



NEWSLETTER FROM SUNFLOWER AUDUBON

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GET TO KNOW:

The Northern Cardinal



The Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*), commonly known as just cardinal, is a medium sized perching songbird well known for the male's crimson plumage. Its habitats include woodlands, gardens, shrublands and wetlands. It's melodious, some is well recognized, causing people to look up to find that brilliant red spot in a tree.

The females are not as colorful but both sexes have a crest at the top of the head, although the male's is typically larger.

TOXIC BIRDS?

A recent article in the [National Geographic](#) detailed a species of bird native to New Guinea which possesses one of the world's deadliest toxins. In 1989, the Variable Pitohui, a gaudy black and orange bird, became tangled in ornithologist Jack Dumbacher's mist net. As Dumbacher tried to set it free, the bird scratched him. Dumbacher instinctively put the cut to his lips and said that his mouth immediately started to burn, then went numb and the sensation lasted until the night.

The birds were discovered to carry batrachotoxin. Deadlier than cyanide, this is among the most lethal substances in the animal kingdom. The same substance is also found in the poison dart frog, halfway around the world.

Out of the nearly 10,500 species of birds worldwide, at least a dozen avian species have been identified as toxic. Some others are the European quail, North American ruffed grouse and European hoopoes.

Even after 35 years from Dumbacher's discovery, much is still a mystery about New Guinea's poisonous birds.

Perhaps bird watching is still better done, from a distance! You can read the full article [HERE](#).

BOOK REVIEW

[*The Guide to Kansas Birds and Birding Hotspots* Pete Janzen Bob Gess](#)

Available from Longleaf Services Inc @ longleafservices.org

While this book might be a bit heavy to take in one's backpack, this 2nd edition is a comprehensive book combining both bird profiles and reviews of the various birding regions throughout the state.

When I first began serious birding years ago, I was told that the best bird ID books were those that referenced the birds with drawings/paintings rather than photos due to the subtle differences between a photograph of one bird vs an artist's drawing of the common field marks on most of the species.

The cardinal eats mainly seeds and grains but will also feed on fruit and insects. During courtship, the male is known to feed seeds to the female.

As with many bird species, the cardinal’s range is expanding from the Eastern US, even though this is where it’s most abundant, into more western states as well as moving northward. It’s found in southern Canada all the way south into Mexico It is, however, common in the desert Southwest.

Juveniles do not have the distinctive red–orange beak until they are almost fully mature, nor do they acquire the trademark color until they acquire their final adult plumage in the fall.

The cardinal, one of the most popular birds, is the official state bird or no fewer than seven eastern states.

Even though the species exhibits sexual dimorphism (males and females have different coloration) both parents feed the nestlings. The pair may have up to 4 broods a year (although 2–3 is more common)

Feeding is mostly done while hopping on the ground or in low bushes. They readily come to feeders and favor sunflower seeds.

As with many birds, the cardinal knows how to “shake his groove thing”. A male will smooth his feathers, fan his tail and force his head feathers straight up into the air, then begin to shift his weight from side to side and sing. The behavior has been witnessed in female birds as well but not as commonly.

Cardinals are mostly monogamous, mating typically for life. However, they may find a new partner each breeding season. Males can be very territorial. They are open nesters and build their own nests each year. Nests are built out of twigs, pieces of grass and other plant materials less than 10’ from the

This book contains photographs. They are, however, gorgeous!

There are profiles on 310 species with a special section devoted to another 16 species of migratory warblers. Each page includes field notes. An excerpt from the Western Meadowlark “The two meadowlarks occur together across most of the state, but in summer, the Eastern is absent from the arid shortgrass prairie of northwestern Kansas, and the Western similarly shuns the comparatively moist southeastern counties in summer”

The state is divided into 5 birding regions with roughly 20 of the best birding hotspots within each region. The descriptions include major highways, rivers and reservoirs. Each hotspot will also give information related to eBird, the popular app developed by Cornell University. For instance, Hotspot #33 is the Hays Area of Ellis County. *“eBird Hotspot names: Frontier Historical Park, KSU Agricultural Research Center=Hays, Sternberg Natural Area. Hotspot type: Worth a Stop”*

At the back of the book is even a species checkoff list to keep track of those “life” birds one has seen.

For the less experienced, this book provides an excellent starting point and is worth being, if not kept in the backpack, at least in the car when out of a birding adventure!

Review by Diana Pantle, President

SCIENCE FAIR

On May 4, Sunflower Audubon participated in the 1st Annual Kansas Science Festival held in Hays. Billed as a day of discovery and excitement, the event attracted over 1,000 participants.

Events/Vendors were stationed at the Hays Public Library, Downtown Pavilion and the KSU Ag Extension Office. Activities from science, technology, engineering, art and math (STEAM) were led by researchers and practitioners from across the region.

A free family event gave participants an unforgettable experience with various interactive booths, hands–on activities and opportunities to engage with researchers and community service practitioners from Kansas.

The idea was to experience how science shapes our everyday lives and to be inspired by sharing. Whether a student, parent, or lifelong learner there was something for everyone.



ground. Even though not heard as often in the winter, cardinals are non-migratory. Baby cardinals can be out of the nest in just 9–11 days! Once the juveniles have fledged, the male may take charge of teaching them to fend for themselves while the females go about nesting for another brood.

It is thought to be a good omen when someone sees a cardinal in their dreams, and they are usually associated with good fortune. Seeing a cardinal is thought to be good luck and they are associated with the number 12, considered by Native Americans to also be good luck.

Information courtesy of:

All About Birds, Wikipedia, Bird Feeder Hub

AUDUBON’S ANTIDOTE FOR DESPAIR

“Despite the biochemical blessing of a bright disposition, Audubon felt at times that his spirit would break from the weight of disappointment, and yet his passion for the work buoyed him, saved him.”

To read the full article on www.themarginalian.org, please click [HERE](#).



The Sunflower table was located in the Hays Library and a host of people took advantage of 3 different activities. Whether the individual choose to answer questions about migration, identify how the 5 major animal groups were as alike as they are different or figuring out how everyday household items resembled various types of bird beaks, a good time was had by all!

AUDUBON LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

July 17–20 in Montreal, Canada, the biannual Audubon Leadership Conference will be held. This event is an opportunity to reflect on Audubon’s history, celebrate progress and look ahead to the future. Conference participants will spend 3 days learning from each other and coordinating actions going forward. Promoting a shared commitment to bird conservation, advocacy and building community. Any board member from a local chapter is eligible to attend.

CONTRIBUTE TO COMMUNITY SCIENCE!

Did you know that your observations could contribute to the conservation of a species? Documenting what you see while birding can help scientists document the distributions of wild creatures throughout the state:

One way to keep track is using *eBird*. A popular app managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Observers can log the birds they see while the app keeps track of the date, location and time spent observing. Even recording visits at your bird feeder may have an impact!

Another app used by many, *iNaturalist*, is for everything that isn’t a bird. This app allows a person to upload photos or sound recordings. Volunteer experts subsequently confirm the identity of your observation (or politely suggest an alternative 😊)

4TH ANNUAL KANSAS LEK TREK PRAIRIE CHICKEN FESTIVAL

Some of the readers of this newsletter may have participated in the event, held in Hays, KS from April 10–13. This event is a fantastic opportunity to view the mating rituals of both the Greater and Lesser Prairie Chickens with daily blind and van viewing opportunities. There are also several field trips, guided bird walks and evening activities at the Sternberg Museum.

If you are interested, save the date for next year! April 9–12, 2026. check with the website kansaslektreks.org to keep up to date on when registration begins, generally near the beginning of December. Spots fill fast!