



the prairie falcon

VOL. 34, No.5
JAN 2006

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

*Happy New Year
and Great
Birding in 2006
to you all!*



GRASSHOPPER SPARROW
DAVE RINTOUL

FIELD TRIP

(No beginning birding this month, however there is the Eagle Day)

Eagle Day at Tuttle Creek Reservoir. Meet at the Fire Station at the corner of Kimbal and Dennison. There will be a short presentation prior to the bus ride to observe the eagles in the Dam area. Presented by the Corps of Engineers. The NFHAS helps sponsor this event.

JAN 7
EAGLE DAY
TUTTLE CREEK
CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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CONTRIBUTORS:

JAN GARTON
THOMAS MORGAN
DAVE RINTOUL

UPCOMING DATES:

JAN 7 EAGLE DAY,
TUTTLE CREEK CORPS OF
ENGINEERS - 9 A.M.
MANHATTAN FIRE
STATION AT THE CORNER
OF KIMBAL & DENNISON

JAN 22 KAW VALLEY EAGLE DAY
DOUGLAS COUNTY
4-H FAIRGROUNDS,
LAWRENCE, KS
11 A.M. - 4 P.M.

FEB 11 BEGINNING BIRDING
MEET AT ACKERT/
DURLAND PARKING LOT,
KSU 8A.M. - 11 A.M.

FEB 15 RAPTOR RECOVERY
PROGRAM

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WITCH HAZEL MAGIC

TOM MORGAN

The common witch hazel tree (*Hamamelis virginiana*) has flowers with ribbon-like petals that may be a sixteenth of an inch in width and half an inch in length. On a cold winter morning, these lemon-yellow petals are rolled up, covering the pollen and nectar. As the sun ascends into the sky, each petal unrolls in the warmth, enlivening the world with its magic.

A smaller, more shrubby species, the vernal witch hazel (*H. vernalis*) has flowers that smell sweet or clove-like, and sometimes has yellow, orange, and red flowers on the same individual. Common witch hazel usually blooms in the fall, and *H. vernalis* usually blooms in the winter.

Vernal witch hazel grows in rocky creek beds, according to Jack Bradford & Daniel Marsh (who reported their observations in the Arkansas Academy of Science Proceedings 31: 29-31), while common witch hazel grows as close as 30 yards away on an upland slope. These biologists observed that simultaneous blooming of these species can occur in November or December. They noted that the pronounced fragrance of *H. vernalis* "... attracted frequent insect visitors, and resulted in our discovery of some stands before they were seen." They saw no insects visiting the flowers of common witch hazel, which they considered "very faint-scented." Both witch hazels rely on insects that are hardy enough to pollinate their flowers in cold weather. The early blooming period of *H. virginiana* may be an adaptation to limit its competition with *H. vernalis* for insect pollinators.

Its strong wood with tight growth rings is surprisingly pliable, bending under the shock of a blow from a falling tree and then springing back. This shade tolerant tree responds to the new influx of sunlight with a zig-zag search pattern of growth on

far-reaching branches which harvest more energy, allowing the tree to flower more profusely.

Many people have used a forked witch hazel branch to dowse for water. The dowser holds the forked ends of a branch and walks over the land, waiting for the thirsty branch to bend towards moisture. According to at least one study, dowsing improves the odds of successful well drilling. Perhaps the magic of this belief allows the full expression of

the dowser's ability to assess subtle clues in the landscape.

The bark of witch hazel has astringent compounds, particularly after the growing season is finished. White-tailed deer will browse the twigs as a less preferred food, but beavers usually soak the branches in water for a few days to remove some of the bad taste before chewing up the bark. Extracts from bark or leaves have been used as a medicine ... but no

one has convinced a beaver that bitter-tasting bark is good medicine.

I have seen *H. vernalis* growing in creek beds in Bennet Springs State Park in Missouri. This shrub suckers readily, forming clonal clumps, while *H. virginiana* is less prone to suckering and more dependent on propagation by seeds. The large seeds of both species are eaten by a host-specific weevil that consumes most of the crop. The witch hazels combat this pest by having small crops for a few years to limit the number of weevils. And then the trees produce a bumper crop that overwhelms the destructive ability of the pest. When the fruits mature, they split with a loud, snapping sound, shooting the seed as far as 36 feet from the tree.

Vernal witch hazel is somewhat more tolerant of basic soils in Kansas than common witch hazel. I think it makes an enchanting landscape specimen, and I have picked a location to plant such a specimen in my yard. I hope that its winter flowering will remind me of the inherent magic of every season.

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Rebekah Sklenicka, a fifth grade student from Wamego Kansas, is the winner of our Nature Writing contest. Rebekah had pictures of a male and female oriole on the title page of her entry. VERY NICE JOB -- **CONGRATULATIONS**. Here is her winning entry:

My favorite Bird of Summer
by Rebekah Sklenicka

I like the Baltimore oriole because it sings pretty songs, has a beautiful orange color, and it has an unusual nest. The habitat of the Baltimore oriole is the elm, weeping willow, and other shade trees, where they like to make their nest. Orioles winter in Central America and the are seen in Kansas May through September.

The Baltimore oriole eats brown-tail and gypsy moths, click beetles, hairy caterpillars, and other noxious insects. The oriole is six to eight inches and has a sharply pointed bill. The male's head and back are bright orange. The wings are black with white bars. The female oriole has a dull olive-brown back and her breast is a dull orange or yellow.

I think it is unique how the oriole makes their nest. The female oriole weaves her nest with her long, sharp beak using bits of wood fiber, strong, fine grass, and scraps of weeds. The nest is cushioned with hair or other soft material, which is added last. The number one choice for lining is horse hair. The father oriole brings the materials to the mother oriole so she can weave them in the nest. The use their nest for two years, if it is strong enough.

While the mother oriole is sitting on the eggs, the father oriole is not too far away. He sits on a branch and defends the nest from their enemies. The bright color of the father bird distracts their enemies from the nest. The oriole lays four to six eggs, which are dull white and one inch long. Also, the father oriole finds food for the nestlings.

As can be observed, the Baltimore oriole has many favorable characteristics. My favorite characteristics are its brilliant orange color and its beautiful song that it sings. Some people believe that no two orioles have the same songs. The orioles are helpful to farmers and gardeners because they eat harmful insects. These are some of the reasons why the Baltimore oriole is my favorite bird of the summer.

Some other entries where

Karnea Martinie, age 6 - sparrow hawk
Christina Bryan, age 11 - Baltimore oriole
Molly Shelton, age 8 - Eagle
Elora Root, age 7 - Owl
Logan Stepp, age 6 - Woodpecker



56TH ANNUAL MANHATTAN CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS (CBC)

Snowy and blustery weather on our count day (Dec. 17) kept the number of participants low, and also probably had an effect on the number of birds counted. 53 field participants (and 7 feeder watchers) tallied 25,938 birds of 87 species (as well as one species seen during count week). The 53 participants was our lowest since 1989 (when we also had 53 participants), the species count was our lowest since 1991 (when we had 83 species), and the total number of birds counted was also our lowest since 1991 (when we tallied a bit under 19,000 individual birds). It was just plain tough to keep your binoculars free of snow and/or condensation, and the limited visibility due to blowing snow also made it tough to see birds at a distance. One example of this is the low number of red-tailed hawks (41 total) seen



this year; our ten-year average for this sizeable and readily visible bird is 139! But sparrow numbers were up considerably compared to last year; the 2005 totals for American Tree Sparrows, Song Sparrows, and Harris's Sparrows were all at least double the totals for 2004 and significantly above the 10 year averages, despite the lower number of party-hours spent in the field in 2005. Other notable numbers included 131 Hooded Mergansers (nearly an all-time high number for this count circle) and 17 Barred Owls (tying the all-time high for this count circle). A couple of ominous trends continued; we found no Loggerhead Shrikes, and the number of House Sparrows, a commensal of the human species, continued to decline.

Dave Rintoul (for complete list and numbers check our website www.k-state.edu/audubon/falcon.html)

**THANKS! TO CARLA BISHOP AND CREW FOR ANOTHER
GREAT CHILLI SUPPER!**



THANKS!

Many thanks to Carla Bishop and Judy Roe for once again helping with the seed sale December 3. Carla even courageously fought her bronchitis to help unload and deliver seed....true dedication!

Tom Morgan heeded the call for additional help in the mid-morning hours, though traffic was a little slow at the time. And Marge Muenzenberger brought our store items and even made a few sales — way to go, Marge!

Our next sale is at the end of February — order forms will come out in the February Prairie Falcon. See you then!!

Jan Garton

CHECK IT OUT

Please allow me to introduce myself. I'm Dick Stumbo, a member of Jayhawk Audubon in Lawrence and its Eagles Day Committee . We've been putting the finishing touches on the 10th Annual Kaw Valley Eagles Day, and, for the first time, we have a website dedicated to the events of the day. It's January 22nd at the Douglas County Fairgrounds, and it's "the more the merrier!" I would like to invite you (1) to visit our website at <http://www.kawvalleyeaglesday.com> and (2) to join us on that day (11 a.m. to 4 p.m.) for a lot of interesting attractions and downright fun.

ART AND NATURE

Strecker-Nelson Gallery and Friends of McDowell Creek invite you to a reception on Friday, January 13th, 4-8 p.m., at the Strecker-Nelson Gallery (upstairs at 406 Poyntz, Manhattan, Ks.), with all donations going to Friends of McDowell Creek for preservation of the tall-grass prairie. Noted Kansas landscape artist Lisa Grossman will speak at 6 p.m. Wine, soft drinks, and hors d'oeuvres will be served and a silent auction will be held. Strecker-Nelson will donate to Friends of McDowell Creek 25% of the proceeds of all art sold between between Jan. 9th and Jan. 13th, the last week of the "Only the Best" Kansas landscape show. Enjoy prairie art while helping to preserve the original! For more information, contact Friends of McDowell Creek, 785.776.5392 or Strecker-Nelson Gallery, 785.537.2099.



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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.

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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