

CAT PRINTS



Wildcat Audubon Society - Serving the Nebraska Panhandle

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Kenitz Corner

By Alice Kenitz

People are always asking about my favorite bird. I can't say exactly what my favorite bird is, but one of the most fascinating bird families that can be found locally is the Nuthatch family. They fascinate me because they are small, they have a small and fine beak, they feed by going head first down the trunk of a tree or going along the underside of a branch, they nest in cavities.

We have three species occurring in Scotts Bluff County, White-breasted, Red-breasted, and Pygmy. The only other species occurring in the country is Brown-headed and it does not normally occur in Nebraska.



Red-breasted Nuthatch—Marie Smith Photo

The largest of the three species is White-breasted at 5¾". It's basic plumage is blue-gray on the back with a white breast and it is primarily found in deciduous forests, parks, and woodlands. The next is Red-breasted at 4 1/2" and it prefers pine forests but can be found in mixed forests, parks, and woodlands. Its basic plumage is gray back with rusty breast. The smallest is Pygmy at 4 1/4" and is primarily found in ponderosa pine forests. Its basic plumage is gray-brown cap, gray back, and creamy-buff underparts.

Much of a nuthatches winter feed is seeds. Sometimes it will use a notch in the bark of a tree as an anvil and will hammer at a seed with its bill until the seed opens and the meat can be consumed—thus nut-hacking or nut-hatching.

The Red-breasted Nuthatch has an interesting habit of smearing pine resin around the entrance to the nest cavity. It is thought this may help deter predators and parasites from entering the nest.

Interesting Sightings

Mountain Chickadees have been seen in Gering and in the Wildcat Hills off and on since December.



Mountain Chickadee - Marie Smith Photo

A Steller's Jay has been at a feeder in the Wildcat Hills since October and birders from around the state have been out to see it.

Northern Cardinals have been at feeders in Gering and near Mitchell this month.



Northern Cardinal - Marie Smith Photo

A White-winged Dark-eyed Junco was seen at a feeder near Mitchell during the snow storm on March 2.

A Harris's Sparrow has been seen off and on in a yard near Mitchell since mid-December, usually just after a snow.

Feeding the Birds

Winter is a good time to supplement bird diets because the shortened days cut down on the time birds have to find enough food to get them safely through the long winter nights. Black oil sunflower seed, millet and thistle take care of most of the birds who are either permanent residents or ones that migrate to our area in the winter time.

Provide Water for the Birds

Many people focus on feeding and forget that birds, even those that don't eat the birdseed, will need water for drinking and bathing, especially in the winter.

In the wintertime, an immersion heater is essential to prevent constant freezing—the primary goal of your artificial water supply is reliability when all other sources are frozen. Whatever water supply you decide on, the key is fresh, clean water.

Audubon Nebraska Crane Festival in Kearney, March 21-24, 2019

Audubon's Nebraska Crane Festival brings together hundreds of crane lovers from around the country to Kearney, Nebraska, to interact with a wide range of environmental speakers, take part in incredible birding trips, and, best of all, experience the world's largest gathering of Sandhill Cranes!

For more information and to register go to www.ne.audubon.org

Sandhill Cranes can also be seen in Scotts Bluff County in Mid-March. You will not see the amazing quantities of them like you will in the central part of the state but we usually have a few hundred to a few thousand in the area.

They are seen in the ag fields and grasslands around Lake Alice, Little Lake Alice and Winter's Creek Lake and at these lakes. Driving on County Roads 26, 27 and 28 north of Lake Minatare Road are good places to look. Also listen for them flying over, their unique sound makes them easy to identify.



Black-capped Chickadee—Marie Smith Photo

Chickadees (like most year-round northern birds) brave the winter in their bare uninsulated legs and feet. Yet their toes remain flexible and functional at all temperatures, whereas ours, if that small, would freeze into blocks of ice in seconds. Don't they get cold?

They do. Their feet cool down to near freezing, close to 30°F. Of course, a bird's comfort level for foot temperature is likely very different from ours; they would not feel uncomfortable until the point when damage occurs from freezing (ice crystal formation).

But chickadee feet don't freeze, and that's because their foot temperature is regulated near the freezing point and may stay cold most of the time all winter, even as core body temperature stays high.

Every time the bird sends heat (via blood) from the body core to the extremities, it must produce more heat in the core for replacement. Thus, if a chickadee maintained its feet at the same temperature as its body core, it would lose heat very rapidly, and that would be so energetically costly that any bird doing so would quickly be calorie depleted. Birds maintaining warm feet would be unlikely to be able to feed fast enough to stay warm and active.

However, a chickadee's feet are provided with continuous blood flow. The warm arterial blood headed toward the feet from the body runs next to veins of cooled blood returning from the feet to the body. As heat is transferred between the outgoing and incoming veins, the blood returning into the body recovers much of the heat that would otherwise be lost flowing out.

Birds retain heat in their body core by fluffing out their feathers. Chickadees may appear to be twice as fat in winter as in summer. But they aren't. They are merely puffed up, thickening the insulation around their bodies. At night, they reduce heat loss by seeking shelter in tree holes or other crevices, and by reducing their body temperature—the smaller the difference in temperature between the bird and its environment, the lower the rate of heat loss. Still, the bird may have to shiver all night and burn up most of its fat reserves, which then must be replenished the next day in order to survive the next night.

Nighttime is crunch time for winter survival because no food calories are coming in to replace those being expended. It is a tight energy balance, but by lowering body temperature and turning down heat production at night, chickadees and other small birds of winter spare the cushion of fat accumulated during the day.

While physiology is a key component of surviving the cold by temperature regulation, the more critical factor is food input. That little chickadee's internal furnace must be fed and stoked. Following chickadees in the winter woods, and watching them closely, reveals another secret of their winter survival. Chickadees in winter travel in groups exploring for food and when one chickadee finds something to eat, its neighbors notice and join in.

For foraging chickadees in winter, food options are still broad—from various seeds, spiders, and spider eggs, to insects and their pupae. Invertebrates may seldom be seen out in the open during winter in the frozen North, but they're around—hidden in the ground, under bark, even underwater—as they employ their own winter survival strategies.

The Wildcat Hills Nature Center Wildcat Weekends

A variety of programs will be offered at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center on the second Saturday of the month (*unless otherwise noted). Best of all, most programs are FREE! A valid 2019 Nebraska State Park permit is required. For more information about these events or to register (when applicable), contact the Nature Center at 308-436-3777 or ngpc.wildcat.hills@nebraska.gov

March 9, 2019 at 10:00am—*Snipe: Reality or Legend*

Uncover the myths and realities behind this legendary animal.

April 13, 2019 at 10:00am — *Earth Day*

Let's celebrate Earth Day at the Wildcat Hills Nature Center. Come along, explore the history behind earth day and take part in a service project!

May 18, 2019—*Wildlands Day/Free Park Entry Day

Take part in several great activities going on throughout this day-long celebration! Join us for a bird hike, wildflower walk, kids crafts and much more! Park permits are not required for this event!

Friday, June 7, 2019 at 7:00pm—*Wildflower Walk

Celebrate Nebraska Wildflower week with a Wildflower Walk. Uncover many of the area flowers in bloom and discover key characteristics for identifying them. Please bring water and hiking shoes for this 1 mile long hike.

July 13, 2019 at 10:00am—*Water Wonders*

Soak up a vast knowledge about water at this program. Discover the different states of water, how it moves and what we can do to conserve it.

August 3, 2019 at 8:30pm —*Night Sky

Bring a blanket and lay beneath the stars! Explore constellations, mythology and much more! This is a great opportunity to watch the Perseids meteor shower, one of the best meteor showers of the year!!

September 14, 2019 at 7:00-11:00am —*Birds and Bagels*

Uncover the birds that call the Wildcat Hills home! We will learn about research being done in the area, common migratory birds and even take a short .57 mile hike. Bring your hiking shoes and be prepared to take flight!

October 12, 2019 at 10:00 am MDT—*Lovin' Dutch Oven*

Explore the art of Dutch Oven Cooking! Come help prepare a wonderful brunch, learn about Dutch Ovens and best of all, eating. Cost is \$5/person to cover the cost of supplies. Please pre-register by October 4, 2019 for this event at 308-436-3777. A minimum number of 10 guest will be needed to conduct this program. Please let us know of any special dietary needs when registering.

November 2, 2019 at 10:00am MST—*Bighorn Sheep Hike

Let's find the mysterious and secretive creature of the Wildcat Hills, the Bighorn Sheep. We will hike to find these sneaky critters and depending on their location, this may be a long hike. Please bring water, hiking shoes and dress for the weather. We will be hiking on uneven ground with tall grass.

Calendar of Events 2019

March 16, 2019

**General Meeting and Program will be held at
The Legacy of the Plains7:30 pm.**

The presentation will be given by Don Gentry and Marilyn Rahmig about Empire Wyoming. Empire was founded in 1908 by African American settlers who came from Nebraska to build a racially self-sufficient, politically autonomous community in the Equality State. Empire thrived for about a decade, but vanished from the map in the mid-1920s. There will be no charge for entry into Legacy for the program.

March 23, 2019

Crane and Waterfowl Field Trip.

Meet at Arby's in Scottsbluff at 8:00am. We will car pool to the lakes and surrounding area to look for birds. We should be back around 1:00pm

April 13, 2019

General Meeting and Program

****Wild Cat Hills Nature Center** 7:00 pm.****

Doors will open at 6:30pm

Vance Nelson, curator at Fort Robinson, will have a presentation about Fort Rob.

May 19, 2019 (Sunday)

Field Trip, destination to be announced.

Meet at RCI, 27th and Ave I, at 6:00am.

June 1, 2019

Scotts Bluff County Spring Bird Count

Meet at RCI, 27th & Ave I in Scottsbluff at 6:00am, we should be back around 1:00pm

June 8, 2019

Fort Robinson and the White River area Field Trip

Meet at RCI, 27th & Ave I at 6:00am, take a sack lunch and drinks. We will be home late afternoon

August 11, 2019

Wildcat Audubon Annual Picnic

5pm at the shelter in *Legion Park in Gering (NEW LOCATION) Bring a covered dish and table service. Meat and drinks will be furnished.

September 22, 2019 (Sunday)

Cascade Falls/Cascade Spring Field Trip
(South Dakota)

Meet at RCI, 27th & Ave I, Scottsbluff at 6am, bring a sack lunch and drinks. We will be back late afternoon.

September 21, 2019

General Meeting and program at 7:30 pm.

Program and location to be announced.

September 28, 2019

Scottsbluff County Fall Bird Count

Meet at Arby's in Scottsbluff at 7:00 am. We will count birds within the county and should be back around 1:00pm for lunch and may go back out in the afternoon.

October 12, 2019

Waterfowl & Cranes Field Trip to local lakes and ponds

Meet at Arby's in Scottsbluff at 8:00am. We should be back around 1:00pm

October 19, 2019

General Meeting and program at 7:30 pm.

Program and location to be announced.

November 8, 2019 (Friday)

Scottsbluff and Gering Sewer Lagoons Field Trip (Note *this is a Friday field trip)

Meet at Arby's in Scottsbluff at 8am

November 16, 2019

General Meeting and program at 7:30 pm.

Program and location to be announced.

December 14, 2019

Scottsbluff Christmas Bird Count

(tentative date, this may be changed)

***Our meetings, field trips and events are
free and open to the public***

Join the Wildcat Audubon Society

Membership dues are only \$5.00 per year and due in January

Your dollars help pay for CatPrints newsletter, Public Education and other projects through out the year

If you would like to continue to receive the newsletter by mail please send in this form.

If you want to have it sent to you by email, send an email with "CatPrints Newsletter" in subject line to Kathy DeLara at renosmom@charter.net



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