

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 42nd Year of Protecting Nature 1973 - 2015

OCTOBER 2015

Volume 24 - Issue 10

General Meeting — Thursday, October 8, 7:00 p.m., Union College Dick Auditorium, 3800 South 48th Street, Lincoln

How Hitler Affected Wildlife in Nebraska

by Dr. Larkin Powell, Professor of Conservation Biology and Animal Ecology, UNL

Most readers of this newsletter consider themselves to be in tune with populations of wildlife in Nebraska and beyond. As a group of nature enthusiasts, we watch population numbers with great interest—are numbers going up or down, and why? Much of the story behind trends in wildlife populations in the Great Plains can be attributed to agriculture, politics, predator elimination, and mechanization. Certainly, humans in Nebraska did set out to eliminate or limit populations of bison, wolves, and mountain lions. But no one set out to make pheasant or quail populations decline. Quite the opposite, actually—Nebraskans have expended countless hours of public servants' time and millions of dollars to reverse the declining trends in pheasants, pronghorn antelope, jackrabbits, bobwhite quail, prairie-chickens and sharp-tailed grouse, as well as other non-game species like our state bird, the western meadowlark.



Dr. Larkin Powell

Nebraskans have seen marked increases of some species, such as white-tailed deer, wild turkey, Canada and snow geese, and sandhill

cranes—species that generally benefit from cornfields and trees. But the lack of progress towards restoring populations of our smaller upland species that are dependent on grassland habitat in Nebraska makes a statement—a statement that potentially is hard to hear because Nebraskans set out to make a living off the land. Private individuals claimed 98 percent of Nebraska's landscape, and we became very good at farming. We built communities, and we built a state. We had the best of intentions, but something happened to our landscapes. As a result, something happened to our wildlife.

What happened to our landscapes? The answer, of course, is that many things changed on our landscapes over time, and the landscapes of the Great Plains have gone through several periods of rapid transition. The acquisition of the horse by Plains Indians, the Homestead Act, railroads, Russian grain imports, and the recent demand for the building blocks of biofuels are stories worth considering. But from the perspective of its effect on a large suite of wildlife species, one of the most powerful transitions was the period just before and after World War II.

Overseas in the 1930s and 1940s, Germany, Italy, and Japan faced resistance to their plans to expand territory and influence. Eventually, soldiers from farms and towns in Nebraska were sent to fight in far-off theaters during WWII, and our soldiers witnessed the destruction of many foreign landscapes during the war. How is it possible that Adolph Hitler's aggression in Europe reached across the Atlantic to affect wildlife in Nebraska? Simply, our landscapes are farmed landscapes, and wildlife lives on farms. WWII changed the farmstead and the farm which changed the landscape; these changes meant that soldiers returning from WWII to Nebraska farms came home to wildlife populations that would never be the same. It is this story that we will explore during this presentation.

Dr. Larkin Powell is a professor of conservation biology and animal ecology at the School of Natural Resources at UNL. He earned a Ph.D. in ecology from the University of Georgia and holds a B.S. in biology from Graceland University and a M.S. in ecology and evolutionary ecology from Iowa State University. Dr. Powell is the author of *Farming with Wildlife, Dust and Mud: Perspectives from Namibia*, and *Cursed with Wings: and other Frustrations*.

Join Wachiska on **Thursday, October 8, at 7:00 p.m.** for this free public presentation in the Union College Dick Auditorium, 3800 South 48th Street, in Lincoln. Free parking is available on both sides of 48th Street and in the College View SDA Church lots. Look for Audubon signs on the doors. There is a ramp at the east entrance and an elevator inside. Refreshments will be served after the program.

Calendar

October

- 4 Field Trip to Fort Atkinson State Historical Park (near Omaha), 10:30 a.m. (page 2)
- 5 Education Committee, Wachiska office, 5:30 p.m.
- 7 Board Meeting, Wachiska office, 7:00 p.m. (changed)
- 8 General Meeting, "How Hitler Affected Wildlife in Nebraska," by Larkin Powell, Union College, 7 p.m.
- 13 Newsletter deadline, Wachiska office, 5:00 p.m.
- 17-18 **Fall Birdseed distribution, 14th & Arapahoe, 12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m. (page 6)**
- 18 **October 18 – Gayfeather harvesting at Ernie's, 12:00 noon on (page 2)**
- 19 Conservation Committee, Wachiska office, 5:30 p.m.
- 22 Legislation Committee, DaVinci's, 11th & G, 6:00 p.m.

NO Population/Environment Committee meeting scheduled

Wachiska Audubon Office: 402-486-4846

Email: office@wachiskaaudubon.org



Field Trip

by John Carlini, Field Trip Chair

Fall Migrants at the Fort

The Missouri River bluffs are a showcase for the first accents of autumn, and we'll enjoy that view on our October field trip to Fort Atkinson State Historical Park just north of Omaha. Our mission will be to look for fall migrants on a hike taking us along the edge of the lowlands. This is a good time of year to encounter an assortment of sparrows, and we'll see how many species we can find. The outing coincides with Fort Atkinson's Living History Days, and those who are interested can stay and watch re-creations of the lives of soldiers, artisans, and civilians who lived around the outpost in the early 1800s.

Meet at **10:30 a.m. on Sunday, October 4**, on the south side of the State Capitol in Lincoln at 15th and H Streets, across the street from the governor's mansion. Participants can either caravan or carpool for the 65-mile drive to our destination. Suggested items to bring include insect repellent, water bottle, snacks or sack lunch, and binoculars if you have them. A Nebraska state park entry permit is required, and day passes are available for \$5/vehicle. The public is welcome. If you have questions, call John at 402-475-7275.

Your Help is Needed to Pick Gayfeather Seed

by Ernie Rousek, Conservation Committee

For quite a number of years harvested gayfeather seed from my four-acre tract has been sold to the Stock Seed Farms near Murdock as a fundraiser for Wachiska. Some years the harvest has been low because of drought or lack of volunteer harvesters. If the year is good, a substantial amount of money can be made for Wachiska—providing there are enough volunteers to do the seed stripping.

In 2010, there were 327 pounds of seed and chaff harvested, resulting in 110 pounds of cleaned seed for which we received \$40/pound for a total of \$4,400. The next year the harvest was 362 pounds of seed and chaff for which Wachiska received about \$5,000. There were 40 volunteer pickers which means each volunteer averaged earning over \$125 for Wachiska that afternoon.

The following year I thought a notification to a number of Wachiska members by email would be sufficient. I got a much smaller response with a corresponding lower seed harvest—I actually collected more seed from the deck of my tractor mower in mowing the field afterward! Last year I borrowed a tractor-powered mechanical harvester with a rotating brush to harvest the seeds. This method wasted a lot of seeds which were not collected.

This year with its plentiful rainfall, a bountiful crop of thickspike gayfeather has resulted. This seed has spread over adjoining grassland, so we now have about 50 percent more acreage in gayfeather plants, for a total of about seven acres.

Stock Seed Farms has informed me that with increased concern about the loss of pollinating insects, there is an increased demand for flowering plants including gayfeather. As a result, they are sold out of this seed. Instead of \$40/pound, Wachiska stands to get \$60/pound for all the seed we can bring to Stocks. Nearly each year we leave some of the gayfeather seed unharvested due to a lack of harvesting personnel. Let's not let that happen this year; there is cash just ready to be picked off each flowering stem. This gathering also creates an atmosphere to get better acquainted with fellow Audubon members.

On **Sunday, October 18**, from **12:00 noon on**, join Wachiskans and friends to pick this seed. The process is very easy (you can do it with your eyes closed). To get to the prairie west of Lincoln, go west on "O" Street to West 168th Street (one mile past the roundabout) to the Pleasant Dale Cemetery. Turn north about 200 yards to a drive with a blue 915 sign and turn west. We'll be right there. Bring leather work gloves and a plastic bucket if you have one; if not, I have about 20 five-gallon containers. Bathroom facilities will be available.

(Editor's Note: I got excited over the prospects of a bumper year for gayfeather that I have promised Ernie there will be 40-50 people waiting to get started on this easy fundraising activity for Wachiska's prairie preservation project. Please don't let him down! Contact the Wachiska office for more details. See you on the 18th about noon! AR)



Gayfeather gathering at Rousek's prairie in 2010

Laredo Birding Festival

Wachiska members are invited to attend the 2016 Laredo Birding Festival February 3-6. Laredo has a rich and diverse river ecosystem that is home to hundreds of migratory birds and local species such as the white-collared seedeater, scaled quail, green parakeet, and red-billed pigeon. Field trips will be led by professional guides to river fronts, creek systems, nature trails, and scenic ranch land. Former festival favorites such as "Bird 'til You Drop" and "Floating Under Flyways" will again be offered.

For more information and details on this 2016 event, visit online www.laredobirdingfestival.com. Should you have questions, call 956-718-1063 or email laredobirdingfestival@rgisc.org.



From the Board ...

by Colleen Babcock
Population/Environment Committee

Birds, People, Memories of the Past, Hopes for the Future

In August we read Wachiska Board members' responses to "What's your favorite bird?" Joe Francis named the rose-breasted grosbeak (RBG), recalling early childhood yearning, and projecting hope for the future: "Maybe I'll get to see one with my grandkids." These Board favorites link to people, place, season, day-to-day dependable life constants. Favorite birds have vivid and contrasting plumage, "piercing yellow eyes," admired skills, respected territory. They "warm winter days," entertain at feeders, accompany on walks or bike rides.

Joe eventually agrees that "you can't have just one favorite." Still, what is a "favorite bird"? I'm amazed. It's often a dizzying recall of songs, weather, habitat, perfect angles of sunlight, and more. It seems some (metaphorically) happy part of my brain erupts; I begin to wonder if neuro-imaging could measure the location and extent of brain activation? Web searches revealed no specific neuro-imaging of "birder brains"; but these searches produced more reports than sparrows on a feeder, and more information than I can digest.

Now focusing back on Joe's hope for the future. Rudimentary interpretation of Audubon's Climate Report suggests hope; however, checking out the Climate Report, I suspect another shift in my neural activity—giddiness wanes. The report is relevant to how we influence the life experience and future of birds. While Joe reports on the role of birds in our lives, there are multiple dimensions in our "relationship with birds" equation.

Our local "Francis brothers" soberly consider human impact, share some common themes with regard to local and global environmental issues and practical recommendations for human action. (See Chuck's article in the July *Babbling Brook*.) In June, Pope Francis (yes, you've heard of this, and he is only related philosophically to our "local brothers") released an encyclical on climate change. A *Washington Post* website reports that Pope Francis seriously warns of "synthetic agrotoxins" harming birds and insects. A cursory review suggests this extended Francis Family has (at minimum) common concerns with over-reliance on technologies leading to acceleration of income disparity gaps, the importance of sustaining biodiversity, the role of reducing food waste. They all appreciate concepts of connectedness and relationships of birds and people as important members of the biosphere.

Between my extremes of giddiness and fear, there is a place in the brain for thoughtfulness and pathways to action. The Francis clan seems also to share a belief in the capacity of humans to act, to make wise choices. The National Audubon website makes a point of affirming and reaffirming: "It's easier than you think to make a difference . . ."

Stay invested in celebrating and making new memories and favorite bird stories for yourself and others. It's good for your health, and there is plenty of research on that.

Colleen Babcock is a mental health practitioner working with clients in residential substance abuse treatment. She is also a registered dietitian with a background in education, health care, and public health settings. Returning to Nebraska in 1990, she has been a member of Audubon chapters in Grand Island, Kearney, and Lincoln. On the night of Joe's research, Colleen was enjoying the music of favorite southern Indiana woods, rarely seen songsters, the wood thrush (climate threatened) and whip-poor-will (climate endangered). Her favorite bird is also the RBG.

(Editor's Note: The Francis "brothers" are related only by a friendship resulting from their active participation in Wachiska.)

Hitchcock Nature Center

by Richard Peterson

Since retirement, I have returned to bird watching, especially the hawks. They have intrigued me since junior high. Last year I discovered the Hitchcock Nature Center, north of Crescent, Iowa, which has been ranked one of the top 25 hawk-watching sites in North America by the National Wildlife Federation, as well as one of four hawk-watching sites in the world with over 500 migrating bald eagles. The 1,248-acre area has 12 miles of hiking trails clearly marked with maps showing the trails that are easy, moderate, and difficult. A 45-foot observation tower gets you closer to the migrating raptors. Entry to the park is \$2/day per vehicle. Make the interpretive center at the Loess Hills Lodge your first stop. Call ahead or check the website for the center's hours.

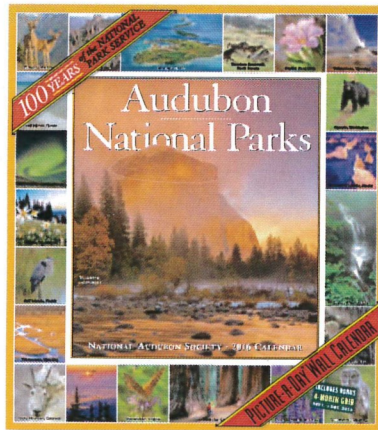
Raptor residents at Hitchcock are the red-tailed hawk, turkey vulture, Cooper's hawk, American kestrel, and northern harrier.

The raptor migration gets underway in August and goes through December. When it begins, you may see the Mississippi kite; then in September get a glimpse of the osprey; peregrine falcon; American kestrel; Cooper's, sharp-shinned, and broad-winged hawks. October is a good time for Swainson's hawk, northern harrier, merlin, and the red-shouldered hawk. In November you can see the prairie falcon, the golden and bald eagles, northern goshawk, and ferruginous hawk. As December arrives, witness the rough-legged hawk.

The most commonly viewed raptors are red-tailed, Swainson's, and sharp-shinned hawks, and the bald eagle. Typically, mid-September to late-October is the best time.

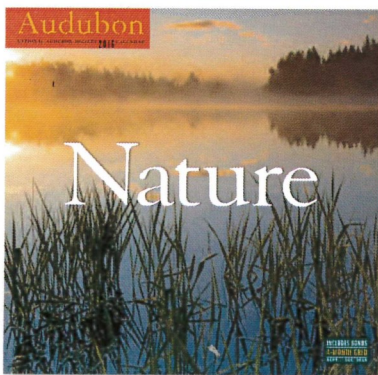
Hitchcock is an hour plus drive from Lincoln. Since it is close by, you can call ahead to the interpretive center at 712-545-3283 and check on viewing conditions before you start your trip. Check out www.pottconservation.com for more information.

THE 2016 CALENDARS FROM AUDUBON



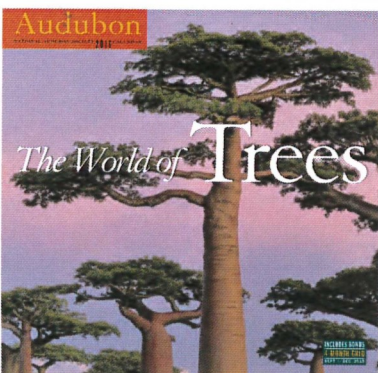
NATIONAL PARKS
Celebrate the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service, a system comprising 84 million acres of diverse regions and ecosystems. Each month spotlights a distinctive park, from the cascading waterfalls of Virginia's Shenandoah National Park to the breathtaking peaks of California's Pinnacles, the newest national park.

12" x 14" • \$13.99 retail



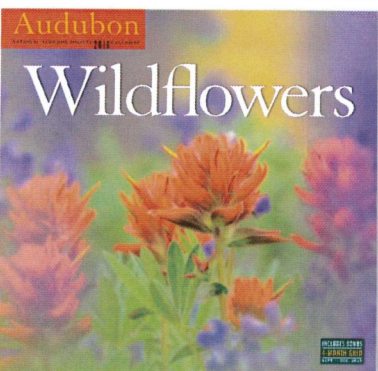
NATURE
Escape to America's most pristine wilderness with a dozen full-color portraits capturing breathtaking landscapes and natural treasures, including the craggy orange rocks of Utah's Monument Valley and the blazing colors of the Great Smoky Mountains in autumn.

12" x 12" • \$13.99 retail
printed on FSC-certified paper



TREES
Reflecting the splendor and diversity of the planet's trees, here are a dozen species exquisitely photographed in full color, from a snow-laden Mountain Hemlock to a Coconut Palm in paradise.

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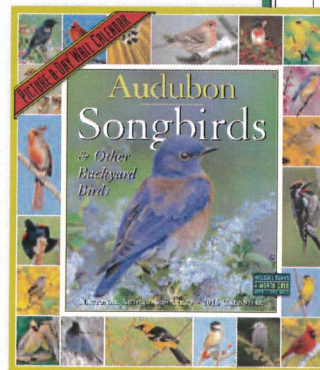
WILDFLOWERS
Delight in nature's gardens with 12 full-color portraits of North American flowers in their native habitats, accompanied by informative text and a range map.

12" x 12" • \$13.99 retail
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SONGBIRDS

A daily celebration of the jewel-like songsters that alight on our bird feeders, flit through our yards, and bring music and joy to daily life—all in full color.

12" x 14" • \$13.99 retail



February

Who's Minding the Bird Feeder?



OVER 1 MILLION COPIES SOLD!

May

Birds Provide the Spark

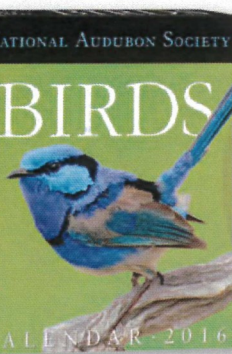


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ENGAGEMENT DIARY

Featuring the world's wilderness captured by the best nature photographers, each weekly spread contains a full-color portrait on the left, and a roomy write-in grid on the right.

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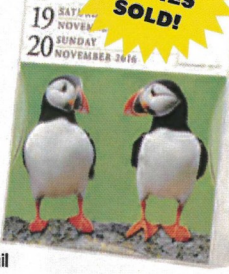


BIRDS GALLERY

This vibrant tribute to the beauty and diversity of the world's birds offers a gallery of unique sightings, from a colorful Fairywren to an American Robin, and everything in between.

6¼" x 7¼" • \$16.99 retail

OVER 1 MILLION COPIES SOLD!



Calendars marked \$13.99 sell for \$15 w/tax. Calendars marked \$14.99 sell for \$16 w/tax. Calendars marked \$16.99 sell for \$18. Prices include shipping to Wachiska office for pickup. Call or email the Wachiska office to order by October 9. Payment will be due at time of pick up in early November. Check the website for this magnificent color poster.

Climate Change Update

by Marilyn McNabb

In September, the highly-regarded journal *PLOS One* published the National Audubon Society's groundbreaking study of the effects of climate change on North American birds. You can find the entire study on the web: "Conservation Status of North American Birds in the Face of Future Climate Change." The lead author, Gary Langham, Audubon's chief scientist, summarized it as "half of our birds are at serious conservation risk in this century." Climate change, he said, "is the result of cumulative small actions. . . . We can make a difference through small individual actions that will make it easier to do the large, collective ones. Since the message is so urgent and the threat so pervasive, we also know that we must each take action where we can, and spread the word."

On Tuesday, October 20, at 4:30 p.m. in the first floor chambers of the City County Building, 555 South 10th Street in Lincoln, the Lancaster County Board will address the subject of zoning rules for wind turbines in the agricultural (AG) areas of Lancaster County. Public testimony will be heard. Background on this subject was included in the August *Babbling Brook*.

In their August 19 meeting, the Planning Commission rejected the extremely tough restrictions for shadow flicker and noise limits proposed by both the City-County Planning and Health departments for AG zoning. These proposed restrictions, the developer said, were much more demanding than comparable limits in the region. They would have made the project impossible. The results are not in yet as to whether the project is viable under the standards the Planning Commission adopted. As of mid-September, the wind developer's representative reports they do not have an assessment completed, but let's assume a project is still possible.

Opposition to the project comes from acreage owners who offer a range of "Not in My Backyard" arguments. They don't want to look at the turbines or hear them. In contrast, farmers whose land is leased will benefit from regular payments, buffering unpredictable commodity prices. County taxpayers will benefit from new revenues.

Another consideration is perhaps the defining characteristic of our economic system: change, rapid change. The cameras, telephones, and typewriters we took for granted not long ago are goners, and that kind of change is not just for cities. It's not uncommon for people to hold a charming Norman Rockwell image of rural America, but they might take a second look at the number of farms, size of farm machinery, crops grown, irrigation techniques, etc. Nobody did or could insure today's acreage owners against change. The rise of wind turbines across the countryside in all of our neighboring states suggests how slow Nebraska has been to harvest this valuable natural resource. The advantages of a growing wind industry in the state will be measured in tax revenues, competitive electricity prices, and its large contribution to stabilizing climate. As one local farmer wrote, "Harvesting wind energy with wind turbines is simply

another form of agricultural activity and one that protects farmers from the volatility of grain prices, weather, and high property taxes." "Harvesting wind" may be a fairly new idea here, but one totally compatible with AG zoning and protecting agricultural production.

I have not found evidence of health effects from wind turbine noise. By far the most comprehensive and precise of the studies on noise and health is "Wind Turbine Noise and Health Study: Summary of Results," which you can find on Google. The only health effect it found linked to wind turbine noise is annoyance, a subjective measure based on self-reports which are too weak a basis for regulation, I believe.

A wind project in our Lancaster County means we do our part in greening the electric system. As Gary Langham said, we must take actions, small and large, where we can.

Members of the Lancaster County Board are Bill Avery, Roma Amundson, Larry Hudkins, Deb Schorr, and Todd Wiltgen. The website to contact them is <http://lancaster.ne.gov/COMMISS/members/index.htm>.

Eighty percent of rural Nebraskans agree or strongly agree that more should be done to develop solar or wind energy in Nebraska, according to the Nebraska Rural Poll conducted annually by UNL. Only 22 percent said renewable energy sources are too expensive for Nebraska. For complete results, see <http://ruralpoll.unl.edu>.

Come to the BIG SIT at SCPAC

by Jason St. Sauver, Community Education Director
Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center

Join us on Saturday, October 10, for the "tailgate party" of birding! The Big Sit—in the tradition of the Christmas Bird Count or Backyard Bird Count—is a citizen science event designed to help count the birds in one area, except there is NO walking, there is a good deal of eating and chatting combined with a whole lot of birding and fun! And it's free to participate.

The BIG SIT helps provide data on our bird populations and any changes due to habitat or climate change. It is great for all ages and birding abilities. Bring along a chair and snacks and we can provide the rest. The SIT will be going on all day, but drop in and count for just an hour or more anytime throughout the day. To learn more about how the BIG SIT works, check out their official website at <http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/connect/bigsit/about-the-big-sit.php>. To register to help for a timeframe or if you have questions, please contact me at scp@audubon.org.

Fall Birdseed Sale Distribution this Month

by Arlys Reitan

The Fall Birdseed Sale orders look promising again this year. The ordering deadline has passed; the seed will be distributed the third weekend of this month. If you ordered seed, please make a note to remember to pick it up during these times:

Saturday, October 17, between 12:00 noon - 2:00 p.m.

Sunday, October 18, between 12:00 noon - 2:00 p.m.

Orders are considerably down this fall. We will have a nice selection of extra birdseed available at a new convenient pick up location at 14th and Arapahoe streets in the back by the garages. This site is across the street from Indian Village Shopping Center in southwest Lincoln. If you forget to come get your order, then our helpful volunteers have to reload the seed bags and take them to another site to wait for pick up. That's a lot of excess lifting and additional time spent. There will be extra bags of the most popular seeds if you forgot to order and want to come check it out. Prices are comparable to quality seed sold at local specialty bird stores. Remember the sales tax is already included in the price, so that's another seven percent savings.

There will also be a supply of Wachiska t-shirts for sale. Have questions? Call me in the Wachiska office at 402-486-4846 in the afternoons or email office@wachiskaaudubon.org. Thank you for your continued support for Wachiska Audubon!

Reminder

Bill McKibben, foremost authority on the latest findings related to climate change, will be speaking at the Lied Center in Lincoln on Tuesday, October 6, at 7:00 p.m. This will be a free public presentation.

What's Happened to Wildlife in the Past 40 Years?

According to *Population Connection* (Volume 46, Issue 4), the 2014 *Living Planet Report* published by the World Wildlife Fund revealed the number of vertebrate animals worldwide declined by 52 percent between 1970 and 2010. Such a drop in 40 years is alarming and much faster than previous declines. The declines are primarily due to habitat loss and degradation, hunting and fishing, and climate change. The report studied the populations of 3,038 mammal, bird, reptile, amphibian, and fish species.

The species worst affected were freshwater animals like frogs. The tropics—those in Latin American, in particular—saw the greatest declines of any region at up to 83 percent. To read the original news articles, go to www.popconnect.org/news.

The form to the right is printed annually as required by the United States Postal Service.

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a. Paid Electronic Copies		0	0
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Membership

Wachiska offers two choices of membership—many people choose both. 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 local membership dues remain 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*.

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Address _____

City _____ County _____ State ____ Zip _____

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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.

AND / OR

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You can help Wachiska save paper and reduce the cost of printing and mailing *The Babbling Brook*. Each month's newsletter will be posted online by the first day of each month. Our electronic subscribers will receive an email the first of each month with a direct link to the online newsletter.

If you would like to join the other 148 *Babbling Brook* readers and switch from paper to online delivery, please send an email to newsletter@wachiskaaudubon.org and put "Electronic Newsletter" in the subject line. We'll get you converted over. Thanks!



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Birdseed pickup - Oct 17 & 18

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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**.