



the prairie falcon

Vol. 33, No. 6
FEBRUARY 2005

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

February 9, 2005
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MTG
Manhattan Public Library
Auditorium
7:00 p.m.

February 16, 2005
EAGLES IN KANSAS
Mike Watkins
221 Ackert Hall, KSU
7:30 p.m.

EAGLES IN KANSAS

Mike Watkins, Corps of Engineers,
Kansas City District

The program will cover the history of nesting Bald Eagles in Kansas. It will include information and photographs regarding the Bald Eagle banding program and documentation of the numerous band returns.

Mike Watkins received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Wildlife Management from Humboldt State University in 1979. He worked as a Soil Conservationist for the U.S.D.A. Natural Resources Conservation Service from 1977 to 1986. Since 1986, he has been working as a Wildlife Biologist in Operations Division for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Kansas City District.

Mike has been working with nesting Bald Eagles in Kansas since the first nest was established at Clinton Lake in 1989. From that time on, he has worked closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to monitor active Bald Eagle nests in Northeast Kansas. He also assists each year with the banding of eaglets at nests throughout the state. This is an incredible success story - 338 eagles have fledged from nesting territories at Kansas City District lakes, including 47 eaglets in 2004. Mike has been intimately involved in making it so.

Before each program, we invite our speakers to join us for an informal dinner and discussion. Feel free to join us this month at Hunam Mongolian BBQ (1304 Westloop Shopping Center) 5:45 p.m.. The program begins at 7:30 p.m. Refreshments are served after every meeting. All meetings are open to the public.

Field Trips

BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK

Join us Saturday, Feb. 12th 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. For more information call Patricia Yeager (776-9593) or e-mail her at pyky@flinthills.com.

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CONTRIBUTORS:

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UPCOMING DATES:

- Feb 9 GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MTG
7 p.m. Manhattan Public
Library Auditorium
- Feb 12 Beginning Birding, 8 a.m.
Ackert/Durland Parking Lot
- Feb 12 Birdseed ORDER deadline
- Feb 16 Eagles in Kansas
221 Ackert Hall, KSU
Dinner 5:45 p.m.
Program 7:30 p.m.
- Feb 25-27 Garden Show
Contact John Tatarko to help
- Feb 26 Birdseed PICKUP

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MANHATTAN, KS



Headed for work one morning, I decided to go by the river road. In fall it is the route of choice for then the grasses and trees frame the passage with a multitude of colors made more brilliant by occasional glints from the river. Just outside of town, a female cardinal - garbed in olive drab - fluttered frantically to the road's surface, tending a fallen male cardinal, presumably her mate. His vermilion body lay still on the south side of the roadbed. I slowed down, then stopped. I heard a car approaching, speeding headlong from the other direction. She blurred into flight and clung to a low-hanging limb like a leaf. The car shot by, fast and sleek - it sucked away my breath. The cardinal dipped down, calling out, and, with hesitant beak, touched her mate in death. I watched with sympathy her incessant motion, awed by her reckless devotion. Before another car could come and cut her down, I moved the dead bird well off the road, to a bed of soft grass. That evening, I drove by the site and, thankfully, she was gone.

One night, coming home from a late meeting, I raced round a bend on the Flush Road, and killed a raccoon whose eyes were like a glass about to be shattered in my headlights. That night, I did not stop, fearful of getting hit myself in the deepening dark. The next day, I had reason to travel the same road, and saw, to my horror, not one but three raccoons dead on the bend where I knew I had hit one the previous night. They were close to, and facing, each other. Had a family come to the aid of a fallen member? What feelings of kinship had overridden their own need for self-preservation?

On Highway 24, the main artery out of Manhattan to the east, I saw the same scenario twice over the span of several years, but the victims were, in these cases, a family of badgers. Two grown ones and two half-grown - a total of four - were dead in one incident, again, all found close to one another.

There were three dead in the other. Further east, again on Highway 24, this year, a family of skunks - babies and an adult (probably their mother) - lay strewn across the roadway. (Many years ago, and not too far from this same spot, a bobcat had been hit, and was still warm when found by a colorful "local." It made its way into a "road kill" stew - whose ingredients were unknown to us - which was shared by a group of campers at a nearby lake. I remember its gamey but rich flavor, but would have preferred it slinking, amber-eyed, through the woodland.)

At these same crossings and at other well recognized ones (a low bridge over a creek comes to mind), animals die on a regular basis. We erect "Deer Crossing" signs to alert motorists to well-traveled routes of these big-bodied, potentially damaging animals, but that is as much or more for our personal safety (and insurance purposes) than it is for wildlife preservation. In Florida, there are "Go Slow" signs in the waterways to protect manatees from boat props, and there is even a sign when entering the Florida Keys announcing, "Crocodile Crossing." (American crocodiles are an endangered species.) Our roads and bridges are built over well-established trails of our native wildlife, and while most of them are not endangered or really even "species of concern," our world is diminished by every road kill; we are especially uncomfortable - even guilty - when entire families seem to be wiped out.

We always seem to be in such a hurry, and use our vehicles to close our perceived gaps in time. Our families would be more likely to see us each night if we exercise more caution and less pressure on the gas. Would it be seen as grossly sentimental to identify these areas of special wildlife use, their faunal roadways, by erecting "Wildlife Crossing" signs? (I'd be willing to foot the bill for one.)

Or are we so sure that we are the only animals who recognize and feel kinship?

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Now working on the
PRESERVATION OF HABITAT IN THE COLONCHE HILLS of Ecuador
A grassroots awareness-building effort to convince local communal landowners to contribute some of their communal lands to make a large protected area for hummingbird habitat preservation. For more information contact Dusti Becker.



The sweet nectar of Ogeechee tupelo (*Nyssa ogechee*) is the source of a distinctive honey. The honey is lightly colored. It is faintly golden and has a hint of greenish coloration. Compared to darker honeys, it is mildly flavored and yet has a wonderful aftertaste which is unlike anything I've tasted before.

According to the 18th century writing of John Bartram, the northern limit of this tree is on the Great Ogeechee River where this tupelo is called the Ogeechee lime. Its oblong fruit is more than an inch in length, and can be used as a lime substitute. It may be made into preserves which have a stimulating tang. And like limes or lemons, it may be made into a drink. That unexperienced sensation is extremely seductive. It might taste like the essence of the tupelo. It might. That is the thrill of our country's flora. There are many essences. There are so many that many will remain a mystery that we may long for with all of our heart.

In the 1997 film, "Ulee's Gold," the gold of Ulee (Ulysses) was the honey his bees made when the Ogeechee tupelo bloomed. This movie was filmed in Florida on a location of an actual bee keeper (from whom I bought tupelo honey). This family of beekeepers has harvested honey every spring for more than one hundred years.

Ogeechee tupelo is native to Georgia and Florida, being abundant along the Ogeechee, Altamaha, and Suwannee Rivers. In its range in Florida, it comprises less than one percent of the woody plants.

How then, does a bee keeper harvest gold? Well, he places clean frames in his hives and transports the hives into the swamp, placing the hives on hillocks or even in a boat in prime habitat, where individual

bees will display fidelity for the blossoms of a tupelo. Yes, in a way, this is a love story about each individual falling in love. It's not the same, of course, not the same as falling in love. But then, it takes so little to remind us.

Many acres of the Ogeechee tupelo have been planted along the Apalachicola River and around swamps in its native range, so there will be enough nectar to satisfy the bees. The bees also pollinate the blossoms which become fruitful. And birds disperse the fruit's one inch long seed. After a seed or fruit has dried a bit, it will float, and after a flood, drifts of fruit may be found at the high waterline mark, and so the next generation begins.

Tupelo honey will never crystallize, because of its high fructose content. On a special anniversary, the bottle is brought out of a cupboard, and its appeal remains. Life never crystallizes. Love never crystallizes. There is the special day. There is Valentine's Day, the day when some honey should be tasted by every human. And for this human entity, it is the distinctive flavor of the Valentine's Day tupelo that I will taste.

How does it taste? Distinctive. That is the most frustrating word. How is it different? I could never say, but my sweetie tasted it. Her lovely dark eyes looked into mine as she told me, "... an aftertaste, an echo of sarsaparilla or root beer on a hot August day ... the consistency and rich smoothness of honey — with something else. Light, leafy and faintly sassafras, a golden zing on the tongue."

It is a special day.

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The NFHAS will have a booth again this year at the **Manhattan Area Garden Show, February 25-27th at Potroff Hall in Cico Park.** If you would like to help at the booth call John Tatarko at 785-537-0787. Or stop by and check out our booth!

8th ANNUAL GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

This is the eighth year of the popular event, developed and managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, with sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited store owners. This year's theme, "North America's Great Backyard," was chosen as a way to celebrate the beauty of birds found across the continent. People are encouraged to enjoy the birds around them by going out into the "Great Backyard" during any or all of the count days and keeping track of the highest numbers of each bird species they see. People then report their sightings over the Internet at www.birdsource.org/gbbc



Continuing from last month, in the mid-1800s science was ever increasingly reporting that the Earth, its creatures, and its universe were astonishingly older, vaster, and more changeable than before imagined, and Edgar Allan Poe was not alone in offering to explain how all the various reports fit together. But since Poe wrote a lot of other things still readily available I think it adds a bit of depth to consider, of necessity briefly, what he had to say in *Eureka*.

Perhaps because he was a story teller he conceived that there were other stories, i.e. other universes, and that ours, at least, has an Aristotelian beginning-middle-end. Ours began, he wrote, with all things contained homogeneously in one infinitely minute item – a simplicity, which at once had separated into uncountable atomic particles that spread apart to unfathomable distances – and this concept of a universe ballooning out from a singularity was 75 years ahead of the public scientific proposal of what came to be known as the “Big Bang.”

To Poe the impetus for this occurrence was God’s will. The Who, Where, and Why of God he did not get into, but he did say that each of all those particles, in addition to their materialness, had a spirit, expressed as an unremitting desire to return to that original state of harmony, or simplicity, of all condensed, undifferentiated, into one. And that desire is imbued in us who are composed of a certain number of those particles.

Eventually, for whatever reason, God’s will faded out, the particles were free to begin coming back together, and in our time that is what is happening. He understood that some particles were so far out that their light required so long to reach us that we saw them as they were still outbound. And thus he reasoned that time and distance were one. Within that framework he interpreted scientific reports to mean some nearer, closer-together particles had already aggregated into the fuzzy nebulae out of which were precipitating new stars and planets that would eventually aggregate into firmer bodies as everything eventually congregated into denser, ever smaller units, returning to beginning.

However that may be, he was off the mark on a couple other points. He spoke of “black holes” which might be the passageways to the other universes with their own physical laws, as some

suggest today, but by black holes he meant the dark areas of the Milky Way, while modernly we regard those areas as clouds of dust opaque to the array of more stars beyond them. He thought that all things contained the electrical potential to glow, and as proof offered the redness of the Moon when it is being eclipsed, while today the blush is caused by Earth’s atmosphere refracting some of the the Sun’s rays onto the otherwise shadowed surface.

Meanwhile the effort to understand it all continues and continues to draw notice, as an article in *Time* magazine for November 29, 2004 highlighted. Prior to references to string theory and other scientific proposals, it began by saying a book, *Biocosm*, by a Portland, Oregon attorney, suggests “the universe has been manufactured by a race of superintelligent extra terrestrial beings.” The book came out last year with jacket endorsements by three scientists, including the British astronomer royal whose comment was, “A novel perspective on humankind’s role in the universe.” Just how much of an endorsement that wording, and that of the others, is you might want to check for yourself. And/or lay claim to your own proposals for the state of the universe.

For the present fleeting moments of time, *StarDate* suggests you let Old Man Moon be your guide as he sails below Antares and above Mars before dawn on February 4th, then spends the evening of the 13th sinking below and a little behind the three-star bent line of Aries. On the night of the 19th he spends more time going down just ahead (to westward) of Castor and Pollux with Saturn below. On the 22nd he’ll be above Regulus (at the bottom of Leo’s sickle), whose evening rises are a forewarning of approaching spring. On the 26th he and Jupiter cross the sky together with Virgo’s fainter Spica accompanying. Venus and Mercury are absent, but Mercury will become notable for awhile in early March. Meanwhile the Big Dipper will be balancing on its handle after sundown preparing to tip over and pour down the April showers. Participation and anticipation in a quiet syncopation everywhere.

Astronomy relates that there will be a comet with two tails, barely visible to the naked eye, pale ions and tan dust, high above Polaris at the start of February, and moving closer through the month. New Moon on the 8th, full on the 23rd.

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Manhattan Public Library Auditorium

Some Topics of Discussion:

Field Trips

Birdathon

Birdseed Sales

Store

Michel-Ross Preserve

Programs

Fall Concert

Local Habitat Preservation

What does this organization mean to you?

Is there something not being done, you would like to see done?



PLEASE ATTEND THIS MEETING
WE NEED YOU!

Manhattan Christmas Bird Census 2004 Summary - Dave Rintoul

Final species count was 104 species + 5 count-week species (Ring-necked Duck, Red-breasted Merganser, Franklin's Gull, Herring Gull and Brown Thrasher). This included 47,373 individuals counted.

We had 58 observers in 28 parties, plus two feeder counters.

SOME HIGHLIGHTS:

Ross' Goose - One bird seen at Lake Elbo. Unfortunately this bird could not be re-found after the weather change that occurred on the afternoon of our count.

Cackling Goose - Several flocks seen at several places. We can add this species to the Pott County list.

Ferruginous Hawk - Seen in the Ashland Bottoms south of the Kaw River;. This species has been seen five times total on the Manhattan CBC, but four of those sightings have been in the last 10 years.

Spotted Sandpiper - Seen by Hoogy and Carol Hoogheem at the Ogden sewage ponds. This species has been seen once before on the Manhattan CBC, in 1986 at (if I recall correctly) the Manhattan sewage outflow on the Kaw River.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet - We had a record-high (23) number for this species, which, until recent years, wintered further south. The first sighting of this species was in 1974, 25 years after the count was initiated, but we have reported them in 8 of the last 10 years, and the numbers are increasing each year.

Yellow-headed Blackbird - The species is quite uncommon on the Manhattan CBC, having been seen only three times previously (last seen in 1984)

Red Crossbill - One bird was seen at the feeders maintained by the "camp host" for the campground below Tuttle Creek dam.

Common Redpoll - Three birds seen foraging in sunflowers near Tuttle Cove. Earlier in the week Ann Feyerharm and Marge Muenzenberger found a small flock of these birds directly across Tuttle Creek Reservoir from this site. Seen only four other times on our CBC, most recently in 2002.

West Nile (or not) news

American Crow - Our count of 13,446 was about four times higher than the count last year, but not as high as the 22,000 seen in 2002, indicating that these birds might be bouncing back from West Nile Virus.

Black-capped Chickadee numbers are still low, we found 149 last year and only 138 this year; the long-term average (1949-2003) for this count is 526.

Tufted Titmouse numbers have bounced back somewhat; after finding only 83 last year, we found 102 this year, which is close to the long-term average of 110.

NEW HIGH COUNTS:

Greater White-fronted Goose - 85, previous high was 37 in 2000

Wild Turkey - 604, previous high was 597 in 1998

Long-eared Owl - 4, previous high was 3 in 1971

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker - 30, previous high was 27 in 1979

Vesper Sparrow - 2, ties the previous high (2) seen in 1967

Common Grackle - 857, smashing the previous record high of 483 seen in 1990



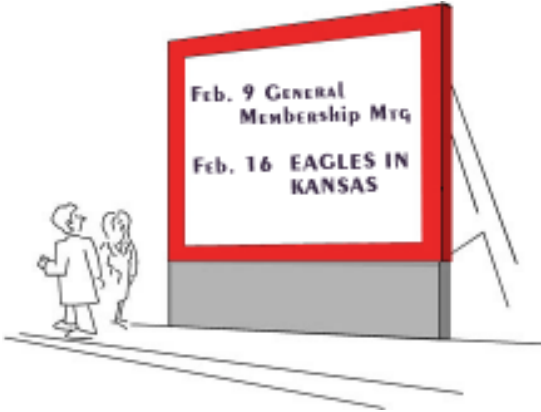
**Northern Flint Hills
Audubon Society**
P.O. Box 1932
Manhattan, KS
66505-1932



Printed on 100% post-
consumer recycled
paper

Non-profit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 662
Manhattan, KS 66502

Return Service Requested



Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society
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Also available on the World Wide Web at the URL <http://www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html>

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.

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 Listserve. Send this message **<subscribe KSBIRD-L>** to this address **<listserv@ksu.edu>** and join in the discussions!

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