



the prairie falcon

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

HIGHLIGHTS OF RILEY COUNTY MIGRATORY BIRD COUNT

Migratory Bird Count day was a perfect day for birding! Nevertheless, we did not have any birders to cover the western part of Riley County or Konza Prairie. If you are reading this and thinking, "I would have counted if I had known," please contact next year's coordinators for Riley county – Jim and Janet Throne (776-7624). Get the area you want to cover reserved now! And mark your calendars for next year - it is always held the second Saturday in May.

The hot birding spot (within the Manhattan city limits) for migratory warblers was along the linear trail just behind the Holidome. Seen were Orange-crowned, Northern Parula, Yellow, Pine, Blackpoll, Black-and-white, and Louisiana waterthrush. Parula and Yellow warblers were seen or heard throughout the county east and south of Highway 24, so it would be worthwhile to learn the songs and look up. The duck count was down with perhaps the exception of Blue-winged Teal. The red-headed woodpecker population is strong but the downy woodpecker numbers were down somewhat. Unusual birds reported were: a Marsh wren near the entrance of the Cecil Best birding trail and a white-eyed vireo just behind the Holidome. This is a preliminary report as all sectors have not been turned in as of the deadline for this newsletter.

Patricia Yeager

A very fond farewell to our outgoing President, Judy Roe. She is off to England -- at least for a year. But we hope she returns to the Manhattan area someday. Our BEST WISHES go with you! THANK YOU for all your hard work and dedication to the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society.

Paul Weidbaas, Judy Roe, Madonna Stallmann at Northeast Park



**ANNUAL
PLANNING
MEETING
MANHATTAN
PUBLIC LIBRARY
JUNE 14, 7 P.M.**

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CONTRIBUTORS:

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PETE COHEN
THOMAS MORGAN

UPCOMING DATES:

MONTH OF JUNE

DAVE RINTOUL PHOTOS on display
AT Radina's Coffee House, Aggieville

JUNE 10 Symphony in the Flint Hills
620-273-8955

JUNE 14 ANNUAL PLANNING Mtg
7 p.m. MANHATTAN LIBRARY
AUDITORIUM

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FLIGHTLESS FANCY

DRU CLARKE

In my last essay on Hawaiian seabirds, I did not mention our brief encounter with its state bird, the Nene goose. That's because it – a goose who closely resembles our Canada goose or the brant I used to see in the coastal salt marshes of New Jersey – no longer goes to sea and is almost flightless. A small flock of them waddled along the pavement of a narrow side road in Kilauea National Wildlife Refuge, close to dense cover on both sides. It is thought that they are descended from an errant number of flying geese who were blown by the vagaries of wind and, by a stroke of luck, drifted over these tiny fists of lava rising from the Pacific swells. They do have the ability to fly short distances, but they cannot sustain prolonged flight. As we watched them, they melted into the brush, disappearing completely.

All of this set me to wondering about flightless birds – an odd notion in itself - and how so many of their ilk are extinct or teetering on the brink, how the percentage is, for obvious reasons, exceedingly high on islands or ecologically fragmented parcels of land. And, I wondered, too, about why on the North American continent – no insignificant land mass – we had no extant (that is, living) native flightless birds. South America has its rhea, Africa, its ostrich, and Australia, its emu. So, where is our Big Bird?

Well, we HAD a few – *Diatryma*, a giant from the *Eocene, and *Gastornis*, a two meter tall, big-headed thing whose fossil has been found in Wyoming. But none running around with the “sons of the **Pleistocene,” or with the huge herds of bison



that migrated over the plains in the last 12,000 years. Other continents and smaller landmasses had theirs, too: the *Phorurhacos longissimus*, a scary predator from Brazil and Patagonia; the *adzebills*, moa-sized birds related to swans, of New Zealand; and *Bullockornis*, the Demon Duck of Doom, from Australia, who was eight feet and shear-billed, a giant goose or duck (hence its cool, but frightening, nickname). None of these met their demise at the hand of man (we hadn't evolved yet), but if they were this big and bad – few were herbivores, it seems – good riddance. Still, I'd like to know what happened to them, wouldn't you?

But there are others whom I would like to have known. The mancalla, an auk (like today's murre), whose fate remains a mystery, lived in California and Mexico until the end of the Pleistocene. But we know full well what has happened to others. The great auk, a penguin-like seabird, lived around the northern arc of the Atlantic, but because it was tasty, rich in oil and laid nutrient-laden eggs, it was plundered, the last pair bopped on the head by a “harvester” in 1844. (Some say in 1850 a single individual was seen swimming in the North Atlantic.) The Pallas' or Steller's spectacled cormorant from the North Pacific was hunted to oblivion by the Aleuts. Perhaps the most heart-rending loss was that of the Stephens Island (New Zealand) wren, the only species we know of that was wiped out by one individual – the lighthouse keeper's cat, Tibbles. (There are fewer than five flightless passerines: I was surprised to find out that there were ANY!)

It would be great fun to be out and about, just birding along, when suddenly there it was – the elusive flightless Flint Hills sparrow! But I'm so bad at identifying sparrows, I probably wouldn't know it if I saw it.

**Eocene - began around 48 million years ago and ended 34 million yrs. ago*

***Pleistocene - 1.81 million years ago to 11,500 yrs. ago*

© Dru Clarke – February 21, 2006

Branta sandvicensis

The Nene (pronounced "nay-nay") has adapted itself to life in the harsh lava country by transforming its webbed feet into a claw-like shape and modifying its wing structure for shorter flights. Hunting and wild animals all but destroyed the species until they were protected by law and a restoration project was established in 1949



Red mulberry (*Morus rubra*) is a common tree in the eastern USA and yet it has mysterious interactions with animals. This tree's leaf has three to five veins that exude a defensive latex with a bittersweet taste. Tree-climbing woodchucks find these leaves quite tasty. And white-tailed deer enjoy the leaves so much that one observer claimed to see a deer climb a tree. Bison eat the leaves (according to George LeRoux of "The Flint Hills Prairie Bison Reserve" near Alta Vista, KS). Indeed, the leaves of the white mulberry (*M. alba*) are considered high quality food for livestock (when the branches are cut and carried to the livestock).

White mulberry has become naturalized in Kansas and is more abundant than the native red mulberry in some areas. White mulberry was named for the pale coloration of the leaf buds, not the fruits (which may vary in color from white to black). The leaves of this mulberry are smooth on the underside or have hairs along the veins, while the undersides of red mulberry leaves are noticeably hairy to the touch of one's fingers. Mulberry leaves have a variety of shapes, usually with unlobed leaves, resembling those of basswood, predominating in the mulberry's crown, while leaves with two or three lobes are common on lower branches and sprouts or young trees.

Native Americans utilized latex from mulberry leaves to treat ringworm infections, so latex does have unusual properties. The intended target of the sap appears to be herbivorous insects, however. Insects known as mulberry borers (*cerambycid* beetles in the genus *Dorcaschema*) which tunnel in dead limbs as larvae and then emerge as adults to feed on leaves.

The somewhat plump appearing adults, with their abdomens slightly wider below the middle, take care to sever the latex-delivering veins, and then begin feeding on the undefended leaf tissue.

The white mulberry was introduced to Kansas in the nineteenth century to establish sericulture, since the Asian silkworm (*Bombyx mori*) prefers the leaves of the Asian white mulberry. This naturalized species is more abundant than the native species in some areas and hybridizes with it, perhaps threatening the survival of the red mulberry.

The latex of another mulberry (*M. australis*) contains enormous amounts of "sugar mimic alkaloids" which have little effect on sugar metabolizing enzymes of the Asian silkworm, but are toxic to other insects. Like the Native American medicine men, Chinese physicians discovered useful properties of mulberry leaves, and white mulberry leaves have been used in Chinese medicine for more than a millennium to treat diabetes, apparently because sugar mimic alkaloids inhibit the digestion of carbohydrate. It seems probable that many critters, including woodchucks, might be sensitive to the alkaloids of mulberry sap. However, a critter that eats as quickly as a hungry woodchuck consumes a whole leaf before additional alkaloid-rich latex is pumped into that leaf.

As I wrote this, I periodically conducted a raid on a bag of salty chips, but what I really want is sandpaper rough, native mulberry leaf. Well, that mulberry fruit I saw at George LeRoux's ranch was beginning to redden. Yes! I'll wait for it to a berry to become juicy sweet.

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WE NEED YOU!

ANNUAL PLANNING MEETING: JUNE 14, 7 P.M.

MANHATTAN PUBLIC LIBRARY

SO PLEASE JOIN US. IF YOU CAN'T MAKE THE MEETING - SEND ME (CINDY JEFFREY - CINRANEY@KSU.EDU, OR 15850 GALILEE RD., OLSBURG, KS, 66520) YOUR IDEAS - FOR PROGRAMS, FIELD TRIPS, SPEAKERS, EDUCATION...



SKYLIGHT PLUS

PETE COHEN

In the first part of April, along an eastern stretch of Missouri's Katy Trail, the redbuds had to be described as effulgent. They were sometimes a veil, sometimes an arbor, in front of the tall pale stone bluffs that stood closeby, looking tiered, apparently more by erosion than from a manner of deposition. Except for three of our 18 mile round trip, they were a kind of a rose-purple mist amid the trees standing between us and the Missouri River. Then for three miles the bluffs stood back away, and we were close to the water, pausing for lunch on a grassy area right at bankside. A nearby sign told us the Lewis and Clark expedition had paused here upbound in 1804, delayed by two days of storm and, alas, likely too late to have the redbud blooms for company. Besides that, the lower part of the Missouri at that time, as did much of the Mississippi system, contained an unwelcoming array of washed-down dead trees, butts buried in the muddy bottom, sheared limbs angling out ready to capture any keelboat, and later to spear any steamboat, that missed a turn.

Many other humans had passed by there since the shrinking of the glaciers and before the coming of steamboats. Then railroad gangs formed the berm we rode on, and repeatedly the river rose and washed away their efforts. Lingering paint on one tough separate rock remnant showed the high water marks going back toward the end of the 19th century. For uncounted numbers of humans and other creatures, event had followed event there. Now the river was a wide span of steadily flowing surface. A single long john boat with little freeboard but a large canvas shelter (which seemed like a wind target) went powering fearlessly by, pushing a light wake against the shore. Another event. We rode back the nine miles we had come, pulling our shadows and leaving our pheromones amid the tinted brush between the bluffs and river there. I returned to our waiting pickup feeling as if another moment of eternity had just passed.

Now in June, early on the evening of the 1st, the Moon will be like a kite with a short tail

consisting of bright Saturn and dim Mars depending to its lower right. Then while the Moon goes on its monthly business, Saturn and Mars will keep getting closer till they almost touch on the 17th, after which Saturn will be below Mars. Briefly watching this from much lower will be Mercury, easiest seen starting about June 10th. Mercury will be even lower than nearby Pollux, the brighter of the Gemini Twins, whose heads will still be above the horizon. Hosting this will be the dim constellation Cancer, occupying the space just ahead of the noticeable large sickle of Leo the Lion's forequarters that will also be diving toward land's edge. It's early to bed for all these folk as we approach the summer solstice due at 7a26 on the 21st. Not so, though, for Jupiter, who will offer himself as a brilliant diversion in the south before he takes his turn toward the west, disappearing in the wee hours just before Venus comes up in the east looking for him.

Meanwhile, there'll be other eye contacts to make. Bright Regulus at the base of Leo's sickle, for one. Look southeasterly from that star for about a third to a half the sky and your gaze will pass between Arcturus (in Bootes) above and Spica (in Virgo) below, before it passes on through the dim stars of Libra to reach Antares at the heart of rising Scorpio. If you veer northeasterly to pass above Arcturus, you will come to the half circle called a crown (*Corona Borealis*) by some, and a campfire council by the Sioux. Just beyond there are the four stars making the keystone-shaped center of Hercules, and further beyond is blue Vega shining in the Lyre Bird, and further northeast some more will be Deneb, the taillight of Cygnus the Swan.

Binoculars will highlight the color differences between Saturn and Mars, as well as the Beehive cluster of stars that are at home in Cancer. Binoculars will be not be needed to see the Moon full in the dark of the 11th, and will be useless to find it when it's new on the 25th. (Technically it will be full – opposite the Sun – at 1p03 on the 11th, new – in line with the Sun – at 11a05 on the 25th).

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PHOTO EXHIBITION BY DAVE RINTOUL

DAVE HAS CONTRIBUTED MANY OF HIS GREAT PHOTOS FOR THIS NEWSLETTER OVER THE YEARS -- NOW THE REST OF MANHATTAN CAN ENJOY SOME OF THEM.

HIS PHOTOS WILL BE ON DISPLAY THE MONTH OF JUNE AT RADINA'S COFFEHOUSE IN AGGIEVILLE.



Phainopela - Dave Rintoul

Raven- Dave Rintoul



HOW OLD DOES A SPOONBILL GET?

May 12, 2006, Tavernier, FL -His name is Enrico and his discovery will make the record books. At 16 years old, the oldest wild Roseate Spoonbill was recently discovered by Audubon of Florida researchers on Tern Key in Florida who were conducting a new Spoonbill Satellite Telemetry Project.

Audubon of Florida researchers from the Tavernier Science Center used a lot of patience and a little luck to recapture Enrico in April for the purpose of deploying a satellite telemetry transmitter on the bird. This is the first year Audubon is implementing a satellite-tracking program to follow breeding spoonbills of Florida Bay to unidentified and undiscovered nesting and foraging sites, over migration paths that are currently unknown.

Once Enrico was captured, scientists contacted the USGS Bird Banding Lab in Laurel, Maryland, to track down the birds origins. Within a few weeks, the mystery was solved. Enrico was originally banded in 1990 by Drs. George Powell and Robin Bjork, former researchers of Audubons Tavernier Science Center on Tern Key.





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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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