

# Wild Bird Habitat Store

## March Newsletter - 2019



**South Lincoln**  
In the Alamo Plaza  
56<sup>th</sup> & Hwy 2  
Lincoln, NE 68516  
(402) 420-2553

**North Lincoln**  
4900 Dudley St  
2 Blks South of Holdrege  
Lincoln, NE 68504  
(402) 464-4055

**Omaha**  
Harrison Village Mall  
168th & Harrison  
Omaha, NE 68136  
(402) 504-4450

You don't want to miss  
the next  
**Wachiska Audubon**  
presentation  
Details on back page

[www.wildbirdhabitatstore.com](http://www.wildbirdhabitatstore.com)

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### THE 2019 GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT - RESULTS

- **Worldwide** - 191658 Checklists Submitted / 6519 Bird Species / Individual birds counted 30,359,200
- **Nebraska** - 744 Checklists Submitted / 90 Bird Species

*View more results at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org) and click on the **Explore Data tab**.*

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### March News Notes:

- March, we are at the beginning stages of spring migration.
  - Over 500,000 Sandhill Cranes will spend six weeks on the Platte River.
  - March snowstorms can cause problems for our birds.
  - Suet will be in big demand for the remainder of winter, and even more so from March to August during the nesting season.
  - Goldfinches will be flocking to thistle feeders & males will show their breeding plumage.
  - If you choose to plant for wildlife this spring begin planning now. Carroll Henderson's book "Landscaping for Wildlife" is a great resource and available at Wild Bird Habitat Store.
  - We've seen a lot of snow. Birds are visiting feeders on a regular basis with natural foods covered.
  - Time to clean out nest boxes, make repairs to them, or add a new bird house.
  - After a snowy cold winter it's time for the singing to begin.
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## Pine Siskin

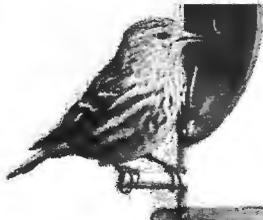


Photo by Steve Byland

A favorite winter bird that generally arrives in the Midwest and Great Plains states in late November to early December that has a huge appetite for Nyjer seed at our thistle feeders is the Pine Siskin. Many of these birds breed from southern Alaska across Canada to Newfoundland down to the upper Great Lakes region and over to northern New England. They are also common in the higher elevations of mountainous areas in the Rockies and western states.

Their preferred northern habitats are the coniferous and deciduous forests and woodlands in the threatened Boreal Forests to the north. They wander south throughout the United States during the winter months in search of available food resources. Some years they may appear as far south as Tennessee and Arkansas and beyond. This southward movement of northern birds during the winter months is known as an irruption and the Pine Siskin are the most common of the irruptive winter finches. But they can be sporadic visitors. These visits in the winter by Siskins are cyclic and likely related to the annual seed production in the northern forests. It seems as it is every two to three years they appear in large numbers. This correlates with a low production of seeds in the north about every two years. That is when Pine Siskin drift south in search of food during the winter.

The Pine Siskin is a small finch that reminds me of a dark goldfinch with stripes. It is slightly smaller than the Goldfinch, averaging just a half ounce in weight, with a brown body and dark streaks. Siskin have two white wing bars along with yellow patches on the wings and rump. These yellow patches are not always visible when they are in their basic plumage. The tail is slightly notched and the bill, longer than that of a Goldfinch, is slender and pointed. They are monomorphic meaning that both sexes have a similar appearance.

During the breeding season the female will build a nest in the shape of a shallow saucer made of twigs, grasses, and rootlets lining it with soft hair, feathers and thistle down. The nest is concealed far out on the end of a tree branch as high as 50 feet above the ground. Being somewhat of a communal species there will commonly be a number of Pine Siskin nesting within a few feet of each other, often visiting each others nest.

Once the female has completed the nest she will lay 3 to 5 greenish blue eggs with black and brown spots. The female will then continuously incubate the eggs for 13 days leaving only for very brief periods. The down she has lined her nest with will help keep the eggs warm during these short trips from the nest. While she is on the nest the male will feed her. After the eggs have hatched the young Siskin will remain in the nest for another 15 days before fledging. She will feed them insects, but once they have left the nest seeds will become the main diet. Pine Siskin are quite nomadic in their nesting habits. They may nest in one area one year, then the following year they may choose a site hundreds of miles away. Normally birds that migrate have a tendency to return to the same area year after year to nest. But not the Pine Siskin. That may be another reason we cannot depend on them returning to our yards on a regular basis in the winter.

Pine Siskin have a very diverse diet foraging on the ground and in trees. They will feed on the seeds of trees such as alders, spruce, birch and ash, but also on a variety of weed seeds, wildflowers, and buds. Insects and spiders make up the balance of their diet. They have also been seen drinking at sap wells drilled by sapsuckers.

They are attracted to backyard bird feeders where their preference seems to be Nyjer thistle while other favorites include white Proso millet, black oil sunflower seeds, and hulled sunflower seeds. Occasionally they may even be seen on suet feeders. At the bird feeder they are often aggressive towards other birds, even those much larger than themselves. But it is a joy to have them around as they are very entertaining to watch. They appear to be somewhat tame around human activity. Once while cleaning my avian pond a number of them perched on the rocks around me chattering as if interested in what I was doing. They are swift fliers that travel in compact flocks and as with the Goldfinch, can cling upside down to feed.



Will we be blessed with Pine Siskin at our bird feeders this winter? Its hard to say. As of the publication of this news letter I have seen several Pine Siskin at the feeders. If in fact flocks of them do arrive they will remain with us until the first or second week of May at which time they will return to their summer range to the north to nest.

The Pine Siskin has suffered a significant annual decline in population in some areas since 1966, according to the Breeding Bird Survey. However due to the irruptive nature of this species, populations vary widely from year to year, and trends can be difficult to identify. Parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds may have a significant impact on the Pine Siskin productivity as forest fragmentation has increased their contact with cowbirds. Maintaining large tracts of coniferous forest will help keep this bird common as cowbirds rarely venture into deep wooded areas.

## Fun Pine Siskin Facts

- Since Pine Siskin may move to different nesting areas each year, it is common that if they have located a sustainable food source during the winter they may remain near it to nest, far south of the normal range.
- Pine Siskin are very social birds. They will build nests adjacent to each other, with only a few feet in between them. Except during the egg laying period they will even visit the nests of other Pine Siskin.
- The name Siskin is derived from its sound or chirp. Thus, this bird's common name is really "pine chirper"
- A group of finches has many collective nouns, including a "charm", "company", and "trembling" of finches.

## Sandhill Crane Migration

March is migration for the Sandhill Cranes. It's an easy one day round trip to Grand Island or Kearney from most locations in Southeastern Nebraska to view over 500,000 cranes. From Lincoln to the Alda Road exit on Interstate 80 is only 1 hour 15 minutes. Go south and drive the Elm Island Road, West Denman Road, and Platte River Road., and enjoy the cranes.



### For more information visit the following websites:

- Rowe Sanctuary - [www.rowesanctuary.org](http://www.rowesanctuary.org)
- Crane Trust & Visitors Center - [www.cranetrust.org](http://www.cranetrust.org)

### Create your own Sandhill Crane Trip at:

- Sandhill Crane Migration - [www.nebraskatravels.com/sandhill-crane-migration.html](http://www.nebraskatravels.com/sandhill-crane-migration.html)

### Sandhill Crane Festival

- 49th Annual Nebraska Crane Festival March 21 - 24, 2019  
<http://ne.audubon.org/birds/crane-festival>

Many Nebraskan's have yet to venture to the Central Platte River to view one of the largest migrations on the planet, that of the Sandhill Cranes. One may think you have to travel a long distance from eastern Nebraska. That you need to search various areas to find the cranes. However that is not the case.

Viewing Sandhill Cranes can be an easy half day trip. You could leave Lincoln at 11:00 AM, view tens of thousands of Sandhill Cranes, and be back home for dinner. It's that easy. You can make it a full day trip leaving early morning, visit the Crane Trust Visitors Center and Rowe Sanctuary, view tens of thousands of Sandhill Cranes, have lunch in Kearney and be home before dark. Or you can book a room in Kearney, schedule a morning or evening blind along the Platte River for the ultimate Sandhill Crane viewing experience.



It doesn't have to be expensive to venture out to view the Sandhill Cranes. A tank of gas and a picnic lunch and you can experience a wildlife migration that rivals the wildebeest migration in Africa.

If you'd like to venture out on your own to witness the Sandhill Crane migration and would like some expert advice from planning a half day excursion to an overnight quest talk to Dave or Eric at the Wild Bird Habitat Store. We can plot you a course on well maintained roads where you'll see an abundant number of Sandhill Cranes.

49TH ANNUAL

# Nebraska Crane Festival

*North America's Oldest Birding festival*

March 21 - 24, 2019

Kearney, Nebraska



Gather with wildlife enthusiasts from around the world to celebrate the annual migration of more than 500,000 Sandhill Cranes and millions of waterfowl through central Nebraska. Get more information about this family event, or register at: <http://ne.audubon.org/birds/crane-festival>

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**Wingtip: The oldest sandhill crane fossil is 2.5 million years old, older by half than the earliest remains of most living species of birds, primarily found from after the Pliocene/Pleistocene boundary some 1.8 million years ago. cranes survived and watched as American bison, pronghorn and wapiti evolved on the prairies. They are truly dinosaurs.**

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## **Wachiska Audubon March Bird Trip (Sandhill Cranes)**

Saturday, March 16, 2:00 p.m. - Field trip to view Sandhill Cranes near the Platte River. Meet on the south side of the Capitol in Lincoln, 15th & H streets, to carpool or caravan the 100 miles to the riverside viewing. Bring binoculars, spotting scope if you have one, and consider a sack lunch. There is no fee or entry permit and the public is welcome. Call John at 402-475-7275 with questions or for more information



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**Wingtip: 80% of the 500,000 plus Sandhill Cranes that visit the Central Plate River in Nebraska are Lesser Sandhill Cranes many of which will travel to Siberia via the Bering Strait to nest.**

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Sandhill Cranes are hunted in every state except Nebraska where they generate an economic out put in the state of over 10 million dollars during their 6 week visit attracting people from all over the world. If you're an avid crane watcher when you look at a flock of cranes some may be the same ones you saw five, ten, even twenty years ago. They have a life span of between 20 and 25 years. Traditionally feeding on crustaceans, earthworms, and insect larva their population boomed with the introduction of crops. Waste corn is a primary food source today for cranes in Nebraska where they can consume a whopping 1600 tons during their stay.

Sandhill Cranes only lay two eggs and fiercely defend their nests. However its common only one chick survives. Often it is sibling rivalry that causes the fatalities. But predation in a region where food is scarce is also a factor.

They are a very unique bird and everyone should witness this massive migration of 80% of the worlds Sandhill Cranes at least once in their lifetime. But be careful. Crane watching can become addictive. And to think its happening just a short drive down the Interstate right now.

## March Ramblings, 2010

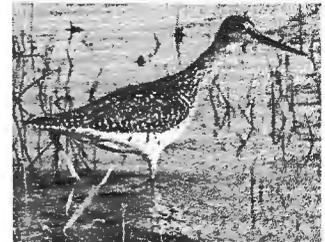
The winter of 2018/2019 on the Central Great Plains has been what we generally expect. Winds chills of minus 20 degrees and lower coupled with what seems to be a perpetually white landscape from the snows that started in early November. Living on the Great Plains can be harsh, even with the luxuries of heating and air conditioning. Rarely with our extremely cold temperatures and winter snows along with our baking temps and humidity in the summer are we recognized for our tenacity to live here by the national news. Its not a climate for everyone.

But what we do have on the Great Plains is space. Vast unbroken horizons with remarkable scenery and inspiring sunsets. When night falls you can venture outside the lights of town and see stars from horizon to horizon. The Milky Way streaming across the sky. Central Nebraska has the largest desert in the Northern Hemisphere, the Sand Hills, 20,000 square miles of rolling sand dunes covered in ancient prairie grasses. More shoreline than all of Minnesota. 10 distinct ecological systems across the state invites one of the most diverse populations of bird species in North America. More than 400 bird species are listed on the Nebraska Bird Checklist. From the canyons in Southwest Nebraska to the Wildcat Hills and Pine Ridge in the Panhandle. From the sandhills in the center of the state all the way to the historic bluffs of the Missouri River on our eastern border, Nebraska is a wild place. All you have to do is go out and enjoy it. It's a great place to live.



Nebraska Sandhills

March is the beginning of one of the most spectacular and exciting times when it comes to watching birds in Nebraska. It starts this month with Robins, blackbirds, Meadowlarks, and bluebirds. Water fowl from geese to ducks are also on the move as are thousands of White Pelicans. The Sandhill Cranes continue to arrive along the Platte River in Central Nebraska. But just as these birds appear the winter flocks of birds visiting the Central Plains from the north country will start to break up preparing to return to their nesting grounds many to the Boreal Forests in Canada. During the winter these birds form flocks and travel together, sometimes with other birds, and stay together until this time of year.



Greater Yellow Legs

As the end of March approaches the songbirds and shorebirds will be migrating. Some of these birds will just be passing through and taking a break to build up energy to continue their trip far to the north, while others will remain to nest and raise families in the plains states. Songbirds will continue to migrate until the first of June. In Wild Bird Habitat's April newsletter we'll tell you what to look for and where some good birding locations are.

Two frequent questions people ask this time of year is about orioles and hummingbirds. It is a ways off yet. For Orioles, feeders with oranges, jelly, and nectars, should be made available by April 25<sup>th</sup>. You may need to freshen it a few times, but early pays off. As for hummingbirds, again timing is important. Hummingbird feeders should be in place by Mother's Day if not the week before. But keep in mind that weather can influence the exact time these Neo-tropical favorites arrive. Just keep it fresh and you should be rewarded with their appearance. Wild Bird Habitat has the largest selection of oriole and hummingbird feeders in Nebraska along with grape jelly and nectars for your convenience.

Here we are talking about migration already but winter weather may be a long way from over. March can produce some significant snows across the Central Great Plains and Midwest. These storms can create problems for the early migrants to our area. Already in February we had dozens of reports of large numbers of American Robins arriving. Bluebirds should be showing up in good numbers during early March, and by mid to late March those folks with Purple Martin colonies will be scolded by these birds until they open the doors on the martin house. But if a sudden snow storm erupts during March, or if the weather is damp and cold, those birds who have arrived that feed exclusively on insects may retreat south as far as they need to go to locate food or run the risk of becoming an early spring fatality. The one exception is the Tree Swallow. This aerial acrobat that catches insects on the wing can survive on seeds if necessary. These migrants arriving from the south are driven by their instinct to return to their breeding territories. But even Sandhill Cranes have been known to perish by the hundreds when caught in a Nebraska March blizzard. All we can do for many of these birds is hope for the best.

Suet will remain in high demand over the coming months, even more so than during the winter. In the past suet was considered to be a wintertime feed product for woodpeckers, nuthatches, Chickadees, and an occasional Carolina Wren. However, heading into the nesting season these birds will consume more suet than all winter long. Roughly about 30% more between now and late summer. The animal protein provides them with the extra energy needed to defend a territory, court a mate, and raise a family. Often during the summer months you'll see the Downy Woodpecker bring their young to the suet feeder for a high energy treat. So if you've never tried feeding suet, now is a great time to start. I prefer the upside-down suet log with the Attractor suet plugs. This makes it extremely difficult for European Starlings to feed. Other popular suet feeders I like to use are the caged suet feeders which prevent squirrels from raiding the suet. We have a good variety of suet feeders at Wild Bird Habitat and the details to help you get the most out of it. Give it a try. You'll be glad you did.



Downy Woodpecker on Wild Bird Habitat's suet log

March is also the time to get the nest boxes cleaned out and checked for needed repairs. Place a fresh 2 inch layer of wood shaving in the bottom of Wood Duck nest boxes. Most others just make sure no mice have wintered over in them and that they are cleaned and ready to go by the middle of the month. If the weather warms and is sunny Chickadees, along with some bluebirds, will begin checking nest boxes and start building a nest. Woodpeckers are early nesters as well.



The birds have been quiet all winter with the exception of the jays barking out their calls to let all know they have arrived once again at the feeders and the finch that continuously squabble over which perch is theirs. Most other birds just give a few chirps and peeps. But March is the time when singing is the onset of courtship and pair bonding, and the songs mean spring to the ear even if the eyes still see white. The Northern Cardinal seems to be the first, singing as early as mid January followed by the Chickadees. The intensity and frequency will pick up along with the mating calls of many other birds. In fact today I heard my first Mourning Dove. This singing is a true harbinger of spring. It reminds us we have endured another winter on the Great Plains and that we are in the home stretch.

Oh yes! Spring brings not only the highly anticipated return of our favorite summer birds, but of a few we could do without, primarily the Common Grackle. We have a variety of bird feeders and great tips at Wild Bird habitat on how to deal with these overpowering birds and still have a great summer bird feeding experience.



I encourage everyone as the winter of 2010 subsides to get out and enjoy the changing of the seasons from beginning to end. Watch and listen to the birds. Watch your backyard closely for any new or migrating birds. Take a walk in a natural area such as the Pioneers Park Nature Center looking for these

spring arrivals. Add another bird feeder, maybe a different style. Find out what cavity nesting birds are in your area or attracted to your habitat and put up a bird house for them. Start planning a new water feature, maybe a small recirculating pond for the birds. Not only will the sound of moving water attract more birds, you can operate them all winter providing a great water source. And it is not too early to begin thinking about adding some wildlife habitat to your yard for the birds. The Wild Bird Habitat Stores offer the book "Landscaping for Wildlife" by Carroll Henderson, and I recommend it highly. Finke Gardens in Lincoln on North 66th Street have a large selection of wildlife plantings the knowledge to plan a natural area for birds. If you were to plant just one shrub to provide food or shelter each year, before you know it you'll have wonderful habitat for birds, and attract many more than just those visiting your feeders. It will also add value to your property.

So enjoy the advance of spring. Go out and spend the day viewing the Sandhill Cranes. It's an easy day trip. Enjoy the wonderful wildlife we share space with.

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**WINGTIP: It takes three to five years for juvenile Sandhill Cranes to reach sexual maturity. Until then they will stay with the family. Flocks of cranes are comprised of numerous family groups. The adults are monogamous keeping the same mate throughout their lives unless one becomes deceased at which time they will attract another mate.**

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### **White Pelican Homecoming Celebration - Alama, NE**

Harlan County Reservoir is one of the largest bodies of water within the North American Central Flyway and is a primary stopover for millions of migrating birds, including Bald and Golden Eagles, Osprey, ducks and geese including Ross' and Snow Geese, many species of gulls, and more, including an occasional sighting of a great Whooping Crane. Over 300 bird species have been observed in the area. Parking lots, campgrounds, and local marinas around the reservoir make prime viewing sites.



### **Harlan White Pelican Watch, March 1 - April 15**

Area residents know spring is just around the corner when the American White Pelicans begin returning from their winter feeding grounds along the U.S. Gulf Coast to take up temporary residence at Harlan County Reservoir. Arrival dates can be as early as late February up through early April. For a copy of our Pelican Watch brochure visit: [www.harlantourism.org/activities\\_trails/birding.php](http://www.harlantourism.org/activities_trails/birding.php) or pickup a brochure at any Wild Bird Habitat Store

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### **Nebraska Prairie Chicken Festival - April 12 - 14 / Calamus Outfitters / Burwell, NE**

The 2019 Nebraska Prairie Chicken Festival, hosted by Calamus Outfitters and the Gracie Creek Landowners, includes Prairie Chicken viewing, birding tours, ranch tour, guest speakers, silent auction, great food and more. In the heart of the Nebraska Sandhills on the Calamus reservoir. Season long viewing. Information & registration at: [www.nebraskaprairiechickens.com](http://www.nebraskaprairiechickens.com) or call (308) 346-4697.



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### **Birding Class #401**

Learn the essentials of birding, bird identification, and where to go birding in this year's "Birding 401" offered by OLLI, UNL's Oscher Lifelong Learning Institute. The six weekly classes include 5 field trips to view migratory birds at nearby locations. **Classes begin April 2, 2019.** Phone: (402) 472-6265 or go to [olli@unl.edu](mailto:olli@unl.edu) for more information. Birding #401 Course is \$30 for OLLI members or is included with a \$50 OLLI membership.

**Instructors:** Dan Wheeler, Emeritus Professor, Ag Communications, UNL  
Dave Titterington, Wild Bird Habitat Stores



## Sandhill Crane Cam

Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary  
[rowe.audubon.org/crane-cam](http://rowe.audubon.org/crane-cam)

In the morning as the cranes leave the river or sundown when they return to roost on the Platte River for the night.



## VORTEX

Binoculars & Spotting Scopes



10% OFF



Unlimited Lifetime Warranty

## Quality Thistle Feeders

*Aspects, Bird Quest, Droll Yankee, Vari-Craft*

10% OFF

During March

- Lifetime guarantee
- Removable base for cleaning
- Invest in the best!

*We repair bird feeders*



Thursday, March 14 at 7:00 PM  
Unitarian Church,  
6300 A Street, Lincoln



Dr. Lucas Sabalka will address climate change and its effects on birds as highlighted in a 2015 groundbreaking report by the National Audubon Society. He will discuss some causes and possible paths forward. Using computer simulation Audubon can predict the re-distribution of birds as the planet continues to warm. Some of the changes will not just surprise you, but shock you. See for yourself what changes will take place in 20, 50, and 80 years out for most bird species on the Audubon's North American Bird Guide. Go to [www.audubon.org/bird-guide](http://www.audubon.org/bird-guide). Select a bird species and scroll down to "How climate change could affect this bird's range" - there are 314 bird species on the brink. The shrinking and shifting ranges of birds could nearly imperil half of the birds in the United States.

## Purple Martin Houses

10% OFF

During March

*Do you have the habitat?*

- Free on site consultation
- Installation available



Ask us for more information

*The Wild Bird Habitat Stores.*

*Lincoln's Purple Martin Headquarters*

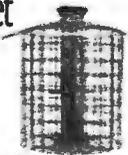
**WINGTIP:** Usually by the end of February we're seeing large flocks of snow geese on the move. With the colder February temperatures they are being delayed. I think March will be a year millions of snow geese will show up along the Central Platte River and in the Rain Water Basin just to the south of the river. It will be an added bonus to those headed out to view the cranes.

## Cages Seed Tube, Peanut & Suet

Bird Feeders

10% OFF

Deters squirrels, Starlings, Blackbirds  
*Offer good through March*



Feed the squirrels on the ground  
Not on your bird feeder

10% OFF

All Squirrel Baffles -  
Hanging &  
Pole mounted

Through March



Take a short road trip to see hundreds of thousands of snow geese. View eagles, swans, and a variety of waterfowl and other bird species. An easy day-trip

- Loess Bluffs National Wildlife Refuge  
[https://www.fws.gov/refuge/loess\\_bluffs/](https://www.fws.gov/refuge/loess_bluffs/)
- Desoto Bend National Wildlife Refuge  
<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/desoto/>

Both these National Wildlife Refuges have well maintained roads making viewing easy. Drop the shovel and take a drive. Enjoy the seasons as they change.