

The Burrowing Owl

November
2021

A Publication of the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union

Dedicated to the study, appreciation, and protection of birds

2021 membership renewals coming up fast

The time to renew your NOU membership is coming up fast. This is a reminder that you can now renew online at www.NOUbirds.org. Many members are already well versed in using the system. If not, simply go to the site, click "About" on the top menu bar, and then select "Join/renew membership." On some devices, you may need to tap on the three white lines on the upper left hand side of the screen. From there, either log in to your current account or create a new account if you do not have one. Once this is completed, you will be set. Furthermore, you will be able to register for future meetings on the NOU website. If you have problems or need assistance, please send me an email at nebraska.ornithologists.union@gmail.com. We continue to strongly encourage individuals to do their renewals or join the NOU online through the NOU website.

Again this renewal season, Jan Johnson is donating original artwork to help the cause. The Great Blue Heron piece on the bottom right hand corner of this page will be given to one individual who will be randomly selected from a pool of candidate who renew their 2022 membership online using a credit card or Pay Pal. If you are ahead of the curve and have already renewed for the upcoming year, good news, you are still eligible to win. The winner will be announced in a future NOU newsletter. Do you know the best time to renew you NOU membership? Right now when you are thinking about it!!!

NOU's Next Scheduled Meetings

Spring Meeting: Gering, 20-22 May 2022

Fall Meeting: Schramm Park State Recreation Area, 28-30 Oct 2022 (tentative dates)

New Members

Colleen, Clyde and Tommy Childers, Grand Island
Karen Linot, Gibbon; Paul Royster, Lincoln

Moving?

If you are changing addresses, **please** update it by logging into the NOU website or by sending a note to Jan Johnson at janbirder@gmail.com. Copies of the *Nebraska Bird Review* sent to defunct addresses are costing the NOU unnecessary postage. Being proactive will help us save dollars.



NOU Big Weekend Provides Interesting Snapshot

By T.J. Walker

Once again, we unfortunately could not meet in person for the fall meeting, but it gave me the privilege of compiling the efforts of the Big Weekend for all of you one more time. I wasn't able to "get out" at all – chalked up just 18 species in my yard. Late October was again a bit of a gamble weather wise – most of the state had at least some decent opportunity on Saturday aside from windy conditions, but Sunday saw dreary, windy and wet conditions across most of the state pretty much all day. Collectively, we found just 135 species this fall on October 23rd and 24th (compared to 164 species last fall). There was at least one report for 42 of the 93 counties (35 last fall), again with better coverage east and central than far west or southwest but much better overall distribution this fall. The top county list was Lancaster with 83 species reported, greatly reduced from the 120 species reported in Lancaster last year. Comparisons between the two falls for species by county appear in Table 1.

The most reported species (number of counties reported in) included Red-tailed Hawk and American Robin (28 counties), 29 species were reported from just one county (some by multiple observers, others a single lone reporter). In Table 2 there is a comparison of 16 species that were in the "top 10" in number of counties across the two years

Group-wise – Waterfowl (21 species compared to 27 species last fall), Shorebirds (8 species compared to 16 species last fall), sparrows (17 – 18 with House Sparrow – just 1 less than last year) and Warblers (just 3 species – same as last year).

Surprises (in my opinion – or otherwise just cool stuff)

- Just 1 scoter location report (Capital Beach Lake, Lincoln) for the weekend
- We got all the gals (gallinaceous birds – except for Gray Partridge) – Pheasant, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Prairie-chicken, N. Bobwhite and Wild Turkey all reported.
- Sandhill Cranes – not overly reported – but reported from Saunders County to Sioux County.
- Whooping Crane – one report that couldn't be shared regrettably
- Short-eared Owl – two reported

Table 1. Comparison of the number of species by county between the 2020 and 2021 Big Weekends

County	Fall 2021	Fall 2020
Lancaster	83	120
Scotts Bluff	70	78
Lincoln	61	75
Douglas	59	79
Sarpy	54	69
Madison	48	52
Merrick	43	22
Saunders	41	41
Dodge	40	57
Stanton	37	0

Table 2. Comparison of the number of counties selected species were reported between the 2020 and 2021 Big Weekends

Species	# in 2021	# in 2020
Red-tailed Hawk	28	21
American Robin	28	21
American Crow	27	19
European Starling	25	21
Dark-eyed Junco	24	24
Canada Goose	22	23
Eurasian Collared-dove	21	17
Song Sparrow	21	15
Northern Flicker	20	18
Double-crested Cormorant	19	15
Downy Woodpecker	19	20
Red-winged Blackbird	19	19
Blue Jay	18	22
Northern Cardinal	18	22
Red-bellied Woodpecker	16	20
Killdeer	9	20



- Four falcons (species) – got all 4 (Kestrel, Merlin, Prairie and Peregrine)
- “Hey you” – What are you still doing here? – Red-eyed Vireo reported (was he still singing???)
- Black-billed Magpies – reported in just 2 counties though including Keith and Scotts Bluff.
- Common Raven – single bird photographed in Sioux County
- Rusty Blackbirds – a decent showing with 4 counties reported in

Surprising Misses (not considering distribution of birders – again – in my opinion)

- Trumpeter Swan
- Gulls – just the 4 expected species of Bonaparte’s, Franklin’s, Ring-billed and Herring – no “odd gulls”
- Rough-legged Hawk – just a hair too early I guess
- Swallows – last year it was colder and we had Barn and Tree
- Carolina Wren – wasn’t missed but only reported in 3 counties
- Mountain Bluebird – wasn’t missed but only reported in 1 county
- Finches – seemed like low number and diversity – House Finch, American Goldfinch – and just 2 reports of Red Crossbills

Species we got in 2020 but not in 2021 (n=40)

- | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| • Ross’s Goose | • Sanderling | • Tree Swallow |
| • Trumpeter Swan | • Dunlin | • Barn Swallow |
| • Greater Scaup | • American Woodcock | • Winter Wren |
| • White-winged Scoter | • Lesser Black-backed Gull | • Marsh Wren |
| • Black Scoter | • Common Tern | • Brown Thrasher |
| • Long-tailed Duck | • Forster’s Tern | • Hermit Thrush |
| • Horned Grebe | • Pacific Loon | • Cassin’s Finch |
| • Red-necked Grebe | • Great Egret | • Purple Finch |
| • Virginia Rail | • White-faced Ibis | • Pine Siskin |
| • American Avocet | • Rough-legged Hawk | • Lesser Goldfinch |
| • Black-bellied Plover | • Barn Owl | • Lapland Longspur |
| • American Golden Plover | • Eastern Screech-owl | • Nelson’s Sparrow |
| • Upland Sandpiper | • Yellow-bellied Sapsucker | |
| • Stilt Sandpiper | • Red-headed Woodpecker | |

Species we found in 2021 but not in 2020 (n=11)

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| • Greater Prairie-chicken | • Red-eyed Vireo |
| • Cattle Egret | • Common Raven |
| • Turkey Vulture | • Sedge Wren |
| • Short-eared Owl | • Sprague’s Pipit |
| • Pileated Woodpecker | • Eastern Meadowlark |
| • Peregrine Falcon | |

All in all there were 338 eBird reports and a handful of other reports (emails, instant messages, etc.).

Editor’s Note: Many thanks to T.J. for once again compiling results from the NOU Big Weekend.



Vermilion Flycatcher: Unexpected Southwest Bird visits Johnson County

By Jim and Marcia Gilliam

Photos by Paul Roisen

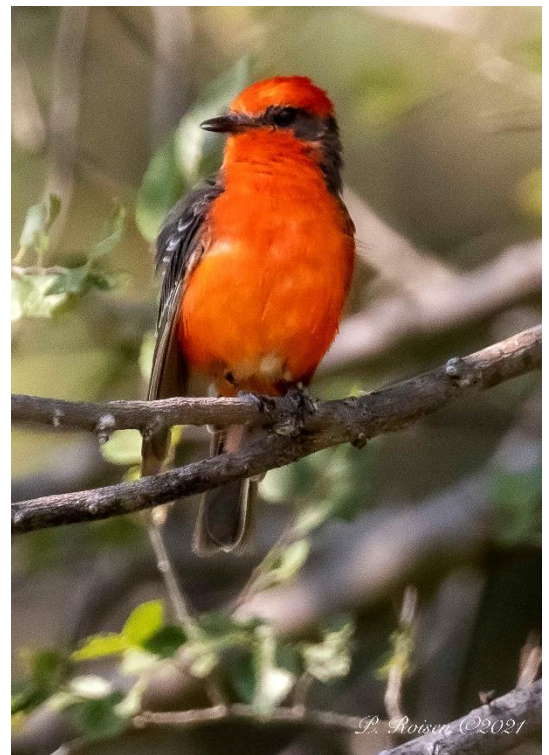
Mid-August of 2021, we were enjoying keeping an eye on the goings and comings of the birds and animals that appear in our farm yard, south of Tecumseh, Nebraska. Daily we spend at least an hour, over morning coffee. Sometime on August 15th or 16th, we noticed an unusual bird. It acted much like the phoebes and barn swallows, catching insects and sometimes “softening them up” on a convenient clothesline post as we’ve seen phoebes do. On August 17th, we succeeded in getting a photograph of the bird using our little point and shoot camera. After consulting the *Birds of North America* book, we decided that the bird was a male Vermilion Flycatcher. However, the normal range of the Vermilion Flycatcher is so far Southwest as to make our sighting nearly unbelievable.

Seeking confirmation of our find, we sent an email and two photos to Nebraska Television’s show Backyard Farmer – the longest-running, locally-produced television show in the nation. It is celebrating its 69th season and airs Thursdays on PBS in Nebraska (a little info. for those NOU members who are dedicated farmers like board members the Pasekas and the Johnsons). The show’s herpetologist Dennis Ferraro said it was definitely a flycatcher but due to the quality of our photos, couldn’t commit to which one. By the time we were in the audience for the show’s end of season live taping, we had received confirmation from Lindsay Rogers of Nebraska Game and Parks. Lindsey relayed the identification to NOU President Joel Jorgensen.

Joel quickly arranged to visit, and as he drove up the lane, had no problem spotting the bird sitting on the power drop overhead. Joel quickly confirmed that the bird was indeed a brilliant male Vermilion Flycatcher. Joel asked and received permission to share the information with others.

We have lost count of the exact number of people who visited to observe and photograph our little guest. Early on, we noticed and advised visitors to stay in, or very near their car. Cars didn’t bother him but he’d notice and fly away whenever people attempted to move closer to him. When human activity stopped, he quickly returned to his preferred perches on fence wire, the power drop, and wire cages surrounding trees. Fortunately for the birders, these features were positioned conveniently on three sides of the driveway.

We first saw him a day or two before the date on the first pictures we took, (8/17/21), so we figure we first saw him 8/15-ish. I’m sure if he had been there earlier, we’d have noticed. We study that part of the yard pretty closely every morning for at least an hour over coffee. The last time we saw it was September 8, 2021. It appears the Vermilion Flycatcher, the phoebes, and the barn swallows all left the property the



same day. Perhaps he followed the others South. We figure he was here from 8/15 – 9/08. We hope he ate enough bugs here to refuel for the trip home.

We enjoyed sharing “our” bird with people who love and follow them, and met many interesting people. Wish we’d been more organized about collecting your names. Thank you for your courtesy and sharing your knowledge with us. Many of you followed up by emailing beautiful photos.

For those of you wishing to see details on past sightings, visit the *Birds of Nebraska- Online* at: <https://birds.outdoornebraska.gov/vermillion-flycatcher/>. This is an outstanding, regularly updated, record detailing sightings of the birds of Nebraska as seen over time. It is the modern-day extension of the 2001 University of Nebraska Press book *Birds of Nebraska: their distribution and temporal occurrence* by Sharpe et al.

Editor’s note: Thanks to Paul Roisen for additional editing of this article.

Christmas Bird Counts – back strong in 2021-22

Christmas Birds Counts (CBCs) are around the corner and it looks like nearly the full line-up of CBCs will be on this year following an abbreviated slate last year because of COVID-19 concerns. Below is information for the ones we know about.



Scottsbluff – 14 Dec; Contact: Kathy DeLara, renosmom@charter.net

Harlan County – 14 Dec; Contact: Joel Jorgensen, joel.jorgensen@nebraska.gov

Ames – 16 Dec; Contact: Don and Janis Paseka, paseka76@gmail.com

North Platte – 17 Dec; Contact: T.J. Walker, thomas.walker@nebraska.gov Or Julie Geiser, julie.geiser@nebraska.gov

Lincoln – 18 Dec; Contact: Jason St. Sauver. jstsauver@audubon.org

Norfolk – 18 Dec; Contact: Dave Heidt, heidtdw@gmail.com

DeSoto – 18 Dec; Contact: Jerry Toll, geritol48@cox.net

Omaha – 19 Dec: Contact: Bob Wells, rcwells@cox.net

Seward/Branches Oak – 19 Dec; Contact: Joe Gubanyi, Joseph.Gubanyi@cune.edu

Calamus-Loup – 21 Dec; Contact: Dave Heidt, heidtdw@gmail.com

Beaver Valley – 27 Dec; Contact: Jason Thiele, jason.thiele@nebraska.gov

Lower Platte River – 4 Jan; Contact: Joel Jorgensen, joel.jorgensen@nebraska.gov



Kid's Page

Top 10 Facts: Birds

1. There are around 10,000 species of birds. They range from small to large and are found all over the world.
2. All birds lay eggs. All female birds lay eggs in a nest to keep the eggs safe and dry. The baby birds hatch when ready.
3. Birds migrate to other countries. A lot of birds migrate which means move to other places for several reasons. It can be due to weather and food availability in different seasons. About 4,000 species of birds migrate.
4. All birds have feathers. Feathers are useful in many ways. Feathers help birds to fly and to control the wind when flying. They keep the birds warm. Birds also use their feathers to show off to attract a mate.
5. Birds don't have teeth. No teeth means they have to swallow their food whole. They have an organ called a gizzard which grinds up their food so they can digest it properly.
6. Birds are great communicators. Birds chirp and sing for many different reasons. They sing to attract a mate. The chatter to warn others of danger, and even to scare off a predator (hunter).
7. A group of birds is called a flock. This is a large group of birds usually of the same species, that stay together for safety, when migrating, or when looking for food.
8. Some birds can mimic (copy) humans! Parrots can do this but so can some wild birds like Crows and Ravens.
9. Ostriches have the largest eye of any animal on land. As well as large eyes, they also lay the largest egg, and they're the largest bird.
10. The smallest bird is the Bee Hummingbird. It is about 5 centimeters long! Look at your ruler to see how tiny this really is. This tiny bird lives only in Cuba. Can you find Cuba on a map?



Unscramble these bird names:

rrwspoa _____

sehuo enrw _____

jblyaeu _____

dicrlana _____

gbhiumingmdr _____

tkruye _____

otchris _____

bbridule _____

Sparrow, House Wren, Bluejay, Cardinal, Hummingbird, Turkey, Ostrich, Bluebird



Proposed change to the Bylaws

The NOU Board of Directors is proposing to amend the bylaws. Specifically, the proposed change would alter the composition of the Nominating Committee. The proposed change is planned to come up for a vote of the membership at the Business Meeting during the 2022 spring meeting in Gering, Nebraska. This change was originally planned to come up for a vote at the 2020 Business Meeting, but those plans were derailed by the 2020 and 2021 meeting cancellations. The Bylaws also require that the membership be made aware of the proposed change more than thirty days in advance of the Business Meeting. The proposed change is from page 4 of the Bylaws, which are available on the NOU website at <https://noubirds.org/Documents/Bylaws.pdf>. The proposed changes to the Nominating Committee section are shown below. Changes are highlighted in yellow, with the language shown with the strikethrough as words proposed to be deleted. Language proposed to be added in shown in red.

Nominating Committee – It shall consist of three members ~~who are not members of the Board of Directors, and~~ who have been ~~members~~ active participants in the organization for at least five years. ~~No more than one committee member shall also be a member of the Board of Directors.~~ Only one member may have served on the previous year's committee, but may not serve more than two consecutive terms. Its purpose is to assure that at least one candidate for each office will be available at the annual meeting. Each nominee for each office must indicate a willingness to accept office if elected. The committee shall present nominee names at the annual business meeting of the Corporation.

The Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Board

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