

People came from five different states to attend the fourth annual Burke County Birding Festival held June 12-13, 2009, at Lostwood National Wildlife Refuge (NWR).

Birders of all skill levels, nature enthusiasts, youth of all ages, neighbors and new friends with a passion for the outdoors and learning about the flora and fauna at Lostwood NWR were treated to picture-perfect weather and surrounded by breathtaking prairie vistas as they participated in the events at the festival.

Throughout the day-and-a-half festival, more than 170 people including volunteers and visitors attended.

Organizers were especially pleased to see the number of youth who had fun while learning by participating in the youth activities Friday afternoon and Youth Wildlife Adventures Saturday morning. The Friday youth activities were led by Jackie Jacobson, Outdoor Recreation Planner at Audubon NWR Complex in Coleharbor, and Saturday, Connie Mueller, the Wildlife Biologist at Lostwood NWR Complex, led the activities. These two talented leaders along with a team of knowledgeable FWS employees made learning fun. There were smiling faces all around Friday as the participants built wren nesting boxes, learned how a bird's body parts can be clues about the life it leads, and they became junior detectives exploring the "Mystery Boxes." Saturday morning participants built robin platforms and enjoyed several bird-filled activities like the Daring Duck Duel, Stamp Camp, Bird Jeopardy and What to I Eat With This Beak? The activities were challenging, fun, and educational for youth of all ages.

This year participants saw 75 species of birds on the guided tours, including some of the most sought-after species like Baird's sparrow, LeConte's sparrow, and the piping plover. The guides, Karen Smith, Corey Ellingson, Darrel Rytter, and Russ Rytter shared their expertise with the tour groups and everyone was happy to report on what they saw. The groups have been very fortunate to have such experienced, talented guides – the result has been a positive experience for everyone.

Volunteer organizer Pat Tinjum is grateful for the generosity of Karen Schwartz, Administrator at the Baptist Home of Kenmare, who for the fourth year has donated two buses and drivers for the festival. She is also grateful the Powers Lake School District allowed them to use two buses and for the volunteer bus drivers who also got up before the birds to have those buses at the refuge. This kind of dedication and community-minded support help to make the Burke County Birding Festival a success.

Speaking of buses, a new bus tour was added—the Safari Style Guided Tour which was enjoyed by all participants. Lostwood NWR staff conducted this two-hour "safari" giving participants an interpreted tour of the refuge. The tour gave riders a broader wildlife experience with no walking required.

Also new this year was the Lostwood Loop hike. Quite a few energetic folks participated in the vigorous walk exploring four miles of the Lostwood NWR National Hiking Trail. Lostwood NWR staff and volunteers accompanied the participants on the two-hour hike. The weather was perfect for this late-morning hike along the National Hiking Trail.

The Bird Biology Blitz Friday afternoon had great participation with Fish and Wildlife Service staff, Monte Ellingson, Kirsten Brennan and Doug Leschisin presenting information on whooping cranes, piping plovers and sharp-tailed grouse. Topics for the "blitz" included how populations of whooping cranes and piping plovers are responding to recovery efforts, how they

use North Dakota during their life, and their nesting habits. Added to these topics was the life history of local sharp-tailed grouse which made for an afternoon of fun feathered facts.

Friday afternoon's Prairie Wildflowers and Grasses Walk led by Connie Mueller and Karen Smith was as popular as ever. Tour groups went out into the refuge to observe the waving seas of native grasses and flowers; habitat that is unique and vital to the grassland birds. Tinjum participated in one tour and learned a great deal about grasses and wildflowers. "I'd recommend this walk to anyone interested in getting to know more about nature and Lostwood NWR," stated Tinjum.

Saturday morning following the guided birding tours, Chester Nelson, an area native, presented a very interesting talk on Amateur Wildlife Photography in North Dakota. His presentation included many of his photographs including the whooping cranes you might have seen published in several newspapers. Chester's session was well attended and he answered many questions for us amateurs interested in taking photos "in the wild."

Also Saturday morning Kirsten Brennan, Wildlife Biologist at Lostwood NWR, took participants on a virtual tour of the Galapagos Islands. She captivated the crowd with beautiful photos of wildlife. Some of the birds found there can be spotted here in North Dakota too, while other creatures are unique to the Galapagos Islands. Everyone who had the opportunity to take this "virtual tour" enjoyed the trip.

Don't forget about the food – refreshments were provided throughout the festival and thanks to many generous donations a delicious catered lunch was served at noon Friday. All of the attendees complimented the provisions. What an example of Burke County hospitality.

Tinjum visited with a young birder from North Dakota who brought his grandparents to the Festival. Always curious as to how folks hear about the festival, she asked him and he told her he did a search on the internet for birding in North Dakota and the Burke County Birding Festival "popped" up. It's thanks to the Burke County Job Development Authority's hosting of the Festival web pages for their presence online. Many folks did the same thing as quite a few pre-registrations came in from the online registration page.

It takes a lot of dedication, hard work, volunteers and good partners to produce a quality event. The primary partners in the festival are Lostwood NWR, Burke County JDA and the Lostwood Birding and Nature Association. "I value these partners and enjoy working with the volunteers and staff at Lostwood NWR," stated Tinjum.

Dates for next year's Burke County Birding Festival will soon be set and planning will again be underway.

Check the Burke County website ([www.burkecountynd.com](http://www.burkecountynd.com)) for details as plans progress. Plan now to come out to Lostwood NWR and get "Lost In Birding" at the fifth annual Burke County Birding Festival. You'll be glad you did!