The Joy of Sandhill Crane Season

There’s hurricane season, cherry season, and basketball season. Aurora Fowler’s hometown has crane season. “That’s when the cranes stop on the Platte River in Nebraska for four to six weeks in the spring,” says the Gibbon, Nebraska, middle-school student. Half a million of the three-foot tall birds stop to feed on farm field leftovers on their way northward to nesting grounds in Canada, Alaska, and Siberia. “People come here from all over the world to see the largest gathering of sandhill cranes on Earth,” says Aurora. Crane watchers who stop at the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary on the Platte River are likely to see Aurora. She volunteers at the center doing everything from guiding trips to view the cranes. “It’s about more than just volunteering my time,” says Aurora. “It is about sharing my enthusiasm for these birds and this river.”

Connect to the Crane Cam: rowe.audubon.org/crane-cam

Eagles Build Towers for Chimney Swifts

Eagles are building homes for chimney swifts in Minneapolis. Not eagle birds, but Eagle Scouts. Boy Scout troops have been helping Audubon Minnesota’s Chimney Swift Conservation Project build nesting towers. Centuries ago, chimney swifts nested inside hollow trees. When settlers cut down forests, swifts moved into chimneys. But these days, open-topped chimneys are becoming rare, so swifts have lost many nest sites. The Minnesota population of swifts has dropped 50% since the 1970s. The hope is that installing 12-foot-tall wooden towers for the birds to nest in will help them recover. Scout Troop 100 has constructed 10 chimney swift towers. High school student Chaoching Vang of Maplewood, Minnesota, earned the top Eagle rank in scouting through this community-service project. “It creates awareness about the decline of the chimney swifts,” explains Chaoching. “Action speaks louder than words. Get involved.” says the 17-year-old Eagle Scout.

Connect to videos and info on chimney swift towers: chimneyswifts.org

Patrolling Beaches for the Birds

Florida’s beaches are popular places for surfers, swimmers, sunbathers—and nesting shorebirds. Plovers, terns, skimmers, oystercatchers, and other coastal birds lay their sand-colored eggs in shallow depressions on the beach. Unfortunately the nests, eggs, and chicks are easily harmed by beachgoers and their pets. So each spring when nesting begins, bird stewards step in to help. “We protect the beach-nesting birds from human disturbances,” says 14-year-old Nora Jade Flower of St. Petersburg, Florida. Bird stewards rope off nesting areas, post signs, and ask people to give the birds space. “Some people don’t listen,” says Nora Jade, who has been protecting birds since age 7. “But many just don’t know that they are doing something harmful when they chase the birds or get too close to the nests.” Nora Jade wants us all to safely share the shore with birds.

Chaoching Vang (fourth from left), other Scouts, and an advisor.