



CRANE RIVER CHRONICLES

IAIN NICOLSON  Audubon
CENTER AT ROWE SANCTUARY

Summer 2009

'The Beat Goes On'

By Bill Taddicken, Director

Three months have passed in the wink of an eye it seems, and it is time for our next newsletter. The spring and summer have been busy at the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center. Staff and volunteers have been hard at work continuing our mission of preserving Platte River ecosystems for cranes and other wildlife through conservation and education.

The summer camp, SOAR, was once again a huge success with two camps filled to capacity. The children had the opportunity to experience nature firsthand and become comfortable handling bugs, fish, frogs, etc.

The day camp for older children, Flying Higher, was also full. These young people had the chance to learn scientific monitoring techniques and further explore the river and habitat near it. One camper exclaimed, "Flying Higher was a discovery a second."

Rowe Sanctuary has a new program on the first Sunday of every month called 'Nature Night'. The first two have been a great success in bringing local people out for a chance to get acquainted with Rowe Sanctuary and what we have to offer. Each Nature Night offers a special program and guided nature hikes that may include exploring the river if weather and water levels permit. The different activities will be offered concurrently so everyone can choose what they want to do on

their own schedule.

The first phase of construction work on a mile long wetland slough restoration has begun and is going very well. The project should be completed by the end of September and will provide wetland habitat for ducks, geese, shorebirds and a variety of mammals and amphibians. The project is funded in part by the Nebraska Environmental Trust.

Vegetation removal in the river will begin this month on the sanctuary to maintain the wide shallow channels preferred by roosting sandhill cranes. The Platte Valley Weed Management Area, which includes Rowe Sanctuary as a partner, continues to have great success managing invasive plant species within the Platte River basin. Our primary focus is phragmites at this time, with purple loosestrife and salt cedar species of concern as well. We have received total support from landowners along several hundred miles of the Platte for this program.

As you can see your contributions are being put on the ground in a meaningful way to meet our mission. For those who have not contributed to Rowe Sanctuary and would like to learn more about how you can make a difference, please call us at 308-468-5282 or go online at www.rowsanctuary.org.

Sanctuary/Center News

Rowe Sanctuary had lots of extra help this summer.

Schuyler Hammond, a student at Hastings College, did an internship at the sanctuary. His duties included grounds maintenance, up keep of trails and sanctuary lands, assisting with summer camps, answering phones and greeting visitors.

Cody McGregor from Gibbon, volunteered his services this summer and was especially helpful with keeping the center grounds looking good. He also had a multitude of tasks assigned to him and did a great job with each.

Mandy Drake and her father Almond from North Carolina, volunteered while visiting family in the area. They weeded our flower beds and the median in the parking lot.

Boys from the Youth Rehabilitation and Training Center in Kearney, led by Rowe volunteer John Murphy, placed mulch on the Education Trail west of the center.

Local volunteers Grant Newbold, Kipp Petersen and Brian Moody installed a railing and log benches at our campfire

area.

Deb Hann from Grand Island manned the center on several Sundays when we were in a pinch.

Local volunteers Dot Owens, Kipp Petersen, Susan and Rob Elmore and Emily Walker and Rolf Hertenstein of Lyons, Colorado, all helped with grounds maintenance at various times this summer.

Dot Owens and Brian Moody guided nature hikes for our Nature Night programs.

Longtime volunteers, Jerry and Sharon Ingram of Kearney continue to help with grounds maintenance and education program projects respectively.

A HUGE THANK YOU to those listed and to anyone who we may have missed for all of your help this summer! Even though it may sound like we are up to our ears in volunteers, we can always use more. For information about volunteering, contact us at 308-468-5282 or visit our web site.

Conservation News - Platte River basin symposium set for Kearney

Fall Platte River Basin Science and Resource Management Symposium

October 14 and 15 in Kearney

The latest in Platte River research and management efforts, including adaptive management, will be showcased at an October symposium in Kearney.

The symposium is Oct. 14 and 15 in Kearney and kicks off with an optional tour of Cottonwood Ranch and other stops along the river, hosted by Chad Smith of Headwaters Corporation.

The symposium will examine research and management from the physical sciences to the human dimensions aspects of economics, sociology, law and policy. The entire reach of the Platte River, including the North and South Platte Rivers, will be examined.

On October 15 the symposium will host a full day of fast-paced sessions by a broad cross-section of Platte River researchers, managers and interested parties. Researchers and resource managers from across the basin, including in Colorado and Wyoming, were invited to present.

Presentation and poster topics include integrated water management in the basin, invasive species management, wildlife

and threatened and endangered species concerns, surface water and groundwater conflicts and socioeconomic issues, among others. Posters will be available for viewing both days.

The day's presentations open with panel discussions on the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program and the Platte River Program Independent Scientific Advisory Committee.

Registration opens in mid-August and symposium information, including a tentative agenda, is online at www.watercenter.unl.edu. **This symposium is open to the public.**

The event is cosponsored and hosted by U.S. Geological Survey Nebraska Water Science Center, Platte River Recovery Implementation Program, Headwaters Corporation and UNL's Water Center, School of Natural Resources, Water Resources Research Initiative, Office of Research and Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Address questions to Benson at (402) 472-7372 or lben-son2@unl.edu.

Rowe Sanctuary supports conservation and education initiatives through the Platte River symposium by its involvement with the Platte River Recovery Implementation Program.

Nature Notes - Ssssssssnakessss!

By Kent Skaggs, Office Manager

When you go to a zoo, what animal tends to send shivers down your spine, even when it's behind glass? Snakes! Probably the most feared animals on the planet and some for good reason, most are relatively harmless to people. So why the apprehension? Is it the way they move or how they look? They may look creepy, but are actually pretty cool.

Growing up in Nebraska, I've encountered roughly a half a dozen species of snakes in the wild. According to The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Reptiles & Amphibians, there are 115 species that occur north of Mexico ranging in size from six inches to over eight feet. They can be found in trees, water, on land, and underground from sea level to above 10,000 feet.

Of the 115 species, rattlesnakes, copperheads, cottonmouths and coral snakes make up the 17 species that are venomous. These are the snakes that are feared the most as a bite from one of these can cause extreme pain, disfigurement, may damage the nervous system, or even death. Pretty scary, right? One definitely should be aware of the potential danger when in an area where these species live, but there is no need to be scared.

Think about it. This is somewhat dependent on where you live and the habits of the snake, but how often do you see them? And when you do, most of the time they're heading for cover trying to avoid this big potential predator they've just encountered. Snakes are typically shy and like a lot of creatures try to avoid people.

Snakes happen to be very beneficial. They control other species like rats and mice that can carry diseases that are much

more of a threat to man than snakes ever could be. They also help to control insect populations and they don't cause any physical harm like the other critters mentioned can. No digging in the garden or chewing holes in your woodwork around the house.

So if you get the heebie jeebies at the mere thought of a snake, take some time to do a little research on these interesting creatures to help put your mind at ease. Also check with your local nature center to see if they have any programs on snakes. Learning from a local expert is very informative and can provide an opportunity to get up close and personal with a specimen or two.



Bullsnakes, like the one above, are very useful to humans by controlling rodents and may save farmers hundreds of dollars in rodent damage.

Calendar of Events

At Rowe Sanctuary

Nature Night

This monthly opportunity for nature exploration will be held on the first Sunday of every month at the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center. To find out more, just click on 'Nature Night' on the home page of our web site or give us a call at 308-468-5282.

Wish List

Conservation Program

- 4X4 Gator All Terrain Vehicle
- New Laptop computer
- GPS unit
- 12 Fireproof coveralls for the volunteer burn crew
- Annual river clearing - \$20,000

Education Program

- 2 Seines
- 20 Kick nets
- 1 Proscope (digital microscope)
- 2 Flow meters
- 5 Field microscopes
- 2 Water quality monitoring field kits
- 2 Anemometer
- 10 Digital meat thermometers
- 10 GPS units

Miscellaneous Items

- New color printer
- Golf cart
- Carpeting for the ConAgra Discovery Room
- 2 pair of stereo speakers for the Ron & Carol Cope Viewing Hall

Rowe Sanctuary's Ultimate Wish List

- **\$5 Million Endowment**
- **Volunteer Housing for 20**
- **ADA accessible trail system**
- **Solar panels for visitor center**

Birdathon, May 2009 - Ever seen a dowitcher?

By Dan Lindstrom, Iain Nicolson Audubon Center Stewardship Board Chair

Ever seen a dowitcher? Would you know a Dickcissel if you met one? Did you know that Baltimore Orioles are crazy about grape jelly? Can you tell the difference between a Clay-Colored Sparrow and a Chipping Sparrow? What in the world is a Willet? These questions, and more, were answered for me on a glorious day in May, when a serendipitous change in my travel schedule allowed me to join the Rowe Sanctuary staff, volunteers and guests on the annual Rowe Sanctuary Birdathon.

What is the Birdathon? Well, you may know it as a fundraiser for Rowe, if you have supported Rowe by pledging to make a gift based on the number of species of birds observed during the day of the event. Every year, staff organizes the Birdathon, solicits pledges and recruits participants to engage in a day of birding. But, it is more than a fundraiser—it's a birding event, and you really ought to consider participating in person in addition to making your pledge. The Birdathon is a great way to introduce yourself, your friends and family to the great number and variety of birds that surround us, enjoy the outdoors, and have fun in the process.



I joined the group at 6 A.M. at Rowe Sanctuary for some coffee and muffins and then we went out to greet the sunrise at the windows near the feeders, counting a number of "easy" birds to start our list ("easy" because they came right to the window and didn't interfere too much with your coffee-drinking and muffin-eating ways). That jelly-eating

Baltimore Oriole was right on time. After that we went to work. A short hike on the trail west of the Center and we added a number of additional birds to the list, including a fanned-out male turkey showing-off to a potential mate. A stop at the blind gave us a chance to see a number of shorebirds, waterfowl and even cranes in the river. A pair of Blue-winged Teal showed their spring plumage while swimming nearby.

After a quick trip to the hills south of the sanctuary (more kinds of sparrows, burbling Bobolink and that happy Dickcissel), we wandered back to the sanctuary. At the newly-restored Dinan tract we witnessed an amazing array of shorebirds (including that Dowitcher and that Willet) and spotted the first recorded Caspian Tern on the sanctuary property. We ended the morning with 68 bird species, nearly all of which came from the sanctuary property. Leaving the sanctuary, we checked-off a few "urban" birds in Kearney and John Murphy shared his classroom with us while we watched his feeders.

With other pressing issues requiring my attention in the afternoon, I left the group as they began the road trip portion of the day. Heading south to the Rainwater Basin areas and Harlan County Reservoir, they made some other great finds and by the end of the Birdathon day, 109 bird species were listed. At a buck apiece, I was happy to fulfill my pledge, but better yet, I was glad to have participated in person.

A couple of observations in case you are considering participation in the next Birdathon, but aren't sure if it is for you: you don't have to stay all day, the experienced birders are happy to share their expertise and their optics with you, and the pace is relaxed and friendly. It's a lovely spring jaunt in the outdoors and you will be amazed at what you see and learn in the process. Will you become a "bird-nerd" if you go birding with the group on Birdathon day? Only if you want to be one, I guess. However, I can guarantee that you will learn something you never knew before and that you'll be amazed at the incredible variety of birds and other creatures that inhabit our "backyard."

Rowe Sanctuary/Iain Nicolson Audubon Center Donors

Rowe Sanctuary would like to thank everyone who has supported our work on behalf of cranes and other wildlife that depend on the Platte River and its associated ecosystems.

(The following gifts were received between April 1 and June 30, 2009)

Organizational Support

\$75-\$100

Copycat Printing
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Individuals

\$1,000-\$2,499

Don Brockmeier
LeRoy & Kate Ellison

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Margery Nicolson

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Peggy Montano
Diana Nevins
American Legion Club Post #310
Bret Snyder
Bob Stoppkotte
Lynn Tennefoss

\$50-\$99

Donna Haynes

The Braided River Society

The Braided River Society recognizes generous individual donors whose annual support of \$500 or more sustains our mission to conserve Platte River ecosystems for cranes and other wildlife. We hope you consider joining them, making possible the education and conservation work at Rowe Sanctuary that will help develop a culture of conservation committed to the future of this treasured natural resource. If you are interested in joining this society, please contact Bill Taddicken at 308-468-5282 or billtaddicken@nctc.net.

(gifts received from April 1 - June 30, 2009)

Sandhill Crane

\$5,000-\$9,999

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Catherine Smyth
David Pitrak & Susan Taylor
Eileen Zentner

The support and recognition of all our donors is extremely important to us. We apologize if a donor has been inadvertently left off this list. Please let us know of any missing names so corrections can be made in the next issue.

Education - Nature's bug zappers

By Keanna Leonard, Education Director

I love to garden! There is something about working my little piece of land that soothes my soul. Oh, don't get me wrong. I do have those moments when I wonder if it's all worth it. You know those times...finding your prize roses have been attacked by aphids or a tomato hornworm has devoured a tomato or two before you even have a chance to taste them. My gut reaction is to grab the chemicals and kill all the wretched bugs.

But before I do that, I reach for the water hose to fill up my birdbath. I bet right now you think I just fell off the turnip truck! Your thinking why would I want to give myself a bigger headache by attracting an even bigger pest?

But consider this. Not all birds attack your produce. In fact, most eat seeds and insects not fruits and vegetables. Now don't get me wrong. Birds won't completely rid your yard of bugs.

What they do is keep insect populations in your neighborhood at a stable, balanced level. You'll have a nicer garden to show for it throughout the summer.

Now you probably think I'm crazy, but ninety-five percent of all insects are beneficial or harmless to people. Consider the lowly bee. Insecticides are non-discriminatory killing all insects. That includes bees, one of the most beneficial insects in the world. If we didn't have bees to pollinate our plants, our gardens would produce poorly if at all. Not a good thing when you are looking forward to watching those watermelon blooms mature into sweet, delicious, mouth-watering fruit.

With a little planning and simple landscaping, you can attract the right birds to reduce pests in your yard naturally. The most important thing you can do is provide inviting habitat, and I am not just talking about a birdhouse.

Besides, not all insect-eating birds nest in boxes.

Consider planting native vegetation, shrubs and trees that need less pesticide and provide good nesting sites and shelter for your feathered bug zappers. Create multilayered gardens, especially under large trees to increase the amount of shelter. And don't forget to have a water source nearby.

Also seriously think about not dead-heading flowers and pulling spent plants in the fall. These will provide birds with highly nutritious food in the lean winter months. It also means less fall cleanup work for you and a more natural look to your winter garden.

It really isn't hard to leave the chemicals in the shed when you understand the role birds can play in your garden planning. Hmm...bug zappers that look and sound good. Now that's a great addition to any garden!

Volunteering - Field Notes

By Erv Nichols & Sandra Noll, Crane Season Volunteers

Inspired in part by our experiences at Rowe Sanctuary, we've adopted a lifestyle of volunteer work in connecting people with nature and the environment.

Last year we planned our work to follow the cranes from our home base in New Mexico, to Rowe then to Alaska where we volunteered at the Maritime Fish and Wildlife Refuge. We assisted with their annual shorebird festival and introduced people to this huge, remote refuge which safeguards the nesting rookeries of thousands of seabirds. We developed and presented programs on Bald Eagles and Sea Otters and still had time to observe nesting Sandhills. What a treat!

We took time to camp, visiting Denali and a few more wonders before volunteering at the Arctic Interagency Visitor's Center in remote Coldfoot, AK. There we also presented programs (eagles and caribou) and facilitated visitors understanding of and travel into some of the protected lands above the Arctic Circle, including those managed by the Bureau of Land Manage-

ment, Gates of the Arctic National Park, and the Kanuti, Yukon Flats and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuges. We lived "off the grid" in a cabin powered by generator, water we carried in and an outhouse requiring us to carry bear spray or a rifle. We were treated to the delights of fall in the tundra; spectacular colors, wildlife and the Aurora!

We returned to the lower 48 camping through Canada, Glacier and Yellowstone before beginning another assignment at the Grand Canyon working as interpretive guides on the trails and in the visitor's center. There we developed programs on California Condors, geology and horned and antlered animals. From program development alone you can imagine the opportunities for learning on each of these assignments.

After a brief home respite, we began



our current work in a remote section of New Mexico at Ted Turner's Armandaris Ranch. We are hack (release) site attendants for the Peregrine Fund which is reintroducing the Aplomado Falcon to once-traditional habitat. Next it's Texas, first at Laguna Atascosa Refuge as photographers and in the Visitor's Center then Roma Bluffs as canoe birding guides. Keep up with our adventures on the web: ervandsandra.blogspot.com.

We enjoy volunteering for interpretive work because of the people connection and, well, because we're hams. Other opportunities involve heavy equipment, trail and garden upkeep, clerical assistance, etc. Pick one and enjoy!



CRANE RIVER CHRONICLES

Rowe Sanctuary
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Gibbon, Nebraska 68840

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CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH NATURE



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The mission of Rowe Sanctuary is to preserve Platte River ecosystems for cranes and other wildlife through conservation and education.



General Information

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44450 Elm Island Road
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Phone: 308-468-5282
www.rowsanctuary.org

Open Monday - Friday, 9 am - 5 pm
Open 7 days a week during crane season

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Please send me information on how to name Rowe Sanctuary in my will or retirement plan.

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Please mail to the address above or email us at kskaggs@audubon.org. Thank you!

You can now make donations online through our website at www.rowsanctuary.org!