

The Burrowing Owl

August
2026

A Publication of the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union

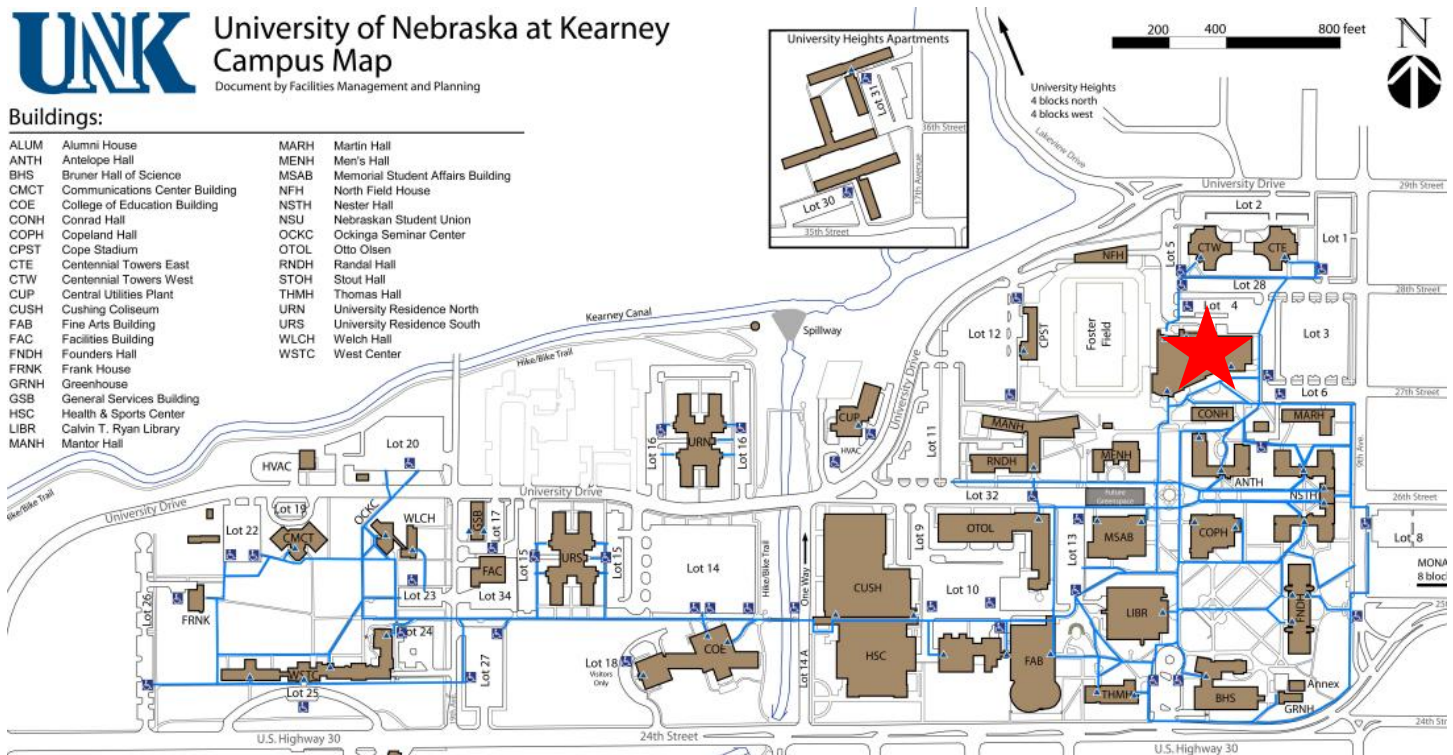
Dedicated to the study, appreciation, and protection of birds

Fall meeting primer

The Nebraska Ornithologists' Union will hold its fall meeting in the Antelope Room in the University of Nebraska-Kearney Student Union in Kearney (UNK), Nebraska, 11-13 September. Location of the meeting on the UNK campus is indicated by the red star on the campus map below. Friday evening's social and dinner will begin at 5:30 p.m. and will be followed by a presentation by Elsa Forsberg with the Crane Trust who will discuss her graduate work focused on Piping Plovers. There will also be student presentations. Saturday field trips will hit a range of local hotspots as well as longer distance trips to sites such as Harlan County or Sherman Reservoirs.

After a full day of birding, Saturday evening's social and dinner will again commence at 5:30 p.m. Saturday evening's speaker will be Dr. Letitia Reichert. Professor and Co-chair Biology Department at UNK. Dr Reichert's research focuses on multiple aspects of ornithology, aimed at understanding behavior of birds and habitat requirements for birds. Sunday morning field trips will be sorted out Saturday evening. Individuals who are not members of the NOU are encouraged to attend. ****Register online here: <https://noubirds.org/Meetings/Register.aspx?mtg=142> *****

Meeting Registration form is included in this newsletter and registration for meals closes 1 September



Spring Meeting Recap

The Nebraska Ornithologists' Union held its spring meeting at Ft. Robinson State Park 29-31 May 2026. Approximately 70 individuals were registered. Friday evening's fun included an evening social and a presentation by Stephen Brenner, with Audubon Great Plains, that focused on Spotted Towhee subspecies in western Nebraska. Saturday field trips spread out in all directions from the Fort. Even though no show-stopping species were found during the meeting and late spring migrants were scarce, lots of birds were seen. Overall, whopping 170 species were tallied and attendees enjoyed a great mix of Pine Ridge and High Plains specialties.

On Saturday evening, folks again assembled at the Fort and enjoyed presentations by Kaitlyn Parkins of the American Bird Conservancy and Lucas DeCicco with the University of Kansas. Kaitlyn presented on efforts to reduce avian mortalities from window collisions and Lucas presented on research about Eastern and Spotted Towhee hybridization along the Niobrara River in northern Nebraska. Overall, the weather, facilities, presentation and birding was delightful.

The NOU field trip to Prairie Plains Resource Institute's Guadalcanal Memorial Prairie and Ranch that took place on Sunday morning of the NOU Spring meeting. Photo by Thomas Labeledz



NOU's Next Meetings

Fall Meeting: Kearney, 11-13 September 2026

Spring Meeting: TBD



Prothonotary Warblings – 4 August 2026

Paul L. Pearson, Ph.D.

President-Nebraska Ornithologists' Union

The Digital Nebraska Bird Review has Fledged (kind of...)

Wait, what?

The past two years have been a major transition for NOU with new officers and new challenges. Two of those challenges have been the future of both our website (more below) and our beloved publication, the Nebraska Bird Review (NBR). The costs of postage and printing have risen to the point that producing and mailing four printed editions of the NBR each year has become more expensive than the dues we are collecting from each member. The NOU Board had much debate on this subject and



Dipping on Ash-throated Flycatcher in the Panhandle (6/22/26)

there are several other ancillary reasons that continuing with a printed version of the NBR was problematic including sustainability, frequently replacing lost or undelivered copies, paying for returned copies and the time/effort it took for both the Editor and the Treasurer to arrange printing and complete mailing. We discussed many scenarios, but the inevitable conclusion was that the only viable options were to either significantly raise the membership cost or move to a digital NBR. To retain current members and attract new members, we did not want to increase the membership prices.

We certainly understand that there are members that cherish getting the printed version of the NBR. Some members may have difficulties in accessing a digital version. We certainly don't want to upset anyone or deprive any members of the NBR, but the reality of the financial and logistical challenges in producing even a single printed issue per year is ultimately too much to overcome. As an organization, there are many opportunities we can explore to fulfill our mission, but losing money on every member would blunt our ability to do anything else and is ultimately unsustainable.

Based on the Board's recommendations at the 2026 Spring Business Meeting, the members present proposed and unanimously approved a motion to move to a fully digital NBR, with the caveat that we can provide a format/option that can be printed by members at their own cost if they so choose. We will be sending this same info in a printed letter to those without a valid email address. If you have feedback on this decision, or you/someone you know is unable to access a digital version please contact me at president@noubirds.org.

Big thanks to Ross Silcock for producing the Seasonal Bird Reports for so many years! His contributions to NOU and the NBR are so appreciated and filling his shoes was a big concern. Thankfully, Tobin Brown has taken on this responsibility with the start of Volume 94 and you will be happy to see that the basic format and content of the reports is largely



unchanged. One of the advantages of the new format is the ability to include more photographs of reported birds, so get ready to send yours to seasonal@noubirds.org.

noubirds.org -Rescued from the Brink

With the sudden passing of our former web developer and host in March, we were left in a position where we no longer had access to administrate our website and powerless to prevent the hosting subscription from running out, putting the noubirds.org website and all the content (including the bird lists for each county) in jeopardy of being lost. Several other organizations (including Iowa and South Dakota Ornithologists' Unions) were in the same boat and months went by as a July deadline for the hosting renewal loomed large. In the final few weeks, a web developer in the South Dakota Ornithologists' Union circle was able to gain administrative access to the various websites to switch hosts and perform required maintenance and security updates. Whew!

It's not all goldfinches and sunflowers quite yet. Although we now have admin access and ownership of our site's contents, we cannot make substantive changes to the site, including posting and providing the new digital NBR. We are actively looking for a new webmaster and developer, so if you have the skills and are willing to volunteer your time, please let me or anyone on the Board know. Thankfully, a volunteer with experience working with SDOU has just stepped up to help us with NBR access and some improvements while we search.

Among my goals for this organization is a complete refresh of noubirds.org to update the content and look, make it more attractive to current/prospective members, improve navigation, add functionality (e.g. accessible NBR, merchandise, payments, etc) and make the site easier to update and improve in the future. This will prove to be a big challenge and may take some time (and funding) to complete.

A Spring Meeting Pine Ridge Highlight and Aftermath of the 2026 Fires.

Summer birding in Nebraska can be downright intolerable. Anyone out birding recently was likely drenched with sweat walking to the car, smothered by humidity and fried by 100 degree F temperatures. Rarities are even less likely and it becomes difficult to add any birds to your year, state or life list until vagrants or migrants show up again. The biggest highlight of the summer is undeniably the 9th record of White-tailed Kite at Halsey National Forest in June. This gorgeous raptor stuck around in the same area long enough for many birders to add this one to their state/life lists. An influx of Red Crossbills across the state, presumably due to wildfires in Canada, is underway as well as a burst of hummingbirds, including several Rufous and Calliope hummers in the eastern part of the state to give birders a reason to fight the heat.

On top of the continued drought, wildfires raged through many locations in the west central, pine ridge and panhandle, including the entirety of Crescent Lake National Wildlife Refuge as well as the area surrounding Ft. Robinson/Crawford the week after the Spring Meeting. Many rightly lament the complete scorching of Smiley Canyon and the area around Ft. Rob. I recalled a trip to the Pine Ridge in August 1989 with Ed and Mark Brogie. There had just been a huge fire at Fort Robinson (similar to the scope of the 2026 fire) just a couple weeks before we went birding there. Literally from the ashes, plants had just begun to emerge and Mountain Bluebirds and Kestrels were plentiful, hunting the insects that were also returning. It was a beautiful site in the aftermath of such a devastating conflagration. This memory was a reminder that fire, although terrible, is also cleansing and regenerative. We need rainfall, but habitat will return eventually and if we are lucky future years will see Lewis's Woodpeckers in the area again. If we are extremely lucky, maybe an American Three-



Toed or Black-Backed woodpecker will find their way from the Black Hills to flip bark off the burned trees. A birder can dream...

Halftime Leaderboard

While there doesn't appear to be many Big Years in progress, that doesn't mean that numbers aren't being piled up.

1. Big Year Champion Tobin Brown hits 300 for the THIRD consecutive year with 302
2. David Cunningham is close to extending his run of 300's to FIVE years at 298
3. Stephen Brenner is right behind at 292
4. Jeremiah Ourada joins the leaderboard for the first time at 285
5. Larry Einemann rounds out the top 5 at 278

There's still a LOT of time for the next 7 birders over 260 to pile up some fall numbers, so get out there as soon as the heat wave subsides and grab those migrants!

Bird how you want to bird...mindfully.

A call for back issues of the Nebraska Bird Review (NBR)

Thomas Labedz, NOU Librarian

The Library of the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union keeps a limited number of each issue of the NBR to replace any lost in mailing and to have copies in the archive, etc. Due to a miscommunication the Library is lacking some copies of some recent issues. If you have copies from NBR volumes 89, 90, 91, 92, & 93 and are willing to share them back to the NOU we are interested in receiving them. If you are in the Lincoln area I can come and get them from you. If you are outside the Lincoln area, contact me (telabedz@gmail.com) and we will make arrangements. Thank you! And thank you to those who have already contributed their copies!



Editor's Note: Below are draft business meeting minutes from the 2026 spring meeting, July 2026 Board meeting and a report from the Auditing Committee. The Board recently decided these documents and reports should be included in the newsletter for transparency and to improve visibility.



Nebraska Ornithologists' Union General Business Meeting Minutes (draft)

May 29, 2026

Fort Robinson, Crawford, Nebraska

President Paul Pearson called the meeting to order.

Ruth Stearns (Secretary) reported the draft minutes of the Lincoln May 2025 minutes were available for review before approval. Paul called for a motion to approve the minutes; A motion was made and seconded and the membership voted to approve the minutes.

David Cunningham (Treasurer) reported the NOU finances were in good shape, that the NOU was in the black. An Audit does need to be conducted of the NOU finances, Ruth Stearns will be the Board member on the Auditing Committee, at this time we do not have an NOU member to help with the audit.

Joel Jorgensen: Joel is looking for comments or items to include in the Burrowing Owl newsletter.

Stephen Brenner: NOU Records Committee: Earlier this year Mark Brogie stepped down as chairman of the NOURC, and the committee selected Stephen Brenner to serve as chairman. This left a vacancy on the committee. Stephen nominated Mark Brogie to serve in his position as member, which the Board had approved. Stephen announced he was working closely with Mark as he transitioned to the chairman position.

Nominating Committee for the 2026 slate of officers of the NOU. Boni Edwards was heading the Nominating committee, however personal obligations kept her from attending the meeting. Paul asked for a vote on appointing Brian Peterson to announce the new officers being nominated for election, which was made, seconded and approved.

President: Paul Pearson

Vice President: Joel Jorgensen

Treasurer: David Cunningham

Secretary: Ruth Stearns

Librarian: Thomas Labedz

Editor: Dan Leger

Board of Directors: oni Edwards to begin a new three-year term.

A motion was then made, seconded and approved by the membership to accept this new slate of officers.

Paul made recognition of the many years of service Janis Paseka has made as Editor of the NBR (Nebraska Bird Review). Also recognized were Joe Gubanyi, who is stepping down as Assistant Editor, and Ross Silcock as preparer of the Seasonal Bird Review.

Replacing this exceptional trio will be Dan Leger as Editor, and Publications Committee members Jacob Cooper serving as member from the Records Committee, and Tobin Brown who will prepare the Seasonal Bird Reports. A third Committee member is TBD.

Mark Brogie was also recognized for his exemplary service as Chairman of the Records Committee going back to the mid 90's, to be replaced by Stephen Brenner.



Nebraska Bird Review Update (Editor, Publications Committee): Proposal for digital NBR Subscriptions Due to the high costs of publishing a printed copy of the NBR, four times per year, as well as the additional effort to get the NBR printed, mailed, remailed, etc., the Board, and specifically Dan Leger as new Editor, have explored the idea of going digital. A good discussion was had by various members with suggestions and ideas, including one from Dave Heidt to ensure that a digital version have a printer-friendly version. Members in a discussion of this issue were ultimately supportive of changing to all digital. While the decision to change the format of the NBR is up to the Editor, member Mark Hansen made a motion to have a vote of confidence that the NBR go digital which was seconded and approved unanimously by the members, with the caveat that it contains a printer-friendly version.

Breeding Bird Atlas Planning: A discussion was made regarding having a new Breeding Bird Atlas as it has been many years since the last one was conducted. A volunteer would be needed to spearhead this project.

NOU Website: Paul explained the situation with the NOU's website, previously maintained by Ann Johnson of Iowa, who passed away suddenly in March, which coincided with the expiration of the NOU's certificate, causing the website to become unavailable for a brief time. In July the hosting subscription will be due and will need to be renewed.

Librarian: Thomas Labeledz indicated he'd very recently heard from UNL regarding the space the NOU occupies in Nebraska Hall (since 1899). The Museum needs the space. They had announced plans were underway to box and store the NOU materials. UNK has been a champion of taking over the library space in its facility, which does have the space. Thomas indicated he is working on the library space issue. The shelving in the UNL museum space is owned by the NOU. Well over 1900 books and other documentation are included in the library, some valuable and of use, others less so.

Communications Committee: Paul indicated it might be time to create a communications Committee to include use of Facebook and Discord.

Another member brought up the idea of have a fundraising committee.

There being no further business, a motion was made, seconded and accepted to adjourn.

Respectively submitted,
Ruth Stearns, Secretary

Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Board Meeting Zoom Call (draft)

July 19, 2026
6:00 – 7:45pm

PRESENT: Paul Pearson, Joel Jorgensen, David Cunningham, Ruth Stearns, Thomas Labeledz, Boni Edwards, Don Paseka, TJ Walker

Paul called the meeting to order.



- I. **Treasurer report regarding insurance, website costs, etc.** In the interests of cost savings, Dave had looked into various liability insurance plans. As it turned out, our current account with Acuity is the most cost effective. Dave explained the medical portion of the insurance had a choice of either \$5000, \$10,000 or \$20,000 cap, with the cost being equal amongst the three levels. After discussion, it was agreed to continue with the \$5000 cap, to allow research into the pros and cons of the different levels. Acuity can change the amount at any time should we want.

MOTION: Dave made a motion, which was seconded, and approved, to continue with Acuity for our liability insurance, and to keep with the \$5000 cap on medical pay.

Website migration: Note: *In email conversations during late June and into July, the board authorized payment of \$730 to authorize Joe Swanson/Adept to migrate our website and host the site for 1 year. This was an emergency situation brought on by the impending July 19 deadline at which time the host of the website Hostek, would cease hosting our site and we would lose all content, and the untimely death of our previous website manager, Ann Johnson.*

Dave indicated the migration was successful, and it appears the site is functioning as it should. Dave indicated he would have control over the GoDaddy account regarding our domain name, and would as of now have control over the website. Discussion was then had as to the maintenance of the website and any content updates, and the recommendation made to hire Joe Swanson to perform the maintenance and updates at \$300 per year.

MOTION: Dave made a motion to hire Adept to maintain our website, at \$300 per year. Seconded and approved.

Debit card: Dave discussed the benefits of having an NOU debit card to cover recurring payments, and incidentals, in situations where that is the best or only option for payment.

MOTION: Dave made a motion to allow the NOU to get a debit card for use by the treasurer to cover standard yearly deductions, i.e. website, liability insurance, etc. Seconded and approved.

II. **Secretary's report regarding minutes**

Ruth indicated that Spring Business meeting minutes once prepared and okayed, are to be included in the next newsletter. At the following spring meeting the membership votes on accepting the minutes, at which time those minutes are to be published on the website.

The Board meeting minutes are also prepared and okayed on any board meetings held, and a summary of which are to be included in the subsequent newsletter.

Audit committee report: Ruth reported that she and Joan Junkin met with Dave Cunningham on July 14th, to perform the audit. The report of that meeting is now prepared and will be forwarded to the Board. The secretary will maintain a copy of this report. The committee reported that the finances are in order, that with the digital publication of the NBR the expenses of the NOU will now be spending within its means and made two additional recommendations to the board. The first would be to review the liability insurance to ensure it is the most cost-effective policy available for the NOU. Essentially, that has been accomplished as Dave has just reported. The second recommendation would be to set up PayPal in such a way to allow members to "cover" the cost of the PayPal transaction fee, if they so choose, as is sometimes available with other credit cards payments to non-profits.



Ruth also pointed out that the Audit was over three years overdue but is now completed through July 2026. The bylaws reflect that these audits should be completed as soon as practical after the end of each year, and in time for the Treasurer's Report to be published in the March NBR. This will now continue moving forward, and she and Joan have agreed to perform the audit next year in accordance with the bylaws.

- III. **Editor digital NBR edition debrief, email distribution.** Paul reported his look at the upcoming digital edition looked good.
- IV. **Librarian upcoming changes and plan for NOU holdings.** Thomas indicated he will now be able to move the records from the University. He indicated about half the records pertain to the Records Committee and the other half as general business and correspondence. He and Joel discussed the idea of the Records committee materials be housed at Joel's office with Nebraska Game and Park.

MOTION: Thomas made a motion to move those records still at UNL which have to do with the records committee to Joel's office at Nebraska Game and Parks. Joel will write up an agreement between Joel and the NOU, to be included with the files, in the event Joel is no longer employed with NGPC, as to what should be done with the records. Motion seconded and approved.

Regarding the general business and correspondence materials, Thomas would look to sending them temporarily to Jacob Cooper's office at UNK for review, before sending them permanently to UNK's archives. Digitizing these records, where possible was encouraged by several on the board.

- V. **OLD Business: Fall meeting planning:** Paul indicated we as yet do not have a contract with UNK for meeting space but are working on that. Meeting is the weekend of September 11-13, 2026. Menu options will be sent out to the Board to select any preferences. One speaker is set, looking into two others. Joel and TJ volunteered to do a field trip each, with other possibilities in play as well.
- VI. **Website future: The** board had discussions on how to manage and enhance the website in the future. Paul also brought up the idea of creating a communications committee that could handle all aspects of communications with the membership and the public, to include social media, written communication, the website, Discord, etc.
- VII. **NEW Business: outreach: Paul** had been contacted to see if NOU could provide outreach or a table at the upcoming Fall Nature Festival in Kearney on October 3. Another event would be in Omaha on October 22, and the Sparrow Fest weekend at Spring Creek Prairie October 23-25, needing volunteers for bird hikes, events, and help with planning.
- VIII. **Outreach and branding: Dave** brought up the Nebraska Birding Bowl and that it could be beneficial to have a roll in that, and to contribute to the prizes, ie, one year membership, etc. Paul talked about having business cards to hand out when appropriate, an NOU banner for display purposes.

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn was made and seconded, and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth Stearns, NOU Secretary



Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Auditing Committee Report

The annual audit of the 2025/2026 financial records of the Nebraska Ornithologist's Union (NOU) was completed on July 14, 2026. The audit was conducted by Ruth Stearns and Joan Junkin and took about two and a half hours. An extensive review of all funds was made. It should be noted that this is the first audit since March of 2023. Due to the lengthy passage of time since the last audit, the inexperience of the audit team, and our having a new treasurer, there was much to cover and the time spent was informative. Each of the accounts reviewed showed thorough documentation of all transactions. It should be noted that the timing of this audit strays from the recommendation of the Bylaws (Article IV Section 7), which requires a year-to-year audit be conducted in March of the following year.

David Cunningham, elected Treasurer in May of 2025, was able to take over the finances by July of 2025, and with the meeting held in July of 2026, we covered a full year of records. We reviewed all the various accounts, discussed measures taken to take advantage of earning interest or dividends on much of the fund of the NOU. Dave has taken steps to digitize many of the records, and we discussed several recommendations to reduce expenses, and raise funds.

Referring to the last audit report, we again used the following questions to guide our audit.

1. Are the NOU's revenue and expenses adequately balanced? YES
2. Is the NOU spending within its means? YES, but see comments below.
3. Have you identified any areas where the NOU can reduce expenses? YES, but see below.
4. Are there any other issues that need to be brought to the attention of the NOU Officers and Board of Directors?
See below.

The finances of the NOU are generally in good shape. A considerable sum has, for the last three years, been held in a Vanguard account, which continues to perform extremely well. Another untouched fund had been in the savings account, and this is now in a CD fund with Veridian and brings in modest interest. The checking account also has had some percentage of its funds migrated to a money market account, which also accrues interest, and is with Veridian.

Regarding the specifics of our yearly finances, Dave explained that we are obligated for seven considerable checks each year. Two cover the expenses of the Spring and Fall meetings, and generally make a profit, though not sizeable. Another big check pays for the liability insurance. The final four checks cover the publication, printing, and mailing of the Nebraska Bird Review (NBR). It is the NBR that does not have sufficient funds to cover expenses, the funds coming from annual dues. Dave explained that donations have allayed those costs. It has been recommended for some time that the NBR become a digital publication. Much has been said about that in prior years, and it may well be that our next publication will be all digital. It is anticipated that the change to a digital edition of the NBR will be a huge positive step to securing our finances.

Discussion then focused on ways to improve our financial situation. Steps taken this year to move the savings and checking account funds, in part, to a CD and a money market account are a step forward. Dave has also digitized much of the financial system for the NOU, which makes the job more streamlined. The anticipated move to digitize the NBR will be a huge step forward.

Recommendations for continued improvement of finances would be the anticipated move to digitize the NBR. When we reviewed the PayPal account, Dave pointed out how a fee was taken out for all transactions. Joan suggested we have an option in Pay Pal to allow members to choose to pay an additional fee to cover the cost of the transaction. We currently spend, in general, over \$3 per transaction to cover each transaction. Dave would encourage all members to



use Pay Pal, either setting up an account or using their own credit card within Pay Pal. It facilitates tracking, the refund process, and accountability.

Another recommendation is to look at the cost of the liability insurance. Dave is looking into other options, to compare both cost and coverage with our current insurance, and Dave will report back to the Board what he learns about that. Currently we have had an account with Acuity, going back about ten years or so.

If there are questions regarding this audit, please direct them to the audit committee.

Respectfully, Ruth Stearns and Joan Junkin
NOU 2025/2026 Audit Committee

The Nebraska Ornithologists' Union Board

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<u>Librarian:</u> Thomas Labedz	telabedz@gmail.com
<u>Seasonal bird report compiler:</u> Tobin Brown	seasonal@noubirds.org
<u>Records Committee Chairman:</u> Stephen Brenner	nourcdata@gmail.com



Registration Form: NOU Fall 2026 Meeting

Antelope Room in the Nebraska Student Union (1013 W 27th St), University of Nebraska-Kearney
September 11-13, 2026

Registration Deadline: To reserve meals, registration must be received by **1 September 2026**. Refunds may be requested prior to 1 September. Refunds are not possible after 1 September. Please do not put registration off.

Location: Antelope Room, University of Nebraska-Kearney Student Union

	Price/person	# of People	Total
Sep 11 – Friday Supper – 5:30 PM	\$18.00	_____	_____
BQ chicken, smoked beef brisket, baked beans, coleslaw, potato salad, cornbread and a chocolate brownie.			
Sep 12 – Sack Lunch, **Friday evening pick-up**	\$13.00	_____	_____
Classic Turkey Club Ciabatta *OR* Grilled Chicken Caesar Wrap *OR* Hummus Wrap with Zucchini and Dukkah (vegan) – select choice			
Sep 13 – Saturday Dinner – 5:30 PM	\$23.50	_____	_____
Braised Pot Roast, Rotisserie-style chicken, garlic mashed potatoes, carrots, mandarin orange spinach salad, macaroni salad, apple pie			
Registration	\$10.00	_____	_____
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 (all requests may not be met, but all attempts will be made):

Please send registration forms and checks to:
NOU Treasurer
10431 S. 105th St.
Papillion, NE 68046

This form must be received by 1 September if you are reserving meals! No refunds after 1 September. Thanks!

Non-members are welcome and encouraged to attend!

Students may apply for scholarships to assist them in attending; please send a request to NOU President Paul Pearson at propearson@gmail.com

