Wachiska on Thursday, November 13, at 7:00 p.m. for this free public presentation in the Union College Dick Auditorium, 3800 South 48th Street, in Lincoln. From 48th and Calvert streets, go one block south to the north end of campus. Free parking is available on both sides of 48th Street and in the College View SDA Church parking lots. There is additional parking north of the new science building. Look for Audubon signs on the Dick Building’s doors. There is a ramp at the east entrance and an elevator inside. Refreshments will be served after the program.
Field Trip
by John Carlini, Field Trip Chair

Autumn Hike at Conestoga Lake

Crisp November air and the grasslands next to Conestoga Lake State Recreation Area will be the setting for an early afternoon bird hike. We'll check the woodlands for treasures lurking in the cedar stands like white-throated sparrows, fox sparrows, cedar waxwings, and golden-crowned kinglets. Migrants could possibly be traveling overhead depending on wind conditions.

We'll meet at 1:00 p.m. on Sunday, November 16, on the south side of the State Capitol in Lincoln, at 15th and H streets across from the governor's mansion. Anyone preferring to meet at the lake can join the group around 1:30 p.m. in the parking lot on the south side of the lake. Bring a water bottle and binoculars and scope if you have them. State park entry permits are required and day passes are available for $5/vehicle. The public is welcome. If you have questions, call John at 402-475-7275.

Summary of Recent Field Trips
by Ken Reitan, Field Trip Committee Board Representative

The August 24 field trip to Jack Sinn Wildlife Management Area and Omaha initially involved eight people. The water was high at Jack Sinn, so the birding was slow; however, great egrets and Forster's terns were seen along with a few other species. On the way to Omaha, the group stopped at a sod farm near Yutan. The farm was very wet which attracted shorebirds. Dowitchers and semipalmated plovers were seen there, but the best sighting was a ruddy turnstone. In Omaha, the purple martin numbers were at a peak. Five people remaining in the group saw an estimated 50,000 purple martins in about six trees near the southwest corner of UNMC. The birds sounded like a waterfall, and the participants got a little dirty from the droppings. It was an amazing experience.

On September 14, the field trip destination was Waubonsie State Park in Iowa, across the Missouri River from Nebraska City. The five participants agreed the trip was perfectly timed for the fall warbler migration. A dozen warbler species were seen including golden-winged warbler, chestnut-sided warbler, several black-throated green warblers, black and white warbler, American redstart, and ovenbird. A ruby-crowned kinglet was also observed. This was a very good day of birding.

Old Audubon Magazines Needed

While planning for next February’s Bird EnCOUNTer, the committee is asking for back copies of Audubon magazine if you are ready to part with them. Bring them to the Wachiska office. You can drop them off outside our door on second floor. Thanks.

Annual Meeting in November

At Wachiska’s annual meeting November 13, the following slate of officers will be presented for 2015 by the nominating committee:

President – Elizabeth Nelson
Vice President – Jessi Umberger
Recording Secretary – Bob Boyce
Corresponding Secretary – Joe Francis
Treasurer – Gary Fehr

Nominations will be accepted from the floor with the condition that each nominee is currently a 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, call President Elizabeth Nelson at 402-770-3485 or the Wachiska office at 402-486-4846. Officers serve a one-year term which may be extended two times.

Christmas Bird Count
by Michelle Johnson

Calling all birders ... time is nearing for the 115th Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count

This year marks Audubon’s 115th annual Christmas Bird Count where citizen scientists collect bird counts from both the field and yard feeders over a 24-hour period. The data collected provides necessary information on various bird species statistics and their annual trends. This information is available online and is being used by many to better understand the population trends of various bird species and guide conservation efforts. Tens of thousands of birders participate in the annual event, representing 2,300 circles across the nation. Lincoln’s bird count circle is a 15-mile diameter around the Coddington and West A Street area.

The Christmas Bird Count is held between December 14 and January 5 every year. Over the past several years, Wachiska has held its count on the first Saturday after the initial day. Please join us on Saturday, December 20, as the Lincoln area citizen scientists continue the long 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 as either a field or feeder counter, please contact either Michelle Johnson at michellej02@inebraska.com or Josef Kren at josefkren@yahoo.com.

Note: Any rescheduling due to inclement weather will be communicated via email.
Conservation Easements Need Support

We have to adjust to changes throughout our lives. When I was on the family farm, the modern farming technique to increase crop production was to rotate crops whereby a field would be in alfalfa for three or more years to fix nitrogen into the soil so it would accommodate nitrogen utilizing corn and sometimes small grains for the next few years. This process was best accomplished with smaller 20- to 60-acre fields with a grassy or weedy divider strip between the fields. Thickets and trees often grew in these divider strips. This arrangement accommodated birds and wildlife very well. Pheasants, quail, ground nesting birds, small animals, and predators were abundant in this combination of grass, weeds, and crops. Deer had not been reestablished by the Game and Parks Commission in many areas until the 1960s, but if they were around, I’m sure that habitat would have accommodated them.

In the late 1940s and ‘50s urban areas were rapidly expanding into what had been farm fields. Any trees in the divider strips were removed to make room for housing developments. So the cities had large areas of treeless lawns while the country had bird-accommodating habitat. If folks wanted to interact with birds and wildlife, they headed for the country.

With the introduction of chemical fertilizers and center pivot irrigators, the fields have become a vast insecticide/herbicide treated monoculture that does not support the insects and plant life necessary for bird and wildlife propagation or activity.

Meanwhile, the urban area trees, shrubbery, and habitat have grown to better accommodate birds, pollinators, and wildlife attested by the squirrels in your bird feeders, the rabbits eating your landscaping, or raccoons living under your porch. Even opossums, deer, and other wildlife are seen or killed by autos in northeast Lincoln. That indicates the habitat is there even though most of the area is still cool season lawns which do not support wildlife or pollinators.

Even though the habitat increases in the cities, it does not nearly offset the decrease in the rural areas which is a consideration we should all think about when landscaping our yards.

The decrease in habitat during this period has been countered by a great expansion of wildlife management properties and by Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, and similar conservation organizations, including the notable work of Wachiska in preserving 27 prairie sites through ownership and conservation easements.

This brings me to my primary point of noting the difficulty of achieving habitat preservation when conservation easements are so strongly objected to by certain interests. For example, LB529 that would outlaw permanent conservation easements was introduced in the 2011 Nebraska legislative session, and the issue continues to be debated in the Legislature to this day. The reasons the issue continues to be promoted in many rural counties may not even be valid if thoroughly investigated. Here is where “adjusting to changes” comes into evidence. When conservation easements first came into use they were supported by the agricultural community as a way to limit urban development’s encroachments onto agricultural areas; however, now that conservation groups are using the easements, many in the agricultural community are objecting to them.

We all need to be aware of this type of legislation and express our opposition to our state senators. Decreasing habitat for pollinators and other wildlife not only affects our quality of life by reducing wildlife enjoyment, but it could ultimately affect our food supply since one of every three bits of food we consume requires pollinators.

Birdseed Available for Sale

by Arlys Reitan, Office Administrator

After another successful Fall Birdseed Sale, the following bags of seeds are still available for your backyard birds’ dining pleasure. Please let me know via phone or email if you can use any of the following:

3 bags of Classic Audubon Mix, 20-lb. bag $19/bag
1 bag of Nyjer Thistle, 8-lb. bag $10/bag
4 bags of Sunflower Hearts, course, 20-lb. bag $27/bag
11 bags of Sunflower Seed, black oil, 25-lb. bag $15/bag

Membership Matters

by Joyce Vannier, Membership Chair

Wachiska welcomes 11 new Audubon members this month. They are Carey Collingham, Claudia Davis & Bill Aukman, Janet Dieckgrafe, Melissa Filipi, E. W. Getman, Jerry Jacobitz, Dana Kumpost, Kelly Maxwell, Yvonne Richardson, Donald Steiner, and Linda Strasheim.

Join us for a program or field trip yet this year. Contact the office if you have questions. The website has posts updated monthly.

Snowbirds – Apparently after a period of time, the post office is no longer forwarding newsletters mailed via the class Wachiska uses, so we end up paying for the returns. Please notify us when you leave and return so we can make changes. Also let us know when you move. These steps would save us many, many dollars.
In 2002, Margaret Nichols contacted Wachiska Audubon and asked about permanently protecting a 10-acre prairie which she owned about eight miles southeast of Geneva. Upon examining this prairie vegetation, we very willingly gave her a conservation easement. This is basically a tallgrass prairie with big bluestem being the dominant grass with some Indian grass also present. Scattered among the big bluestem are patches of grass species more commonly found in the mid-grass area further to the west, such as porcupine grass, little bluestem, and sideoats grama. Forbs, although not present in large numbers, are represented by such species as leadplant, prairie cone-flower, purple and white prairie-clovers, and silver-leaved and many-flowered scurf-peas.

Margaret’s grandfather, William Gewacke, (pronounced GAY-who-key) bought the farm in 1919 and passed it along to her father Clyde in 1945. Margaret recalls that as a teenager she belonged to a 4-H Club. One of the club’s projects was to furnish displays of native prairie plants at county fairs. She said many of the plants were gathered at her family’s prairie. When Margaret inherited the prairie in 1996, she knew she wanted to preserve it in its pristine condition, and that is when she established a conservation easement on the land with Wachiska Audubon as the easement holder. The Gewacke Prairie is prime, level, agricultural land. If it had not been for Margaret’s thoughtful stewardship, this prairie would have been plowed up long ago.

It may be of interest to know that, due to a Fillmore County record search by Wachiska member Stu Luttich, the township in which the Gewacke Prairie is located was originally named “Beautiful Prairie Township” due to the “pleasing lay of the land.” Somewhat later the township was renamed Belle Prairie “in honor of a very pretty girl who lived there at that time with her parents.” The 10-acre Gewacke Prairie is basically all that remains of an alluring sea of grass in “Beautiful Prairie” Township.

Recently, Margaret decided to offer her prairie for sale to Wachiska. Farmland in that area is selling for around $7,000/acre and Margaret has offered it to Wachiska at far below market value. This is an opportunity Wachiska should not miss!

Can You Help Us Purchase the Gewacke Prairie?

by Elizabeth Nelson, Wachiska President

Exciting News! Wachiska Audubon has the opportunity to purchase a high-quality prairie in Fillmore County, the Gewacke Prairie. (See the article by Ernie Rousek above for details about the prairie.)

Wachiska’s conservation committee has completed a careful study of this land. The Wachiska Board has reviewed the committee’s evaluation and management plan and has voted to approve the purchase. This prairie is in very good condition, and the annual haying required to keep it in top shape will generate the revenue needed to pay the taxes on the land and cover any needed maintenance. So once we cover the purchase price, this land will generally be self-supporting.

Please help us raise $10,000 towards the purchase of this land

The landowners have offered this prairie parcel to Wachiska at a price considerably below the “cropland value” as they trust Wachiska to care for the land and keep the conservation easement secure. Wachiska has been saving for such purchases, but additional donations would be extremely helpful. **Our goal is to raise $10,000 by December 15, 2014 to be used toward the purchase of this property.** Please consider making a year-end gift to Wachiska to help with this important conservation project. Your donation to Wachiska Audubon Society is tax-deductible.
Beautiful Bruce Wendorff Mounted Photographs – Wachiska’s Thank You to Major Donors

Bruce Wendorff’s photographs have been among the most popular auction items at fundraisers for Wachiska, Rowe Sanctuary, and Spring Creek Prairie. Bruce’s stunning full-color photos of some of Nebraska’s favorite birds have sold for $100, $200, and more at these auctions. These photographs, printed on canvas and mounted, are ready-to-hang in your own home or they make an extra-special gift. Donors making gifts of $500 or more qualify to receive a Wendorff photograph as our thank you. If your donation is received by November 30, you can choose from seven beautiful bird images and have your photograph in time for holiday giving. Donations received after that time will entitle the donor to receive their photograph by the end of January 2015.

Send this form and your check to Wachiska Audubon Society, 4547 Calvert Street, Suite 10, Lincoln, NE 68506. Note Gewacke Prairie Purchase on the memo line of your check. You will receive a letter confirming your tax-deductible donation, and we will contact you as to your selection of a thank-you gift.

If you have any questions, please contact Wachiska President Elizabeth Nelson at 402-770-3485 or Don Pepperl, past president and project coordinator, at 402-489-9321. Thank you for your consideration in helping to preserve this virgin Nebraska prairie forever!

Yes, I’ll make a donation to help Wachiska Audubon purchase the Gewacke Prairie!

I (we) will make a sustaining gift of

☐ $25  ☐ $50  ☐ $100  ☐ $250  Other amount $__________________

Donors making gifts of $500 or more qualify to receive a Wendorff photograph as Wachiska Audubon’s thank you.

☐ $ 500 - Receive your choice of any Wendorff photograph in 11” x 14” size
☐ $ 750 - Receive your choice of any Wendorff photograph in 16” x 20” size
☐ $1000 - Receive your choice of any Wendorff photograph in 24” x 36” size
☐ Custom donation amounts welcome $__________________
Another mountain lion was killed recently in Knox County in Northeast Nebraska. This is the tenth reported cougar death this year, not counting the unknown number of kittens that starved when a lactating female was killed earlier. Here is my tally:

1 & 2 – Two were killed on January 1 and 2 at the start of Nebraska’s first hunting season. Both were killed by treeing the animals with dogs, then shooting them execution style. One was killed by a man who bought the permit ($13,500) at auction; the other was killed by a teenager who won a Nebraska Game and Park’s fundraising lottery.

3 – An adult male was accidentally killed by a vehicle on February 1 in Sioux County.

4 – An adult was accidently killed by a cable entanglement in Custer County on February 16.

5 – An adult female was killed for sport on February 26 in Sioux County, ending the second phase of legal hunting, but leaving most of the state open for the rest of the year.

6 – A young male was shot on March 21 when seen "threatening" a chicken coop in Sheridan County.

7 – An adult was caught in a trap set in Sioux County sometime in late June. The trap was left unattended by federal government trappers, and the decaying carcass was not found until early July.

8 – A 30-pound female was shot near Chadron in Sioux County on July 19.

9 – A lactating female was illegally shot by a hunter in early September in Sioux County. Her kittens were not found and no doubt starved.

10 – A 157-pound adult male was killed legally by a hunter in Knox County on October 5. It was killed in the prairie hunting unit, which covers about 85 percent of the state, and remains open to legal hunting for the rest of the year.

Unless sufficient outrage is made evident over the fact than in less than a year over half of the state's estimated mountain lion population might have been eliminated, thanks in part to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's efforts to make killing mountain lions a sport, it is likely there will be another season next year. It is a real money-maker for the Commission, probably bringing in $15,000 in lottery proceeds and license fees. I urge members of Wachiska to make their feelings on this subject known to the Game and Parks Commission and to local media.

SunShares Update

You can still sign up for LES’s SunShares community solar project. The size of Lincoln’s first large solar project will be determined by how many LES customers participate. As of October 1, 868 Lincolmites had signed up. Negotiations are underway. Call LES at 402-475-4211. Check out their website, too, to sign up.

The new UNL report on climate change in Nebraska does not beat around the bush. The second sentence of the Introduction says, "The body of scientific evidence confirms with a high degree of certainty that human activities in the form of increased concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs) since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, changes in land use, and other factors are the primary cause for the warming of the planet has experienced, especially in recent decades." (my emphasis) It continues, "Projected changes, and the rapidity of these changes are unprecedented." The report warns about effects occurring now and, if business as usual continues, what we can expect this century. The report is about Nebraska and written by expert Nebraskans. That’s hard to ignore.

Dr. Clint Rowe with the UNL Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, a lead author of the report, will be our speaker at the November general meeting.

The report included comments from specialists with knowledge and practical experience in key sectors like water, energy, agriculture, and the insurance industry. Wachiskan Chuck Francis wrote about agriculture, proposing moving away from "monoculture thinking" and instead "introducing more biodiversity in time (rotations) and in space (multiple species in the field)" to gain greater resilience and control erosion and evaporation in the face of intense rains, drought, and other effects of climate instability.

Mace Hack with The Nature Conservancy’s Nebraska chapter considered ecosystems. He indicated that given more intense rainstorms in the future, we have a choice between building ever higher and stronger levees along the Missouri River or instead, reconnecting the river to areas of the floodplain that are not developed, allowing floodplains to absorb floodwaters and release them slowly into the main channel. He called for new public/private partnerships in order to expand the scope of public and private lands managed for conservation of natural communities and wildlife.

Rick Schneider, Nebraska Game and Parks' Natural Heritage Program director, noted it is well documented that in recent decades, species of wild plants and animals have shifted their ranges, following the climate to which they are adapted. Also documented are earlier springs which change the timing of annual events in the life cycle of species such as migration, insect emergence, flowering, and leaf out. Wetlands, lakes, streams, and rivers are expected to be most highly affected.

"Understanding and Assessing Climate Change: Implications for Nebraska" can be found here: http://snr.unl.edu/research/projects/climateimpacts/reportannouncement.asp. You may still be able to pick up a printed copy at Hardin Hall, first floor, publications area. A video of the Heuermann Lecture presenting the report is here: http://heuermannlectures.unl.edu.
Public Officials

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Lincoln Journal Star
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Membership
Wachiska offers two choices of membership. Local membership, called Friends of Wachiska, includes receiving The Babbling Brook, our chapter’s monthly newsletter. It also includes voting privileges and attendance at monthly meetings, programs, and field trips. All membership dues from a local membership stay with Wachiska to support chapter activities such as prairie preservation and education.

Membership in the National Audubon Society also includes membership in our local chapter, Wachiska. You will receive Audubon magazine from National Audubon along with The Babbling Brook.

Friends of Wachiska (local membership)
Name ____________________________________________
Address __________________________________________
City __________________________ State ______ Zip_________
Phone __________________________ Recruited by________
E-mail ____________________________________________

$20 Individual/Friend ______ $50 Sustainer
$30 Families ______ $100 Patron

Make checks payable to Wachiska Audubon Society. All funds remain with our local chapter. Mail to:

Wachiska Audubon Society
Attention: Membership Committee
4547 Calvert St Ste 10
Lincoln NE 68506-5643

As a conservation organization, our goal is to use our natural resources wisely. Materials and postage are considerable, and we do not want to waste them. When your address changes or if you are receiving The Babbling Brook and would rather not get it, please notify us at office@wachiskaaudubon.org or 402-486-4846.

OR

National Membership in National Audubon Society

Dues from new (introductory) memberships and for first-time gifts will be returned to Wachiska if this coupon is used:

Name ____________________________________________
Address __________________________________________
City __________________________ State ______ Zip_________
Phone __________________________ Recruited by________
E-mail ____________________________________________

Enclose introductory membership fee of $20.

Make checks payable to National Audubon Society and mail to:

Wachiska Audubon Society
Attention: Membership Committee
4547 Calvert St Ste 10
Lincoln NE 68506-5643
C4ZP040Z

The Babbling Brook  November 2014
Can you help? Volunteers Needed

Are you a CPA? – Wachiska needs professional advice. We have attorneys who support our efforts, but we have yet to identify the CPAs among our membership. Let us know who you are, for both paid and volunteer projects.

Can you help with fundraising? – Do you like to talk to people? Do you have marketing experience? Wachiska has exciting plans for the coming years, particularly in areas of prairie and wildlife habitat preservation. These projects provide fundraising opportunities, but we need individuals to help with these efforts.

If you would consider helping, even if just occasionally, please contact the Wachiska office or President Elizabeth Nelson at 402-770-3485 or enelson555@gmail.com.

WACHISKA AUDUBON LEADERS - 2014

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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.

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.