



# the prairie falcon

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NORTHERN FLINT HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY, P.O. Box 1932, MANHATTAN, KS 66505-1932

## **WILDLIFE REHABILITATION CINDY CHARD-BERGSTROM K-STATE VETERINARY MEDICINE**

Kansas State University's Veterinary Medicine complex is home to a renowned wildlife rehabilitation center. Here, injured wildlife of all descriptions, including songbirds, raptors, reptiles, and mammals, are treated and cared for with the goal of eventual release back to the wild.

Some animals, due to their injuries, are not able to be released, but can often perform an important educational role. Join us as we learn from Cindy Chard-Bergstrom, microbiologist and local wildlife rehabilitator, of the important link wildlife "rehabers" serve. She will discuss the procedures of admitting, treating, and rehabilitating her patients, with emphasis on the stringent licensing and housing requirements designed to ensure the well-being of the animals. She will discuss some special roles wildlife can play, including foster parenting, and will have one or more animal patients with her. Please join us for this special program.

*Before each program, we invite our speakers to join us for an informal dinner and discussion. Feel free to join us this month at Hunan's Chinese Restaurant, in Westloop at 5:45 p.m.. The program begins at 7:30 p.m. All meetings are open to the public, so bring a friend.*

### **FIELD TRIP**

#### **BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK**

Join us Saturday, Feb. 11<sup>th</sup> and every second Saturday at 8 a.m. in the Ackert/Durland parking lot on the KSU campus. We will carpool to a local birding hotspot and should return by about 11 a.m. Birders of every age and interest level are welcomed. Children are especially encouraged to attend. This month's walk will be led by Dave Rintoul.

**WILDLIFE  
REHABILITATION  
FEB. 15, 2006  
7:30 P.M.  
MANHATTAN PUBLIC  
LIBRARY AUDITORIUM**

### **INSIDE:**

- 2 EXOTIC ENCOUNTERS
- 3 PILEATED PAIRS
- 4 SKYLIGHT
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### **CONTRIBUTORS:**

**DRU CLARKE  
PETE COHEN  
THOMAS MORGAN**

### **UPCOMING DATES:**

- FEB 11 BEGINNING BIRDING  
MEET AT ACKERT/  
DURLAND PARKING LOT,  
KSU 8A.M. - 11 A.M.**
- FEB15 RAPTOR RECOVERY  
PROGRAM**
- FEB17 BIRDSEED ORDER  
DEADLINE**
- FEB25 BIRDSEED PICKUP  
SALE 9A.M. - 12N  
UFM 1221 THURSTON,  
MANHATTAN, KS**
- FEB 24-26 MANHATTAN  
GARDEN SHOW:  
NFHAS BOOTH,  
CONTACT JOHN  
TATARKO TO HELP  
(TATARKO@KSU.EDU)**

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## EXOTIC ENCOUNTERS

### DRU CLARKE

A rooster crowing woke me, and a squint at the clock bedside showed a time of 3:30 a.m. I swung my legs to the floor, then walked sleepily to the patio door, then out to the broad, manicured lawn, studded with tall and leaning coconut palms, lit by a near-full moon and distant stars. The night air was tepid and fragrant and decidedly tropical: no, we weren't in Kansas, and the rooster wasn't Baudelaire, our Bantam, but a Moa Jungle Fowl.

We were on Kauai, staying in a renovated worker's cottage on a turn-of-the-century plantation. Our "suite" had no air conditioning except that afforded by nature; the fetch of the wind was unbroken for 2500 miles in any direction, and kept the temperature year 'round in the range of 72 to 78 degrees Fahrenheit. We had attended the annual National Marine Educators Association conference on Maui, and wanted to take in more than one of the Hawaiian Islands, so extended our visit to the Garden Isle. Reveille by a Moa was, it seemed, part of its charm.

These birds, it was thought by Darwin, were the ancestors of our modern domestic chicken, although some today think more species can claim that credit. They resemble our dear Bantams, both in vivid coloration of plumage and size, and they made us chuckle as we encountered them everywhere, it seemed.

Hawaii has lost most of its endemic species of birds, so instead of stalking relict populations, we visited Kilauea National Wildlife Refuge where we were awestruck by large numbers of true seabirds, brought close to us on the paths that threaded the dizzying cliff tops above the Pacific. True seabirds – not shorebirds whom you might find during migration along the central flyway in Kansas – are those species who are specially adapted for life at sea, who range far out into the pelagic zone, the open ocean, out of sight of land in any direction, to forage for food. Some, like the Laysan albatross, who nests on the open areas among the trees on certain cliff tops, had fledged their young, so we missed their spectacular and sometimes kamikaze-like landings and takeoffs, the birds sporting wingspans wider than most of us are tall. I wondered how they launched themselves into the atmosphere on the sea's surface, for surely they must rest as they spend months, and yes, even years, in that fluid realm before returning to land to mate and raise their young. At sea, did they catch a tall wave, then spread their long, slender wings from its towering crest – a fluid, torrential cliff that tumbled then melted away beneath them as they rose into the air? I knew their nickname of "goony bird" (derived from the Dutch for "clown") which they earned from goofy courtship antics and awkward launchings, but, ah!, what could compare to an albatross soaring without wing beat for hours on end?

Above my head – as if suspended by monofilament – hung a female frigate bird, so close that if my husband had put me on his shoulder I could have touched her belly. Also known as the "man o' war" bird, these brigands obtain their food by snatching it from the sea's surface or by swooping down on other birds who promptly regurgitate what's in their crops, the frigates catching it on the way down. I instinctively crouched and covered my head with my arms. The female is rather hard to look at, sporting a pale head and long, hooked beak. But the males are blessed with a redeeming feature of an expandable red gular pouch, used extensively and evidently effectively in courtship. I remembered seeing frigates in Florida, sailing above a pod of dolphins who were feeding. Perhaps they have some as yet unknown relationship.

More comely were the graceful tropic birds, with their long, streamer-like tail feathers, and floating, kite-like flight. Not close enough to see their bills, I discovered that they are serrated, a perfect adaptation for grasping their slippery prey of squid, a delicacy I used to fix for my students after, of course, we had dissected and identified the critical parts. These birds were also called "bos'n" (for boatswain) birds as they frequently would settle on the masts and rigging of ships at sea. Ironically, this is the name I picked for one of our dogs who feels the need to accompany us wherever we go.

Plentiful, too, were the shearwaters, among some of the most abundant birds on earth. Their name describes their manner of shearing the waves, using the interface of water and air to transport themselves like miniature aerial surfboards.

I remembered them, too, from the North Atlantic when I was shipboard on the staysail schooner "Westward" in hot pursuit of a warm core ring spun off the Gulf Stream. They were a pleasant diversion from the long hours of tedium searching for our spiking temperature gradient.

True seabirds all – equipped with glands behind their eyes to rid their bodies of excess salt, proportionally long wings, and legs and feet better serving them in water than on land. Many, too, are "tubenoses" – tubular nostrils set on the beak like a pair of binoculars, many of which have baffles in them that lead us to the notion that they can detect changes in barometric pressure, no trifle when spending months at sea and on the wing.

Although the Hawaiian Islands have lost many of their species, their isolation and dramatic coastlines provide rare and protective habitat for some amazing seabirds. We will remember them as much as the compulsive Moa Jungle Fowl rooster who was determined to roust us from bed one soft and dream-like predawn in a place far, far from home. In fact, far from anywhere



Some pairs of pileated woodpeckers appear to have decided that every day is an occasion to strengthen the most important relationship that they will ever have. Yes, every day is Valentine's Day.

The word pileated refers to the crest on top of their head, and this crest is used to advantage, when these crow-sized birds perform their courtship dance in late winter. According to Sally Hoyt, who published some of her late husband's observations (1957, *Ecology*:38:246-256) "When within about 20 feet of her the male spreads first one wing, then the other above his back, exhibiting the beautiful black and white pattern. At this time the crests of both birds are erect and brilliant scarlet."

The most amazing aspect of the relationship of some pairs may be the enduring companionship which endures throughout every day of the year until death do them part. This companionship lasts from sunrise to sunset. They spend the night in holes in different trees separated by 100 to 400 feet! Their tradition of separate beds makes no sense, but the male does show a modicum of sense when he escorts her to her roosting hole. Perhaps he is acting as a sentinel, ensuring that no owl or hawk molests her before she slips into her hideaway. After a few minutes of solitude in the twilight, he flies to his roost and utters a stream of "cuks" which she can hear. Perhaps he is saying, "Sleep well, my precious one."



These woodpeckers are late risers, waking up about 15-30 minutes later than less sensible downy woodpeckers. They often wake up slowly, giving their roost hole a cursory cleaning, tossing out wood chips. And while still inside their abode, they give "wuk" calls and drum against the interior. And their mate often hears and responds with "wuks" and drumming. After thus exchanging good morning greetings, he often flies to her, rendezvousing for a foray into their territory with either himself or herself leading the foray to a breakfasting area.

Yes, they are sensible creatures. The male often allows himself to be displaced from a choice feeding location, perhaps because the sharing of food is a way to strengthen their relationship. He does displace her occasionally, but when he does so, he often waves his bill in a stereotypical fashion, drawing attention to himself. What he really wants, perhaps, is reassurance, not sustenance. Perhaps he needs to be reassured that he's the king and she's the queen.

Their relationship is important for their survival. When one bird is chiseling away, knocking off a slab of bark or excavating a hole, it often isn't in position to see an approaching hawk, but its mate is. When one of them spots a hawk, they both are soon giving "cuck" calls. Perhaps they understand the meaning of - You watch my back. And I'll watch yours.

Yes, I'll never let you down, my valentine.

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NORTHERN FLINT  
HILLS AUDUBON  
SOCIETY  
T-SHIRTS ARE NOW  
AVAILABLE





It seems the most noticeable effects of having an atmospheric sky, as we do, is the ready supply of breathable gases and the variations it gives to the alternations of days and nights. There are multitudinous other effects that are still being discovered after thousands of years of human efforts, some of them quite esoteric and invisible. Still, one other quite visible, long-known though less widespread, effect is that of “looming,” in which things are effortlessly transposed to where they are not.

Such occurrences have been quite prominent, so I've read, in the Strait of Messina, between Sicily and Italy, and the occasions there have been credited to, or blamed upon, Morgan le Fey, or Fata Morgana, the mischievous fairy-like sister of King Arthur. Others say all such occurrences derive from the habit of light to bend when moving from one substance to another of different density, and from the ability of our atmosphere to exist with different densities from place to place and at different altitudes.

One common result, normally noticed only for technical requirements, is that we get to see the Sun several minutes before it actually “rises” above the horizon, and for several minutes after it actually “sinks” away. Other results, here and there, have earth- and sea-bound objects appearing in the sky, and/or miles from their actual location; sometimes upside down, and sometimes in duplicate – rightside up and upside down.

Our venerable Chambers Encyclopedia cites several noted occasions, including an incident in May, 1854, when people on a British steamer, *Archer*, in the Baltic, saw an entire fleet of 19 ships, actually 30 miles distant, suspended hulls up, masts down, in plain view. Entire geological formations can be similarly transported. In *Sea of Glory*, America's Voyage of Discovery, (Viking, 2003), recounting an 1838-42 exploration, Nathaniel Philbrick tells that the British polar explorer James Ross, by comparing logs, disputed an Antarctic sighting reported by the American commander who was prior in the area. Ross proposed that Charles Wilkes' expedition was actually 200 miles from the coastline in question and could only have seen it by a looming effect.

I may have missed witnessing such an effect on numerous occasions – perhaps because of not looking for it – but it's been reported that people looking eastward over the plains from the Colorado foothills can sometimes see two different horizons, the second one, actually a refraction, being located somewhere beyond the line-of-sight horizon.

The famous and infamous desert mirages, in which a layer of hot air close to the sandy surface deflects light so that from a distance it appears to be the reflection off a lake, are related phenomena. Such mirages are utter lies. There is no lake. But the whimsies of Fata Morgana are not complete fibs, and can sometimes be useful. The things she depicts do exist – somewhere.

As night falls on February 1<sup>st</sup>, the Moon watches the Great Square of Pegasus, tilted to a diamond, go diving out of the sky just below it. Then the Moon may seem to be looming starting on February 8<sup>th</sup> when you may wonder what's it doing amid the five main stars of Auriga. The Moon's path stays close to the Sun's, thus it usually travels within the twelve constellations of Zodiac, but nobody is born under the “sign of Auriga.” Yet there, says *The Old Farmers' Almanac*, is where the Moon will be, and closer to us than for the rest of the year, a mere 217,000 miles away. So if you think it “looms” a bit larger than normal, that's why.

Mars will be near the Moon on the 5<sup>th</sup>, and StarDate says those who like quiet action can watch the two separate, hour by hour – Mars on its way leaving Aries to enter Taurus on the 6<sup>th</sup> and therein to pass near the Pleiades the 16<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup>. Also on the 6<sup>th</sup> Mercury starts its best showing of the year low in western evening twilight, looking like a small star, till about the 23<sup>rd</sup>. A real star, Regulus, will peak out beside the Full Moon on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Saturn will be up most of the nights below the Gemini Twins as they rise. Jupiter will start rising a little after midnight at midmonth; the Moon will have its company on the 20<sup>th</sup>, Venus's before dawn on the 24<sup>th</sup>. Full Moon the 12<sup>th</sup>, 10p44; New 27<sup>th</sup>, 6a31.



**THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT RETURNS FOR ITS NINTH SEASON  
FEBRUARY 17-20, 2006**

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), a joint project of Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, returns for its ninth season February 17-20, 2006. Bird enthusiasts of all ages can share their love of birds with a friend, a child, a scout troop, a class, or a co-worker - opening new eyes to the joy of birding and the fun of creating a unique snapshot of winter bird abundance and distribution across the continent.

“The level of energy created each February by Great Backyard Bird counters is phenomenal,” said Dr. Paul Green, director of Citizen Science for Audubon. “What always amazes me are the new discoveries made by people across North America. Some bird watchers even send digital photos to back up their reports. Last year participants sent in more than 1,000 photos and many are now part of the GBBC web site gallery.”

Everyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to seasoned experts. During the count, bird watchers tally up birds for as little as 15 minutes, or for as long as they like, keeping track of the highest number of each bird species they see together at one time. People are encouraged to report birds from public lands and local parks, as well as from their backyards. Participants enter their numbers online at [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc) and can explore sightings maps, lists, and charts as the count progresses.

Year-round, anyone can view results from past counts and learn how to participate by visiting [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc). There is no fee or registration for the event, which is sponsored by Wild Birds Unlimited. For more information, contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at [cornellbirds@cornell.edu](mailto:cornellbirds@cornell.edu) or (800) 843-2473 if in the United States; (607) 254-2473 if calling internationally; or contact Audubon at [citizenscience@audubon.org](mailto:citizenscience@audubon.org); (215) 355-9588, Ext. 16.



**“BOOMING”**

**GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN VIEWING ON THE KONZA**

Konza Prairie Biological Station (KPBS) is taking reservations for its Prairie Chicken Blind for March 17 to April 20, 2006. Viewing the courtship behavior of the Greater Prairie Chickens will be allowed with a guide assigned by KPBS with a charge of \$10.00/person. The blind will accommodate six to seven persons plus a guide. Smaller groups will share the blind with others. Groups with special agendas, such as photography, should make this clear at the time of reserving the blind. No flash equipment is allowed. Professional photographers require special permission from the Director and a site fee will be assessed.

Details of where to meet and times will be given when you make your reservation. In general, we meet at 4:30 a.m. before the time change at the beginning of April and at 5:00 a.m. during Daylight Savings Time in order to enter the blind before light. Each group should plan to remain in the blind until approximately 8:30 a.m. when the birds have finished courting. We will not disturb the lek before this time unless the birds have already flushed. Please wear wool or other soft fabric outer clothes. The newer high tech materials are very noisy and disrupt the experience of hearing the incredible call of the males.

For more information or to make a reservation, please call Dr. Valerie Wright, Environmental Educator/Naturalist, KPBS, or Annie Baker, Education Assistant at 785/587-0381 or e-mail Annie, [bunny@ksu.edu](mailto:bunny@ksu.edu).



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**Subscription Information:**

Introductory memberships - \$20 per year; then basic membership is \$35 annually. When you join the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, you automatically become a member of the National Audubon Society and receive the bimonthly Audubon magazine in addition to the **PRAIRIE FALCON**. New membership applications may be sent to NFHAS at the address below; make checks payable to the National Audubon Society. Membership Renewals are handled by the National Audubon Society and should not be sent to NFHAS. Questions about membership? Call toll-free, 1-800-274-4201, or email the National Audubon Society [join@audubon.org](mailto:join@audubon.org).

If you do not want to receive the national magazine, but still want to be involved in our local activities, you may subscribe to the **PRAIRIE FALCON** newsletter for \$15 per year. Make checks payable to the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, and mail to:

**Treasurer, NFHAS, P.O. Box 1932, Manhattan KS 66505-1932.**

**RARE BIRD HOTLINE:** For information on Kansas Birds, subscribe to the Kansas Bird Listserv. Send this message **<subscribe KSBIRD-L>** to this address **<listserv@ksu.edu>** and join in the discussions!

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