

The Burrowing Owl

A Publication of the
Nebraska Ornithologists' Union

Dedicated to the Study, Appreciation, and Protection of Birds
August 2017

NOU News Upcoming Meetings:

Join us in Ogallala, 15–17 September 2017, for our fall meeting. The meeting location is only minutes away from Lake McConaughy (pictured, with setting sun) and Lake Ogallala/Keystone. The meeting location and time of year should produce a long list of species, and the potential for rarities is high. The registration form is included on page 5 of this newsletter. Thank you all for your continuing support of the NOU.

Our spring 2018 meeting will be at Ft. Robinson State Park, 18–20 May 2018.

Photo by Joel Jorgensen

Changes in NOU Officers

In late 2016, the NOU had a vacancy on its Board of Directors, because former Board Member Jan Johnson was elected Treasurer. T.J. Walker was subsequently elected to fill the open position. At the NOU spring meeting in May 2017 in Auburn, Dan Leger stepped down as President after serving in that role for five consecutive years. Dan's leadership and efforts during this extended period is greatly appreciated. NOU's new President is Joel Jorgensen. One of the duties of the President is to generate this newsletter. With that task being assumed by the new president, you may notice some subtle style changes to this publication. All other officers were retained. Many thanks to the Nominating Committee that included Maggie Olson, Esa Jarvi, and Dave Heidt.

New Members

Terry Mason, Calloway, NE

Welcome to the NOU!

Nebraska's 2nd Brown Booby bops in at Harlan County Lake

Just as spring migration was winding down in late May, a report came of a Brown Booby at Harlan County Lake. The bird was initially reported by Jeff Drahota who happened to observe the bird while fishing over the Memorial Day weekend. While Jeff may not spend much time birding, he is a professional wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and he does know his birds. On 31 May, Melissa Panella and Joel Jorgensen relocated and confirmed the Brown Booby. The megarrarity was viewed by many through 25 June.

Brown Boobies are usually found on and near tropical and subtropical oceans, but the species does have a tendency to wander inland. Nebraska's first Brown Booby, not seen by any birders, was photographed by a resident of a sandpit housing development in Sarpy County in 2014. Another one appeared in central Iowa in 2015, but the species is generally unrecorded in other nearby states. Brown Boobies have also been recorded inland in Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, Arizona, and several other states.

With a number of birders flocking to Harlan County Lake to see the booby, it is no surprise that a little "Patagonia picnic table effect" occurred and a few other good birds were spotted. A few lucky observers saw an adult Laughing Gull (pictured), and a Clark's Grebe (pictured) was nicely documented by former Nebraska birder John Sullivan, who now resides in Oregon.



Photo by John Sullivan



Photo by Paul Roisen



Photo by Paul Roisen



Photo by John Sullivan

Goodbye Thayer's Gull and Le Conte's Sparrow

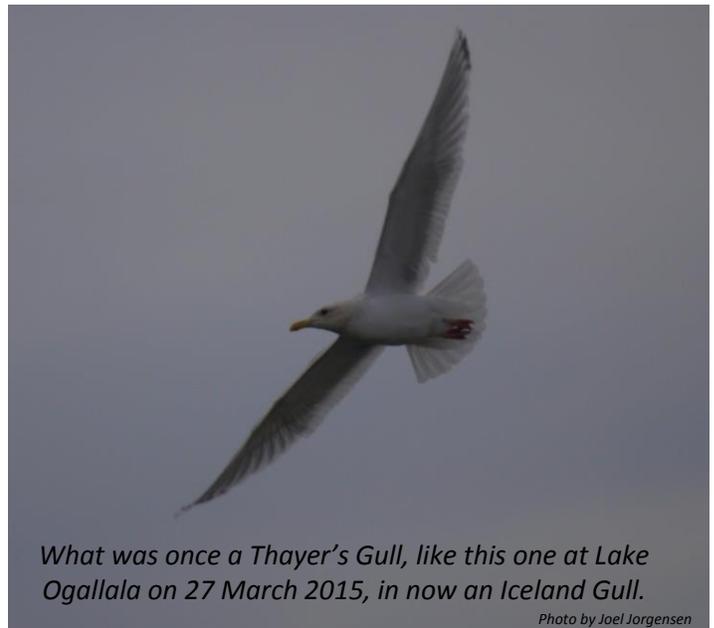
In early July, Nebraska birders and the broader ornithological community lost a confusing and perplexing friend, the Thayer's Gull. The taxon lost its standing as a full species and was lumped with Iceland Gull as part of the American Ornithological Society's 58th supplement to the Checklist of North and Middle American Birds. The lump and name change seem as though it will continue to cause some confusion. The former Thayer's Gull (now *Larus glaucoides thayeri*) is an uncommon migrant and winter visitor to Nebraska. Paler birds of this new taxon that breed in eastern North America were formerly considered to be part of their own subspecies of Iceland Gull (*Larus glaucoides kumlieni*). Prior to the change, birds appearing to be "Kumlien's" Iceland Gulls were much rarer in Nebraska than birds appearing to be Thayer's Gulls. However, all of these birds, as well as European Iceland Gulls, will now be considered Iceland Gulls. Birders should update their various lists by combining Iceland and Thayer's Gull ticks.

Another loss to birders is the space in LeConte's Sparrow. The proper spelling was formerly Le Conte's Sparrow. Additionally, the genus name for Emperor, Snow and Ross's Geese was changed from *Chen* to *Anser*. The genus *Anas*, which include many duck species, was split into four genera. *Spatula* becomes the genus name for Northern Shoveler, Blue-winged and Cinnamon Teal. *Mareca* is now the genus that includes Gadwall, Eurasian and American wigeon.

Northern Harrier was split from its Old World counterpart, the Hen Harrier and Northern Shrike was also split from its Old World counterpart, the Great Grey Shrike.

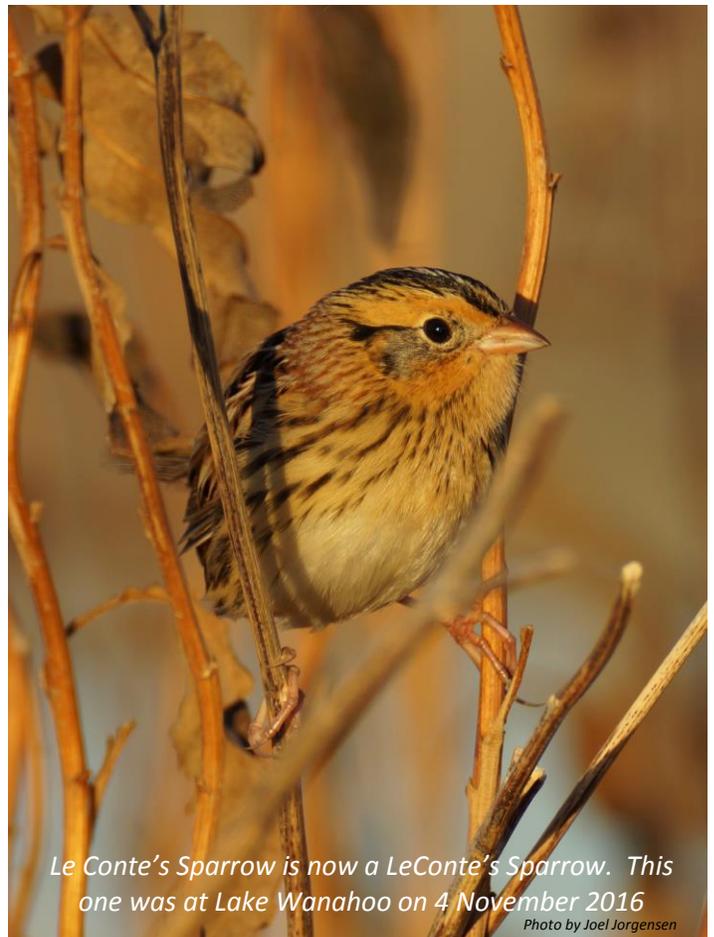
The lovably distinct and peculiar Yellow-breasted Chat now occupies its own family, *Icteriidae*, which is very similar to and will no doubt be confused with the New World blackbird family, *Icteridae*.

Some additional reordering of species was also included in the supplement. All the changes have been incorporated into NOU's official list online: <http://www.noubirds.org/Birds/StateList.aspx>



What was once a Thayer's Gull, like this one at Lake Ogallala on 27 March 2015, is now an Iceland Gull.

Photo by Joel Jorgensen



Le Conte's Sparrow is now a LeConte's Sparrow. This one was at Lake Wanahoo on 4 November 2016

Photo by Joel Jorgensen

UNL research suggests wind energy facilities have limited impacts on Greater Prairie-Chickens in the Nebraska Sandhills

Wind energy development is growing rapidly in Nebraska and surrounding states and with it come significant concerns about impacts to wildlife. Birds and bats may be killed when they collide with wind turbines, have their vocalizations masked by the sound of the spinning turbine blades, be exposed to greater predation risk, and breeding habitat may be effectively lost when they avoid areas near turbines. The Greater Prairie-Chicken is considered a conservation priority across its range by non-governmental organizations and state and federal agencies, and there was concern that wind energy facilities might negatively impact local populations. Current research by Larkin Powell, Mary Bomberger Brown, and their colleagues at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln School of Natural Resources is revealing impacts to prairie-chickens may not be as serious as once feared. The researchers conducted a multi-year study looking at various aspects of the species' life history, including lekking behavior, predation risk (which may change if certain predators are attracted to or avoid turbines), vocalizations, and hen, nest, and brood survival and movement at varying distances from wind turbines at an existing facility near Ainsworth in the Nebraska Sandhills. The researchers have found little evidence to suggest the turbines and associated structures at the wind energy facility are negatively impacting Greater Prairie-Chickens. The research project was conducted in the largely intact landscape of the Sandhills and it is possible that impacts may be different in more fragmented landscapes. Additional information can be found online at the following webpage: <http://larkinpowell.wixsite.com/larkinpowell/current-research>

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks & White-winged Doves making moves

White-winged Doves and Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks are two species increasing in Nebraska. Both species historically occupied areas well to our south, but both have been increasing in numbers and expanding their range for decades. The whistling-duck and dove were first documented in Nebraska in 1989 and 1994, respectively. Since the initial records, the frequency of additional reports has increased, slowly at first but picking up steam over time. However, it appears both species have recently crossed a threshold whereby additional sightings and reports, while notable, are no longer surprises, but are expected. Already in 2017, there have been four reports of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks in the state, including eight birds out west near Bridgeport in early June. Other reports, all supported by photos, were from Saunders, Lancaster, and Hall counties. Not long ago, a single report during any one year would have been notable. White-winged Doves have had an excellent showing in Nebraska over the last 18 months or so. Not only are reports of White-winged Doves increasing, but so too are observations of nesting. In 2016, nesting was reported from Culbertson, Hitchcock County, and Aurora, Hamilton County. This summer, White-winged Doves were discovered nesting near Wahoo, Saunders County. In addition, the frequency of reports in places like Benkelman, Champion and Imperial suggest the species is now established as a summer resident in some cities and towns in southwest Nebraska. It is assumed regular nesting likely occurs in these areas even though evidence may be lacking. These two species are expected to increase in Nebraska.



Registration Form: NOU Fall 2017 Meeting
 Ogallala, Nebraska
 September 15–17, 2017

Registration Deadline: September 1, 2017

Location: Quality Inn and Conference Center
 201 Chuckwagon Rd.
 Ogallala, NE 69153

		#People	Total
Sep 15 – Friday Supper – 6 PM Pizza and beverages	\$8.00	_____	_____
Sep 16 – Sack Lunch, pick up – 6:30 AM Sandwich, chips, fruit salad, water	\$12.00	_____	_____
Sep 16 – Saturday Dinner Buffet – 6 PM Baked Chicken, au gratin potatoes, garden salad, vegetable, drink	\$15.00	_____	_____
Registration per person:	\$12.00	_____	_____
Would you like to become a member? Dues:			
Active household	\$25.00	_____	_____
Sustaining household	\$40.00	_____	_____
Student	\$10.00	_____	_____

Fees include all taxes and gratuities

Total: _____

Name(s) _____ Address _____

City/State/Zip _____ Phone _____ Email _____

Please indicate any special dietary requirements: _____

For the Saturday night dinner, we need to give a dinner count to Quality Inn 2 weeks prior to our meeting. If you are attending please try to register by September 1, 2017. Thanks!

Please send registration forms and checks to: Jan Johnson
 86252 581 Ave.
 Wakefield, NE 68784

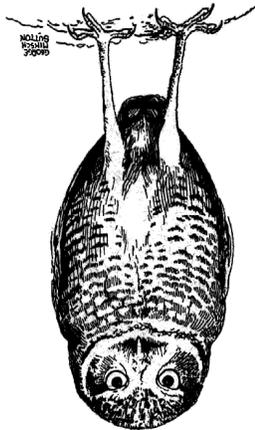
Quality Inn will hold rooms for us until 3 weeks before our meeting, or about August 25, 2017 at the following rates. There is no elevator to the 2nd floor.

Main level: 1 king bed - \$102 per night	2 queen beds - \$108 per night
2 nd Floor: 1 king bed - \$93 per night	2 queen beds - \$99 per night

Ogallala area hotels and phone numbers

Quality Inn (308-284-3623), Super 8 (308-507-4067), Best Western Stagecoach Inn (308-284-3656), Lazy K Motel (308-284-4056), Rodeway Inn (308-284-2056), Lonesome Dove Lodge (308 284-2266) Holiday Inn Express (308-284-6080), Days Inn (308 284-6365)

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