



Audubon | GREAT PLAINS

2024 Fall Newsletter

NFWF Grasslands Grant | Look Who's New | Mindful Birding | Sustainability by Design

2024 Audubon Great Plains Fall Newsletter

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Audubon Great Plains walked in the Fargo-Moorhead Pride Parade to promote **Let's Go Birding Together**

Special thanks to **Downtown Yoga Fargo** for their sponsorship!

Left: Amanda Booher, Jason “The Birdnerd” St. Sauver, and Lindsey Lee
Center: The team prepares for the parade with our Let's Go Birding Together banner.
Right: Isaac Booher (6) rides his bike in front of the team during the parade.
All photos: Amanda Booher, Audubon.



Letter from the Executive Director, Kristal Stoner



As the vibrant colors of summer begin to give way to the rich hues of fall, and the Red-winged Blackbirds, Sandhill Cranes, and Yellow-rumped Warblers begin to head South, the change of seasons is upon us. Change brings growth and opportunity. I am delighted to share some exciting updates and accomplishments from Audubon Great Plains.

We are thrilled to announce the installation of a MOTUS tower at Spring Creek Prairie. This significant addition will enhance our ability to track bird migration patterns and contribute valuable data to the global understanding of migration.

The Motus Wildlife Tracking System is a collaborative research network that uses coordinated automated radio telemetry to study the movements of small animals, and our new tower is a testament to our commitment to innovative conservation efforts. We have already tracked Black Terns flying through Spring Creek Prairie and multiple species at Rowe Sanctuary.

Our outreach initiatives continue to thrive as well. This year, we proudly hosted the second Women in Conservation event in North Dakota at the Edward Brigham Sanctuary. The event brought together women from diverse backgrounds to share their passion for conservation and to empower one another in efforts to nurture our lands. The connections and ideas that emerged from this gathering will undoubtedly drive meaningful conservation actions in the years to come.

As we transition into fall, we are excited to welcome nine new staff members to our team. In addition, Juli Bosmoe and Lizzy Gilbert have been promoted to new positions; we are very proud and grateful for their incredible achievements. Our team is once again at full staff and is moving full steam ahead!

These accomplishments and new beginnings are made possible by the unwavering support of our community. Your dedication to Audubon Great Plains enables us to advance our mission and make a lasting impact on the environment. Together, we are making strides toward a future where birds and people thrive.

Thank you for your continued support and enthusiasm. We look forward to sharing more exciting updates with you in the coming months.

Warm Regards,

Kristal Stoner

2024 Audubon Photography Awards Top 100

Our cover photo for this issue was chosen from the 2024 National Audubon Society Photography Awards.

Cover Photo: Great Blue Heron. Photo by Kort Duce.

Behind the Shot: “On this day, I watched this heron catch three fish: one in daylight, one at sunset, and one in the dark. The heron was oblivious to me photographing its hunt,” said Kort Duce.

Restoration of the Izaak Walton Nature Area provide essential habitat for Great Blue Herons. Where there were once gravel pits, there are now ponds and heron rookeries surrounding Longmont, Colorado.

Right: Sedge Wren, Gray-head Coneflower. Trisha Snider. For more Audubon Photography Awards, visit us online at audubon.org/magazine.



National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Award: Northern Great Plains Program

Josh Lefers and Melissa Amarawardana



A bison herd on the Jerde Ranch near Reva, South Dakota. Audubon has worked with the Jerde Ranch, SD Game, Fish, and Parks, and World Wildlife Fund to restore 800 acres of cropland to grassland, and fence expiring CRP for integration into their grazing system. Photo: Josh Lefers/Audubon.

In July, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) announced an award to the National Audubon Society of \$1.85 million in support of Scaling Grassland Conservation and Restoration across Five Northern Great Plains States. This award will propel grassland conservation and Audubon Conservation Ranching expansion in the Dakotas, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Montana. This grant follows a \$1.7 million NFWF award last year to the same program.

The National Audubon Society is matching the grant with over \$2 million in cash and in-kind funds.

The grant will improve the management of 165,400 acres and restore 7,000 acres across five states, collect data on avian response, and sample soil carbon storage to better inform management on participating ranches.

The core objective of this project is to increase habitat connectivity of our native grasslands by restoring degraded habitat adjacent to grasslands and rangelands, improving management on working land in core areas, and increasing population density of at-risk grassland bird species. The work will also support the Grasslands and Aridlands initiative goal in the National Audubon Society Flight Plan.

Audubon Conservation Ranching and Conservation Forage Programs

The ACR program now reaches across three million acres in 14 states. It promotes planned or managed adaptive grazing regimes with long periods of rest and recovery, which mimics the historical use of grass by grazers to create habitat mosaics for grassland birds. ACR provides technical assistance to enrolled producers to encourage the use of bird-friendly grazing and haying management, leading to consistent increases in habitat on enrolled ranches as measured by the Bird-Friendliness Index, a model developed specifically for ACR by Audubon's Science team. Even simple grazing infrastructure such as fencing is very costly and work-intensive simply because of the size of many ranches, the cost of which can prohibit moving to rotational grazing practices.

With this award, Audubon Great Plains will provide financial assistance to agricultural producers to restore grasslands on privately-owned land. In North Dakota, funds will be used for seeding cropland to grassland in partnership with the North Dakota Conservation Forage Program and a partnership with Ducks Unlimited through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. In Nebraska and South Dakota, we will also remove invasive woody vegetation, with a preference on grinding the trees in place, which keeps stored carbon underground

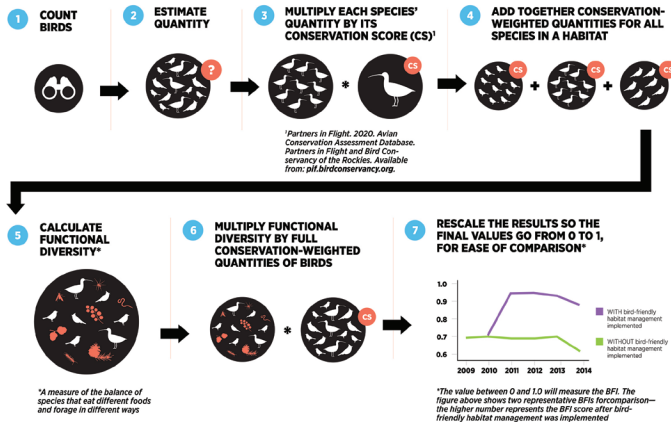
WHAT IS THE BIRD-FRIENDLINESS INDEX?

A metric that measures the abundance, diversity, and resilience of a bird community.

BFI = ABUNDANCE  + **DIVERSITY**  + **RESILIENCE** 

HOW DO WE MEASURE IT?

The BFI is the sum product of bird abundance, weighted by conservation status, and multiplied by functional diversity



Above: South Dakota Grazing School, Summit, SD. Participants learn the value of diversity in their pastures. Photo: Josh Lefers/Audubon.

and in roots as they decay. The cost of mechanical removal can be a major challenge for landowners when faced with woody species with highly invasive characteristics.

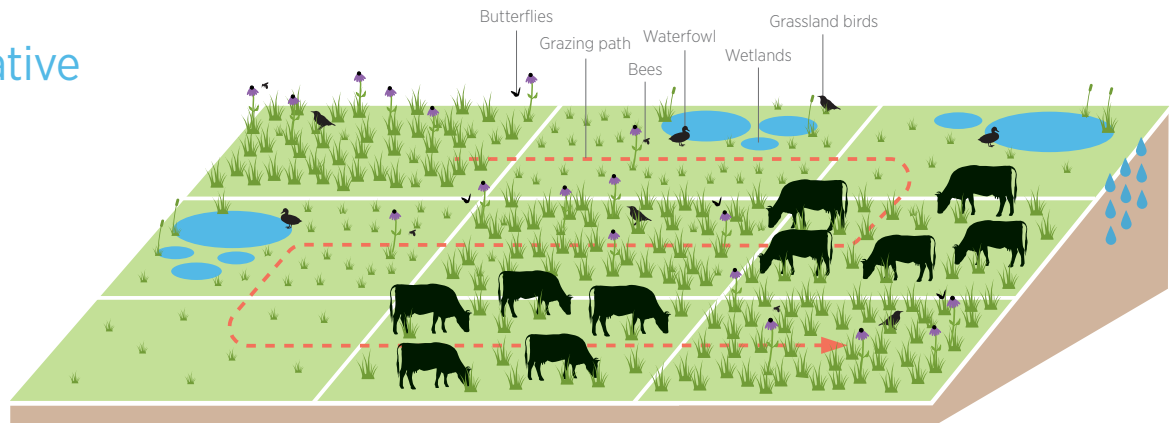
Restoring grazeland to diverse native grasslands, producers can provide significant habitat benefits to grassland birds, keep carbon in the ground, and build sustainable income from their lands. Our

partnerships have developed restoration models that provide income to producers for the first couple of years of establishment.

Over the past two years, Audubon has worked in these programs to restore nearly 8,700 acres of diverse grasslands in North and South Dakota – this grant from NFWF will fuel significant growth of that progress.

Regenerative Grazing

Cattle graze in one area and move on to the next, allowing the full regrowth cycle essential for grassland ecosystems.



DIVERSE HABITAT

Regenerative grazing enhances habitat diversity, which benefits birds, pollinators, and other wildlife.



CARBON SEQUESTRATION

Plants capture atmospheric carbon most efficiently during the regrowth process.



CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Healthy soils with deep roots hold more water and can withstand droughts.

look

Who's NEW

We're growing! Audubon Great Plains is expanding our work across the region



Thomas LEICESTER

Range Ecologist, Western Nebraska

As our Range Ecologist in Western Nebraska, Thomas works to deliver private lands conservation programs in partnership with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Prior to joining us, Thomas was a Conservation Delivery Specialist for Pheasants Forever doing similar work in the Loess Canyons. Originally from Minnesota, Thomas has also lived in Canada, England, and briefly, Spain. Despite growing up in cities, he has a deep appreciation for the ranch life, one day hoping to run a ranch himself. In his free time, Thomas enjoys gaming, cooking, and working out. His favorite bird is the Shoebill simply because of how ridiculous it looks.

Maggie FIGURA

Range Ecologist, South Dakota

Maggie Figura is from Montana and came to South Dakota five years ago for her Master's Degree in Wildlife Science at South Dakota State University. The past two years, she had the great adventure of being the Northern Great Plains Crew Leader for the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and coordinating their surveys all over the Great Plains. She also on the Board of Directors for the South Dakota Ornithologists' Union and Assistant Editor for South Dakota Bird Notes. "My favorite North American bird is the black-billed magpie; they're beautiful, funny, and remind me of my hometown."



Kelly TEBBEN

Senior Coordinator, Outreach, Fargo, North Dakota

Kelly was an educator for 17 years and has educational certifications for English, Early Childhood Education, Family and Consumer Science, Computer Science, Health, and as a School Library Director. Kelly's favorite local bird in the White-breasted Nuthatch. Her favorite non-local bird is the Atlantic Puffin - "I've never seen a Puffin in its natural habitat, but it's on my need-to-do list!"

Juli BOSMOE

New Role: Working Lands Program Manager, Fargo, North Dakota

After 5 years with Audubon, most recently as a Senior Range Ecologist, Juli Bosmoe is now the Working Lands Program Manager for the Great Plains region. "I always tell people my interest in nature came from camping in southern Missouri as a kid, but my interest in grasslands specifically became really strong while working on native prairie preserves in college. Just like other prairie enthusiasts, I enjoy the diversity of habitats, plants, and animals (especially birds!) in a place that is often overlooked. During a course at SDSU, we learned what private lands biologists do and I immediately thought 'That's the way to do conservation!' It feels obvious now, but at the time it seemed revolutionary."



Marcos STOLTZFUS

Iain Nicolson Audubon Center Director, Rowe Sanctuary

Marcos has spent his career with organizations dedicated to conservation, environmental education, and science education. His professional experience in nonprofit leadership includes zoo, museum, higher education, and nature center settings. "I am deeply influenced by my experience in environmental education; for example, helping to establish the first nature preschool in Northern Indiana as a model program for area educators. This has shaped my approach to what nature-based programs can look like – ask me sometime about giving preschoolers handsaws and letting them climb trees!"



Amanda HEFNER

Education & Outreach Manager, Rowe Sanctuary

Amanda manages the outreach and education programs at Rowe Sanctuary and works with partners and educators to provide hands-on learning experiences. She grew up in Archer, Nebraska and graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where she studied environmental studies and natural resource sciences. "One key experience that shapes my approach was learning about conservation storytelling through a course in college taught by storytellers Michael Forsberg and Michael Farrell. It really opened my eyes to how important our stories are and how they connect us to one another."

Katie BYRD-MOORE

Volunteer Coordinator, Rowe Sanctuary

Originally from Oklahoma, Katie spent some time in Nebraska for a summer before she graduated college working with wetland birds in Wilcox, that's where her love of birds started! "Working with a grad student in college set me on this career path. We did bird surveys, vegetation surveys, mapped nests, took invertebrate samples and it was some of the best times of my life." Katie worked in Portland, Oregon in Primatology for seven years before moving back to Kearney to start a business and expand her family. Katie and her family have lived in Kearney for the past decade and volunteer at the World Theatre every chance they get!



Marissa JONAS

Conservation Program Technician, Rowe Sanctuary

Marissa is coming to us as a recent graduate from Central College and grew up in Blair, NE. She has experience working with tallgrass prairies and has done conservation research on bats as well. She also loves teaching others the importance of conservation and sustainability. As part of a tropical ecology class, Marissa spent three weeks in Costa Rica and Belize. While at Central College, she took advantage of a wealth of research opportunities, including on tallgrass prairies and netting bats for population surveys. With an NSF Research for Undergrads program, she studied the effects of the enzyme NPC-4 on phosphate in plants at the Danforth Center in St. Louis.

Wyatt KOEHLER

Senior Coordinator, Habitat Management, Spring Creek Prairie

Wyatt graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a B.S. in Regional and Community Forestry and a minor in Fisheries and Wildlife. Previously, he worked at UNL as a Habitat Management and Prescribed Fire Education coordinator.



Jacob NISPEL

Habitat Technician, Spring Creek Prairie

Jacob has experience with landscaping, construction, maintenance, and customer interaction. His skills and familiarity with the local ecology have equipped him to manage our habitat and grounds. He is passionate about our tallgrass prairie and hopes to expand our reach, and to learn and teach others the benefits of responsible land stewardship.

Connecting with nature: a guide to mindful birding

Amanda Booher

In a world where the pace of life seems ever-increasing, finding moments of peace and connection with nature is more important than ever. One wonderful way to achieve this is through mindful birding—an activity that combines the joys of birdwatching with the practices of mindfulness. Mindful birding can be an impactful experience, fostering both a sense of community and a deeper appreciation for the natural world. Whether you're a novice birder or a twitcher (avid birdwatcher), mindful birding is for you. Less about species identification or acquisition count; mindful birding is about appreciation, awareness, and observation. Here's a guide on mindful birding, complete with a thoughtful approach to introductions, slow and mindful walking, and finding a sit spot to observe, and listen, and feel.



Gathering: Sharing Nature Moments

When leading a group, I aim to create a welcoming atmosphere by inviting participants to form a circle and introduce themselves. They're prompted to share a "nature moment"—a simple, personal experience they've had with nature. Emphasis on the moment not needing to be significant; it could be as simple as noticing a bird singing outside their window, the feel of the dampness in the air on a humid day, or the sight of their garden in bloom. This practice serves multiple purposes:

- **Breaking the Ice:** It helps participants feel more comfortable with one another, setting a friendly and open tone for the outing.
- **Fostering Awareness:** It encourages everyone to start thinking about nature and their interactions with it.
- **Building Community:** Sharing personal experiences helps create a sense of community and connection among the group.

Moving Slowly and Mindfully

Once introductions are complete, or if you are on your own journey, your experience begins with slow mindful movement on your path. It is important to move at a relaxed pace, paying close attention to your natural surroundings, and to keep conversation to a minimum in order to support a calming environment for both people and wildlife. Whether you are with a group or mindful birding solo, here are some tips to enhance the experience:

- **Focus on Breath:** Take deep, steady breaths. This helps to center the mind and bring attention to the present moment.
- **Engage the Senses:** Pay attention to what you see, hear, and feel. This could include the colors of leaves, the texture of the ground beneath your feet, or the sound of birds and rustling leaves.
- **Be Present:** Let go of any distractions or worries, focusing solely on the present moment and the natural beauty of your surroundings.

Finding a Sit Spot: Observing and Listening

An essential part of mindful birding is to find a comfortable spot where everyone can sit quietly, pause, and observe. Take notice of the shape, size, and color of birds you may see. Observe their behavior, are they soaring high in the sky or fluttering on tree branches? Do their calls seem to alarm their friends that you are near and possibly a threat, or do their songs offer a sweet tune that reminds you of playing outside as a child? At your "sit spot" a deeper, more immersive part of the experience begins. Here's how to make the most of this time:

- **Settling In:** Find a spot where you can sit comfortably and remain relatively still. This might be on a rock, a fallen log, or even directly on the ground.
- **Three Levels of Observation:** Encourage participants to observe their surroundings on three levels –
 - **Distant:** Look for birds in the distance, perhaps soaring high or perched in far-off trees.
 - **Middle Ground:** Observe the middle distance, where birds might be hopping from branch to branch or foraging on the ground.
 - **Nearby:** Pay close attention to the immediate surroundings, where smaller, less noticeable natural elements may show up, such as an insect crawling around the dirt near you.

- **Listening:** Focus on the sounds around you. Birds often reveal themselves through their songs and calls. If it feels safe and comfortable you can close your eyes for a few moments to fully immerse in the sounds of nature. Layered listening encourages you to notice the sounds around you and then slowly bring your hands closely cupping the ears, further engaging your senses and opting into a more audible experience.

Reflecting and Sharing

After a period of quiet observation, mindful birding groups are asked to come together again and share their experiences. This final reflection is a crucial part of mindful birding, as it helps to reinforce the connections made during the outing. Participants might share what they observed, how they felt, or any insights they gained. This sharing is done in a circle, allowing everyone to listen and learn from each other.

Mindful birding is a beautiful way to connect with nature and each other. By starting with personal nature moments, walking slowly and mindfully, and then sitting quietly to observe and listen, participants can deepen their appreciation for the natural world and for the community they are part of. Whether you are an experienced birder or a novice, this practice can bring a sense of peace, presence, and connection. So, gather a group, head outdoors, and embrace the art of mindful birding.



Opposite page: Amanda Booher leads a Mindful Birding group in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Top: Eastern Screech-Owl. James David Raj.

Second: Oak Titmouse. Mark Mitchell.

Third: American Bittern. Mark Eden.

Bottom: Mindful Birding Group at the end of their gathering.

Amanda Booher/Audubon.

Grass illustration: Takeshi Ishikawa.



Phragmites...the herbaceous hazard

Melissa Mosier

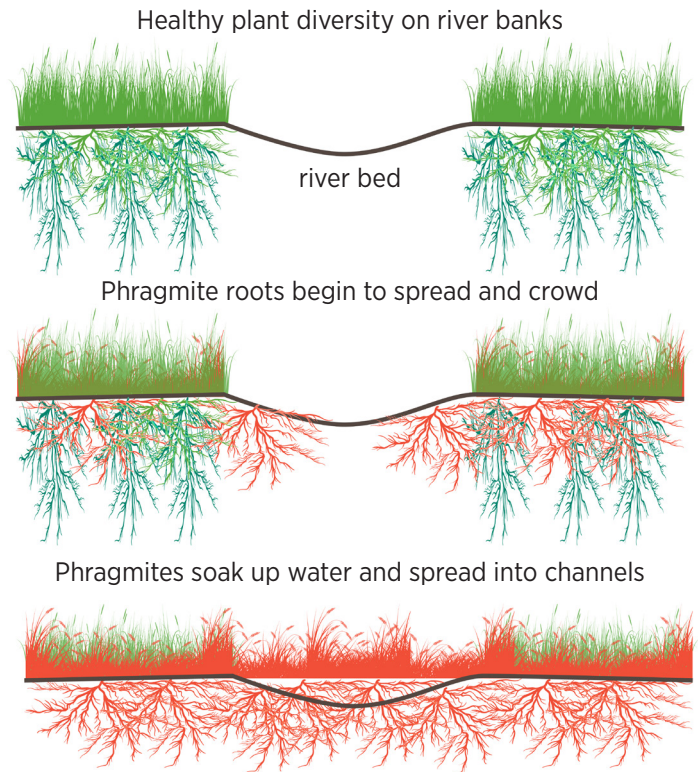
When we think about major threats to the Platte River ecosystem, the first things that come to mind may be climate change, drought and changes in water supply, shrinking stream channels, or loss of habitat and decreasing biodiversity. These are all critical drivers of the Platte's capacity to support our treasured Great Plains bird species and other valuable wildlife, and they are also connected by another critical but less talked about factor – invasive riparian vegetation. Although not often billed as the star of the show playing along the Platte, the encroachment of invasive, vegetation like non-native Phragmites (fräg-mites) – large perennial reed grasses – has major implications for both wildlife and human communities.

Along our waterways and in wetlands, Phragmites can grow into such dense patches that it impedes the movement of aquatic wildlife like fish and turtles, overtakes native plants, and ultimately results in biodiversity loss. Phragmites patches even grow thick enough to stop the downstream movement of water and sand, causing the banks of the river to gradually narrow into the channel and potentially leading to localized flooding. As vegetation takes over and locks sand into place, the wide, braided characteristic of the Platte, which Sandhill and Whooping Cranes prefer for roosting, is lost.

Because Phragmites grow so prolifically – spreading through underground roots, above-ground shoots, and also by seed dispersal – they easily outcompete and overcrowd native plant species, initiating a chain reaction that results in biodiversity loss along our waterways and within our wetlands. Add into the mix the fact that, of course, Phragmites require a lot of water, you end up with a mighty challenge that threatens our well-being on a number of different fronts.

The flushing flows of sediment and water that once dominated the Platte in the spring, combined with drier summer conditions and scouring ice flows in the winter, could be a proper match for the relatively new threat posed by Phragmites. But in the Platte system of today, with much of the water and sediment locked behind dams or diverted away from the river in canals, our best option for controlling Phragmites is to use an integrated approach that combines mechanical and chemical removal on an ongoing basis.

At the scale of the Platte River, fighting Phragmites with the limited means we have left at our disposal



Invasive phragmites spread with underground shoots, above ground shoots, and through seed dispersal. As they choke out native plant diversity, they decrease nutrients available in the soil and can even spread through shallow channels.

requires major partnerships and a well-coordinated effort. Audubon Great Plains fights phragmites along the Platte banks at Rowe Sanctuary, and we partner with the Platte Valley Weed Management Area (PVWMA). This partnership has a long list of members, including natural resources districts, county weed control authorities, universities, state and federal agencies, environmental NGO's, and collaboratives like the Platte River Recovery and Implementation Program – but meeting the annual funding needs is a challenge every year. With recent reductions in state and grant supported funding, securing enough money to cover the cost of this very important, albeit unglamorous conservation work, is even more of a struggle.

We are working with multiple partners to secure long-term funding to support the continuation of this work. Our partnerships stretch far past our own conservation plan at Rowe Sanctuary, we depend on the downstream effects of each steward working to protect the Platte.

Sustainability by design: Rowe Sanctuary's new Visitors Center

Melissa Amarawardana



Above: Solar panels will produce an estimated 48,000 kilowatt hours (kWh) every year.

Inset: Rowe staff get a tour of what will be the Community space.

In the past 20 years, the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary has gone from hosting a few hundred visitors a day to more than 35,000 over the eight-weeks of crane season. When it was first built, the Visitors Center was one of the largest straw bale buildings in the country, a technique unique to Nebraska. Straw has been used in construction for centuries, but in the late 1890s, the new mechanical baler made hay an abundant, affordable resource that protected buildings from harsh winters and extreme storms.

The new east and west additions build on some of the original building's sustainable strategies. The original building used straw bales for insulation and a closed-loop geothermal heating and cooling system that decreases the need for heating and air conditioning, which can be up to half of a building's energy use. Geothermal heating is essentially a system that stores and pumps the building's water underground to maintain a stable temperature. Both additions extend the geothermal system.

The design team also used several techniques that decrease the amount of energy the building will need. High-efficiency windows serve multiple purposes, beyond giving stunning views of the Platte River. Reflective glass and deep eaves over

the windows decrease the amount of heat absorbed during the hottest parts of the day, so less energy is necessary for air conditioning. To further reduce collision risk for birds, a system of vertical hanging cords will be installed over the windows.

A new solar power array with 86 photovoltaic panels on the southern-facing roofs of both new wings will produce an estimated 48,000 kilowatt hours (kWh) every year. The system collects data that can demonstrate the efficiency of solar power and inform best practices for energy use.

Finally, using native plants for our landscaping has myriad benefits. First, they will require less water and maintenance long-term, even through droughts and periods of extreme weather. Second, they will support the native pollinators. Third, their deeper root systems provide more stability for the ground and stores more carbon in the soil. Isolating plants with high water needs into our rain garden creates a different habitat for the insects and small invertebrates our birds feast on.

Construction will always impact the wildlife around it, but with both time-tested and new innovative technology, we can mitigate the harm we do and grow efficiently.

Spring Creek Prairie records first migrating bird on Motus tower

Melissa Amarawardana

On June 22, at Murray Lake Farm in Saskatchewan, a small black bird was banded and tagged with a radio telemetry tag and released as part of the larger Motus Wildlife Tracking System. The bird, a Black Tern, was part of a breeding and dispersal program for birds vulnerable to habitat loss. Around the same time, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center was installing a radio receiving tower to detect these tags. Less than six weeks later, on August 4, that very same Black Tern pinged the tower and was recorded at Spring Creek Prairie, more than 1,000 miles (1,624 km) away from where it was banded.

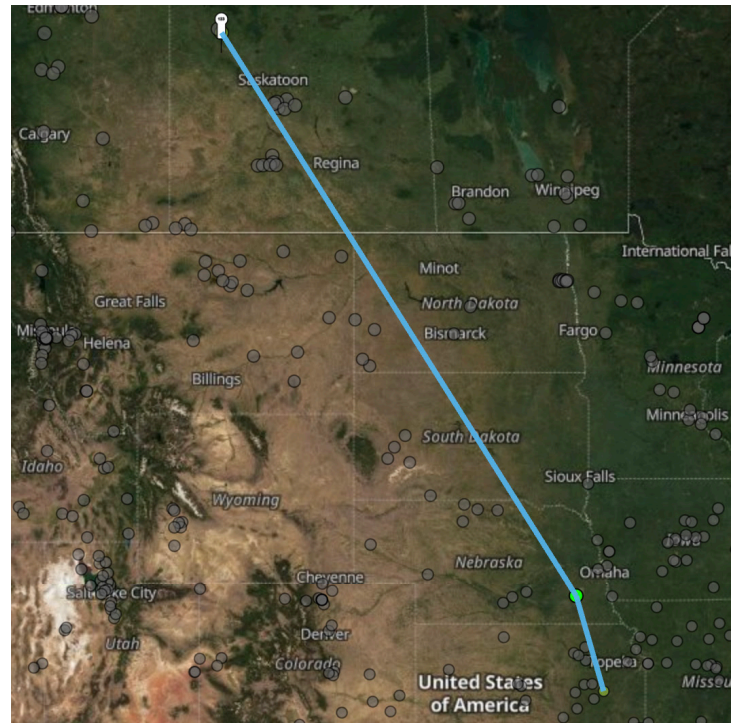
Motus – Latin for movement – is a radio telemetry tracking system that records data on individual animals whenever a tracking device comes within range of a receiver. These trackers can be very small, allowing scientists to see the movements over time of animals as small as sparrows and bats. Audubon Great Plains will be installing 15 towers over the next five years as part of the Flight Plan.

By the next day, the Black tern was recorded by the Motus tower at Flint Hills in Kansas. Since this first detection, Spring Creek’s receiver has detected four more Black Terns in migration south, one that was banded and tagged last fall, wintered along the Coast of Peru, and is now heading back after breeding season in Canada. This data shows us the importance of the Prairie Potholes in North Dakota and Nebraska wetlands as a migratory path for this amazing bird.

Black Terns have seen a sharp decline in population since the 1960s. Likely factors include drainage of wetlands, where Black Terns nest, loss of food supply due to overfishing, and runoff pollution into nesting marshes.

Top: The path taken by the Black Tern tracked through Spring Creek Prairie. This particular Black tern was not quite close enough to dozens of Motus towers in southern Saskatchewan and the Dakotas, but the Great Plains team is using data like this to identify new sites for Motus towers, and plans to install 15 more in the next five years.

Bottom: Black Tern, adult and juvenile. Diana Whiting.





Bird Feature: Northern Bobwhite

Colinus virginianus

The only native quail in the eastern US, its “bob-bob-white!” whistle is a familiar sound in spring in farmland and brushy pastures. Northern bobwhites are heard more often than seen; although not especially shy, they often stay within dense low cover. During fall and winter, bobwhites live in coveys, averaging about a dozen birds. At night they roost on the ground in circles, tails pointed inward, heads pointed out.

Family: Quail

Size: About the size of a Robin

Colors: Black, Brown, Red, Tan, White

Wing Shape: Fingered, Rounded, Short

Tail Shape: Rounded, Short, Square-tipped

Pattern: Contrasting pale eyebrow and throat, buff on female, white on male

Habitat:

Northern bobwhites are found in a wide variety of semi-open habitats, including brushy meadows, overgrown fields, or where pastures or agricultural fields are next to hedgerows or woodlots.

Nesting:

In courtship, the male turns its head to the side to show off its pattern, droops wings, fluffs up feathers, makes short rushes at female, slowly approaching the female with tail fanned and feathers fluffed up. The nest location is chosen by both members of pair, then built – also by both – on ground among dense growth. Grass and weeds are often woven into

an arch over nest, making it very well hidden, with entrance at one side.

Young:

Downy young leave nest shortly after hatching. They are tended by both parents, but feed themselves. If danger threatens young, parents may put on distraction display. Young Northern bobwhite can make short flights at 1-2 weeks, but are not considered full-grown for several more weeks.

Conservation status: Near Threatened

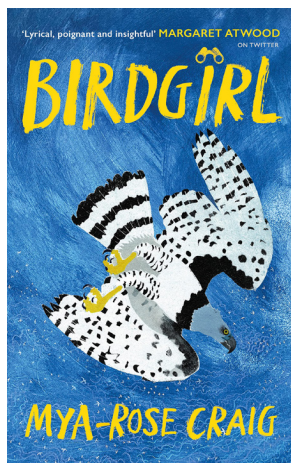
Northern Bobwhites have disappeared from much of the northern part of its range and have declined seriously even in more southern areas. The causes for these declines are not well understood, likely loss of habitat from urbanization and spring heat waves. At the northern edge of their range, many may be killed by unusually harsh winters, but this does not fully explain its widespread vanishing act.

Photo Credits

Top: Jodi Taylor.

Inset: Lindsay Donald.

Books for Birders



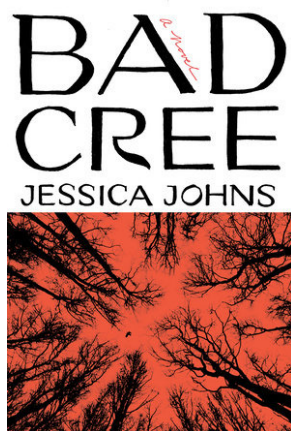
BIRDGIRL by Mya-Rose Craig
Review by Melissa Amarawardana

Mya-Rose Craig grew up birding; no casual hobby for her family, twitching is their lifestyle. At 7, she went on her first “Big Year” and by the time she was 17 she had seen half of the world’s bird species, including endemic species on all seven continents. She is an activist for the environment, diversity, and mental health, and has earned an honorary doctorate from Bristol University.

Besides being in awe of her, what will stay with me is the way this book made me feel like I was reliving my own memories – with landscapes and birds I have never seen. She details dances, calls, flight patterns, as well as physical features with artful words that inspire awe with the natural world.

BIRDING WHILE INDIAN by Thomas C. Gannon
Review by Jason “The Birdnerd” St. Sauver

Our book recommendation for this issue connects to Audubon’s mission in many ways. Local author and UNL Professor of English and Ethnic Studies, Thomas C. Gannon’s book *Birding While Indian* first and foremost is about his important relationship with birds and complex relationship with birthing. This darkly funny and sometimes challenging memoir also highlights Gannon’s past and present navigating a very white and colonized world through birthing adventures and enlightens the readers to understand what it is like to “bird while Indian.”



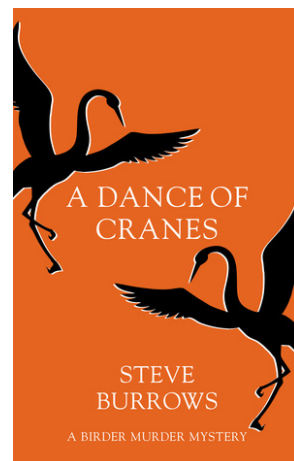
BAD CREE by Jessica Johns
Review by Amanda Booher

If you’re interested in the supernatural or a little spooky read for fall, check out *Bad Cree* by Jessica Johns, a compelling novel that explores the complexities of grief, family, and the supernatural, all while offering a profound glimpse into Indigenous cultures and beliefs. The story follows Mackenzie, a young Cree woman haunted by dreams that blur the line between reality and the otherworldly. As she navigates the tension between her urban life and her Cree heritage, themes of ancestral connections and the significance of nature in Indigenous spirituality provide a thought-provoking storyline. One of the standout elements of *Bad Cree* is how it utilizes crows, portraying them with a powerful symbolic presence. Through their eerie, ever-watchful eyes and murder (group of crows), the novel suggests that these birds carry important messages, whispering truths that can only be heard if we take the time to listen. In this way, *Bad Cree* not only tells a haunting story but explores Cree culture and its wisdom.

A DANCE OF CRANES (Birder Murder Mystery #6) by Steve Burrows
Review by Melissa Amarawardana

As an avid reader of thrillers and mysteries, I was skeptical when I heard about Steve Burrows’ *Birder Murder Mystery* series. It sounds like a gimmick, how many people could be so into both birds and murders? In fact, there are plenty of us.

A Dance of Cranes is actually about three cases at once, but also manages to seamlessly weave in the great story of Whooping Crane recovery. I was especially entertained by the ends-justify-the-means conservationists versus the very by-the-book main character. This is absolutely not to say I was rooting for the accomplices, but it was easy to relate to their motivations.



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