



the prairie falcon

Vol. 33, No. 1
SEPTEMBER 2004

NORTHERN FLINT HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY,

P.O. Box 1932, MANHATTAN, KS 66505-1932

September
ICE CREAM SOCIAL
NORTHEAST PARK
SEPT. 19, 2 p.m.

September 19, 2004
Sunday, 2 p.m.

NOTE
LOCATION!

Annual Ice Cream Social

Join us at the picnic shelter in **Northeast Park** on Knox Lane, east of Casement Road, for our yearly ice cream social. This kicks off the 2004-2005 program year, which promises to be especially educational. Look for the annual program calendar in next month's *Prairie Falcon*.

The ice cream, bowls, and spoons are provided. Just bring your favorite topping to share. Then take time to tour the several projects our chapter has taken on in the park: the prairie restoration, tree plantings, Cecil Best birding trail, and the "Leander." Don't know what that is? Come and find out!

Bring your family and friends for a pleasant afternoon of refreshments and conviviality.

September 18, 2004
Saturday - OUTBACK FUN & ADVENTURE CAMP
See the enclosed flyer for more information

Field Trips

BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK

Join us Saturday, Sept. 11th 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 Yaeger (776-9593) or e-mail her at pyky@flinthills.com.

INSIDE

2 SPECIES IN THE SKY
3 PURSLANE
4 SKYLIGHT
5 TAKE NOTE
6-7 WOLF PRAIRIE

CONTRIBUTORS:

PETE COHEN
DRU CLARKE
THOMAS MORGAN
PAUL OHLENBUSCH
RICHARD PITTS
MADONNA STALLMANN

UPCOMING DATES:

Sept 11 Beginning Birding, 8 a.m.
Ackert/Durland Parking Lot

Sept 18 Wonder Workshop
Outback Adventure see flyer

Sept 19 ICE CREAM SOCIAL
2 p.m. NORTHEAST PARK

PRINTED BY
CLAFLIN BOOKS & COPIES
MANHATTAN, KS



SPECIES IN THE SKY

dru clarke

"Thank God they can't cut down the clouds."

Thoreau

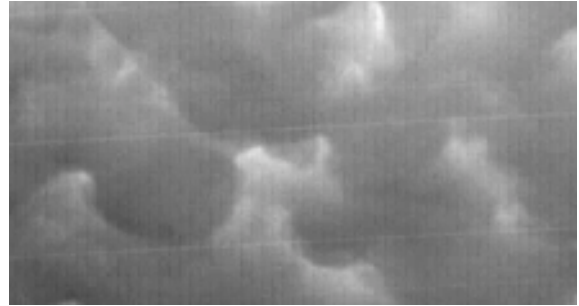
This summer I spent more time than usual looking heavenward than down, for the clouds were daily events, abundant and diverse: weather's "indicator species." I broke out an old climatology text and a laminated cloud chart and began reacquainting myself with the more exotic names of these itinerant visitors. I knew "cirrus" were the highest and made of ice crystals, and was reminded by their wispy, feathered form of the cirri of feeding barnacles (called *Cirripedia*, or 'feather-foot'), or the hair-like tendrils (aka cirri) of dodder, a parasitic plant I saw at our farm, wrapped like wet hair around helpless bell flower stalks. Cirrus are sometimes called "mares' tails" for the way they stream out from some invisible galloping mass of vapor in the high winds; cirrus, too, configure a "mackerel sky," scale-like patches that swim in a pale school in the high sea of air. Cirrus clouds are useful in predicting long-term weather patterns, and because they cannot be detected by remote sensing instruments on orbiting platforms, they must be identified by 'ground truthing,' by folks, like you and me, looking up at the sky.



But the most often seen clouds of the summer were cumulus, those fat puffs of vapor that children first identify and classify, whose permutations and combinations are variously prefixed by strato- (layer) or alto- (middle) or suffixed by nimbus, modified by growing congest, mammatus, or, simply, deep (to name just a few). Just when I'd nail down the name of the type of cloud I was watching, it would morph into another type with a different name. Normally portending fair weather, cumulus can morph rapidly, especially on a hot summer day, into a purveyor of rain. Mammatus,



resembling full, ripening breasts, you may know, warn of a potential tornado: time to seek shelter. And the days of the cumulonimbus, who birth rain, provided an excuse to stay inside and break out a good book.



A young student from Slovakia (whose dad dubs TV programs like the Sopranos in Slovak and whose mom is a pediatrician) visited this summer. We had taken a long walk on the prairie, pretending to look for blackberries, and lingered on high ground to see all around, taking in the treed sloughs and undulating hills blanketed by knee-high grass, with a huge bell flower-blue sky as backdrop. As a 'thank you' gesture, he left this poem about Kansas (and clouds) for me.

Hot air floats on the fields
Resembling a combed sea
Trucks run up and down the chessboard
And like a dirty fiancé
Drag trains of dust behind them
Sunflowers surely got a headache
For their work
And hardly anyone stops by to help
I think it's here
Where the sun rests its head
In the pillows of marshmallow clouds
And the bed of warm ground
Danny Laurince

Sometimes when you are out walking, looking and listening for birds, there may be a lull in their (or other of nature's citizens') activity: all is not lost, for you can look heavenward and begin your life list of clouds. There will be no dearth of them, as cloud cover in the northern hemisphere is supposedly increasing, by some estimates 30% more than in previous decades (although clouds, since records have been kept, have always been more prevalent north of the equator than south, perhaps due to the preponderance of Earth's land masses here, and more recently, perhaps, because of global warming). You may be lucky enough to spy a rare one. Taking a child with you on your jaunts may launch him or her into a lifelong appreciation of these lofty visages of the more familiar fluid phase of water.

As Henry David Thoreau said, they (clouds) can't be cut down.

© 2004 Dru Clarke



Common purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) was transported to our country by the Europeans, even though this species was already here. It had been used as food and medicine by Native Americans for several millennia. The place of origin of this species and the timing of its dispersal is a mystery. Mexico is a center of diversity for this species, and might be the location of its birth as a species. That pair of words, ... might be, ... seems to be love words for expressing the enticing mysteries of nature.

I tasted purslane as an ingredient in quiche and cornbread that had been baked by volunteers at the Bur Oak Nature Center in Blue Springs, MO on May 10th. At the front of our meeting room, there was a living, potted specimen of common purslane that fascinated me. The branches of the reddish stems of purslane form a mat that can be two feet in diameter with smooth, rounded, fleshy leaves that can be an inch in length. The wild varieties of this species are usually prostrate, adhering to earth. When I finally found some, its pale yellow flowers with their bright yellow anthers played peek-a-boo. The small flowers open about 9 o'clock on hot, sunny days and close at about 2 in the afternoon. Then their role is completed, and the next sunny morning, another blossom opens, enjoying a sunbath for a single day, for its day. If purslane is uprooted or is subjected to a severe drought, it resorbs the water from the leaves into its stems, which sacrifice their water to the developing fruits, allowing the seeds to mature. The lid of the basal cup of the fruit falls away and the seeds fall from that cup-shaped holder. As many as 50,000 seeds may be produced by a single plant, providing food that is relished by birds which carry the seeds to new locations.

This species is adapted for the dry, pounded earth of rutted buffalo trails. My fiancée, Morgan Jane, told me about a historical record from the eighteenth century of a buffalo trail across the Illinois Grand Prairie which could support only one plant, purslane. Purslane also serves as a volunteer crop between the rows of more highly domesticated crops. There are references from the seventeenth century that mention its presence between rows of Indian corn. This summer, I discovered that my elderly parents had not

removed the purslane from between the rows of their garden, and there it was, playing peek-a-boo with its shy, delicate blossoms.

When it is scraped or cut by the hoof of a bison or by an agricultural implement, it sprouts adventitious roots which can reconnect it to the earth. An article in the American Journal of Alternative Agriculture suggests something which was quite likely comprehended by Native Americans. Purslane forms a living mulch which has no significant effect on the yield of some crops and prevents competition from weeds that use more water than it does.

When it can, this species avoids conflicts. It senses the presence of small plants that might compete with it. And as an opportunist that grows rapidly (increasing in weight by as much as 30% per day), it has much to gain by growing away from small, faraway plants that could become competitors.

And a mosaic of individuals becomes a coverlet.

Morgan Jane and I visited the Flint Hills Prairie Bison Preserve owned by George LeRoux in July. He showed us his bison, driving out among them, almost touching their shagginess, their lighter-colored mats of unshed hair hanging down from shoulders, their short, swirling tails, their ears twitching, their teeth tearing, audibly tearing leaves of grass as they tore off each mouthful. We heard the loud whooshes as they blew their breath into a clumps of grass for some arcane purpose, for some unfathomable purpose. Perhaps the whoosh was an expression of love for sustenance, for the life-giving force. Morgan Jane and I enjoyed the raw branch tips of purslane in a salad in August. We discovered that the boiled, medium-sized stems were extremely tender, with an exquisitely sour, acidic taste, which was more alluring than that of other greens. I felt reborn. I was a bison blowing its breath into prairie, munching on the purslane, tasting that slightly acidic wildness. I was wild.



© 2004 Daniel Reed
courtesy of Wildflowers of the Southwest
<http://2bnthwild.com/plants/H186.htm>



SKYLIGHT

pete cohen

Some of us living at or near the bottom reaches of our sky, mired in gravity and wading through tons of gases and particulates, animate and otherwise, sometimes look up and often see glamorous twilights or decorative stars, all performing in peaceful, relaxing harmony. But, as I've mentioned, this boon is available only to the naked eye. The microscope- or telescope-aided eye seems to encounter a great deal of vigorous and some vicious turmoil. And increasingly it seems the inner eye (and ear) of thought cannot rest easy in contemplating the Above-and-about, either. The sky may not be falling, but it could be having some balance problems.

In our quest for ever more energy we are suffering we are told from what might be called "Second-hand Coal," with all its effusions when burnt, of nasty chemical particles and greenhouse-causing carbon dioxide gas. And we are told by some that therefore we should embrace all alternative sources like long-lost lovers (or say, servants) returning to us from the days of yore. What my two years of looking at this for Wabaunsee County, as an enquiring layman regarding all the technology involved, tells me is that the situation is light-years from being so simple. The wind and sun come free only until you try to harness them, and even executives and engineers at wind companies have told me their current technology (the pun is free) offers only a band-aid for our energy situation, wind being so un-dense and un-predictable, and their produce so un-store-able. Thus come the correlative opinions that we should hold our investments in installing alternatives until research offers technologies less destructive and more effective. The overwhelming majority of credentialed people I've talked to say the best investments to be made near-term are in conservation – better appliances, wiring, smarter applications of lighting, etc. (As to lighting one could contact the EnviroSmart program at Calgary, Alberta.)

In what might seem a counter-intuitive direction there is opinion that we should be concentrating a great deal of our effort on new coal plants – ones that can capture and/or sequester their effluents. Kansas is in competition to secure a prototype that would be used to generate hydrogen

and not electricity directly. The reason for the effort being that coal is so abundant, available, and power-rich that hugely burgeoning societies like India and China will be economically forced to employ it, and the air in their sky will sooner or later be the air in our sky – it's a matter of self-defense. Some will say talk of such capture is pie-in-the-sky and even if possible will mean a bigger hole in Wyoming and a flatter West Virginia. Yes, comes an answer: the same way the North Woods forests were annihilated to make wooden homes for midwestern pioneers who plowed up the prairie to make, in Aldo Leopold's words, "a world safe for soybeans." This happened pretty much willy-nilly, and more than one writer has noted that "there is a tide in human affairs," and not to seek an opportunity to gain steerage way in this one would be a mistake.

The issue, with its local ramifications, is hot on the table now in the Flint Hills into the coming months. Hopefully, many will contemplate and will plow deeply in doing so. Returning to the world of the naked eye this is the start of the autumn joy for Moonwatchers as its waxing crescent moves from Scorpio on the 19th ever larger into Sagittarius on the 21st, and then comes up full-looking for several nights even before twilight ends, with technical fullsome at 8a09 on the 28th. Close to 10 p.m. on October 2nd its waning shape rises just to the right of very noticeable Capella, and just below and a little left of the more demur Pleiades in the shoulder of Taurus. In the early wee hours of the 7th it comes up to the left of Saturn, with the Gemini twins above, and in the dawn of the 10th the thin remaining crescent will be between Venus (below) and Regulus at the base of Leo's foreparts (above). All per StarDate.

Star trackers will also have blue Vega, the brightest of those present, high to the west after nightfall. And can watch Cassiopeia rocking her chair up onto the tips of its runners as the nights go by, with Perseus's stars filling the space downward toward Capella. Planet pursuers will have Saturn for company in the wee hours, rising closer to midnight each night, with Venus still brilliant though fading rising a little later each night through the wee hours. After being full September 28th the Moon will be new on October 13th, His Royal Newness bringing a partial eclipse of the Sun to Hawaii and western Alaska.

© 2004 Peter Zachary Cohen



WONDER WORKSHOP/AUDUBON OUTBACK ADVENTURE CAMP SEPTEMBER 18, 2004

Please take a look at the enclosed flyer - it is our first joint venture with Wonder Workshop and we think it is a great beginning. Education, Energy, Environment - and families - what could be better. If you have any questions call Richard Pitts at 785-776-7234. If you have an idea (s) PLEASE call Madonna Stallmann or Richard Pitts.



- 1) If you or someone you know has extra binoculars or spotting scopes that are not being used, donate them to WW. They will be put to good use!
- 2) WW provides scholarships, for all of its programs, to people who need financial assistance. You can make a donation to help with these scholarships.
- 3) Be a nature guide! If you are knowledgeable about anything having to do with nature (i.e. gardening, birding, rocks, wildflowers, etc.) & would like to share that knowledge, WW participants would enjoy learning from you.
- 4) Last but not least, sign up to participate in any of our upcoming Audubon/Wonder Workshop events. You will learn, make friends, and have fun!

If you would like to know more about WW and the upcoming events, give Richard Pitts a call at Wonder Workshop, 785-776-1234, or email wonder@kansas.net

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!
ICE CREAM SOCIAL 2 p.m.
SEPT. 19, 2004
NORTHEAST PARK

NEWLY DESIGNED NORTHERN
FLINT HILLS
AUDUBON
SOCIETY



If you have an idea or want to submit an article for the Prairie Falcon, the deadline is the 15th of month for the following month's issue. Mail or email Cindy Jeffrey, 15850 Galilee Rd., Olsburg, KS 66520 (cinraney@ksu.edu)



Wolf Prairie - Damaged But not Destroyed

Paul D. Ohlenbusch
Professor Emeritus, Grazingland Management
Department of Agronomy
Kansas State University

On May 21, 2004, together with representatives from Manhattan High School, the City of Manhattan, and others, I visited the Wolf Prairie. Earlier, the area was “destroyed” by a dozer operator that mistakenly started clearing the area as part of the development of a new service road for Sunset Zoo.

The Wolf Prairie was not destroyed. In ecological terms, it was disturbed. To many, it was “damaged.” What was done was almost a benefit. The prairie had not been burned for six years and a heavy duff (mulch) layer had developed. The “dozing,” in most of the area, raked the mulch into piles and opened the soil to sunlight. At the time of the visit, the major grass and forb (broadleaf) species were recovering well. Some “repairs” are required, primarily the removal of woody material uprooted by the dozing, removal of some of the piles of mulch, and partial filling of some ruts created. These repairs are minor. There are some very small areas that were scraped, but grass plants are beginning to grow back. One relatively large area is a pile of soil and mulch. Already small grass plants are growing and, over time, should revegetate naturally.

There is a need for a long-term management plan for the prairie. The prairie will recover if given the proper management. The invasion of the rough-leaf dogwood (*Cornus drummondii*) is a concern. Other woody species invading include honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*), Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*), and Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*). These need to be removed using an herbicide treatment such as basal bark or cut stump methods to allow full recovery of the prairie. In addition, 2-4 years of annual burning in the late spring (mid to late April) will help limit the woody invasion. After that, burning on a 2-3 year rotation would probably be an adequate maintenance option. Occasional treatment of the above woody species with an herbicide may be required.

The ability of the prairie to recover from disturbance is well known. Some even say the prairie is “very forgiving.” The tallgrass prairie, in ecological terms, is a dynamic disturbance equilibrium when managed using an ecological approach. The disturbance that naturally maintains the prairie is recurring fires.

The Wolf Prairie has been an outdoor lab for the high school for several decades and to some extent for The Konza Environmental Education Program. It is a prairie in an urban setting which is truly unique. While woody plants, particularly rough-leaf dogwood, have been invading, it retains the potential to be an excellent outdoor classroom for the high school and the community. Even more importantly, it is a unique opportunity to develop as a tallgrass prairie educational exhibit located next to the Sunset Zoo parking lot. It could provide a reminder of the history and value of the tallgrass prairie as well as a place of solitude (with proper amenities).

From an ecological viewpoint, the Wolf Prairie is unique. Surrounded by trees, streets, and a parking lot, it has retained most of the tallgrass prairie characteristics with only minimal management. What could it become with management based on ecological succession?

A Personal Comment

The long range plans at the zoo show the Wolf Prairie will become a parking lot and a new prairie established to the south. In evaluating the proposed prairie area for my own information, I found field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*) and tall fescue (*Festuca arundinacea*) as major components of the area. Both species are aggressive invaders and will be virtually impossible to eradicate. A seed bank (seeds already in the soil) as well as roots and crowns of plants will remain and allow for continual invasion.

Ecologically, “restoring” a new prairie site will take decades to even remotely resemble what is present in the Wolf Prairie. The dark colored, organic matter rich soils of the prairie take many decades,

(continued on pg 7)



probably over a century, to sequester the carbon that creates the rich, black soil characteristics. The major grasses and forbs (broadleaf plants) can be seeded and will establish in a relatively short period time. However, the soil characteristics that support the species diversity and richness that define the tallgrass prairie will take much longer. Native grass seedings made during the Soil Bank program of the late 1950's and early 1960's still retain soil characteristics associated with cropland rather than prairie.

Destroying a small but unique native prairie for a parking lot and attempting to "restore" another site just to provide parking for the high school students farther from the zoo seems to be short sighted. If the high school can't provide adequate parking for the students, why should Sunset Zoo and the city provide it?

A Suggestion

The Wolf Prairie is a unique treasure that needs to be developed for and by Manhattan and the surrounding community. There are several groups that should actively work with the city and school district to solve the parking problem without destroying the prairie. These might include K-State (particularly the Agronomy Department and Division of Biology), Konza Environmental Education Program, Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, Master Gardeners, and other similar groups. Some regional and state groups could include Tallgrass Legacy Alliance, Kansas Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, and Kansas Section of the Society for Range Management. Improving the Wolf Prairie with a walking path around the perimeter, some benches or rock seats under some nearby trees, some signage to help people understand what they are seeing, and maybe even the ability the have guided tours (like Konza Environmental Education Program provides at Konza Prairie Biological Station) would make the site appealing.

A Thought

John James Ingalls (1833-1900) was Senator from Kansas from 1873 to 1891. An address of his, printed in the Kansas Magazine in 1872, is hard to get but contains a passage that is often quoted. He was an eloquent man but not a scientist.¹

"Grass is the forgiveness of nature – her constant benediction. Fields trampled with battle, saturated with blood, torn with the ruts of cannon, grow green again with grass, and carnage is forgotten. Streets abandoned by traffic become grass-grown like rural lanes, and are obliterated. Forests decay, harvests perish, flowers vanish, but grass is immortal. Beleaguered by the sullen hosts of winter, it withdraws into the impregnable fortress of its subterranean vitality, and emerges upon the first solicitation of Spring. Sown by the winds, by wandering birds, propagated by the subtle horticulture of the elements which are its ministers and servants, it softens the rude outline of the world. Its tenacious fibres hold the earth in its place, and prevent its soluble components from washing into the wasting sea. It invades the solitude of deserts, climbs the inaccessible slopes and forbidding pinnacles of mountains, modifies climates, and determines the history, character, and destiny of nations.

Unobtrusive and patient, it has immortal vigor and aggression. Banished from the thoroughfare and the field, it bides its time to return, and when vigilance is relaxed, or the dynasty has perished, it silently resumes the throne from which it has been expelled, but which it never abdicates. It bears no blazonry or bloom to charm the senses with fragrance or splendor, but its homely hue is more enchanting than the lily or the rose. It yields no fruit in earth or air, and yet should its harvest fail for a single year, famine would depopulate the world."

(Footnotes)¹

John James Ingalls (1833-1900), Senator from Kansas from 1873 to 1891, excerpted from "In Praise of Blue Grass," Grass: The Yearbook of Agriculture, 1948. USDA, Washington, DC. The entire address can be found at <http://www.forages.css.orst.edu/Topics/Pastures/Species/Grasses/Bluegrass.html>



**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

SEPT. 19, 2 p.m.
ICE CREAM SOCIAL
NORTHEAST PARK

Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society
Edited by Cindy Jeffrey, 15850 Galilee Rd., Olsburg, KS 66520 (cinraney@ksu.edu)
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 Listserv. Send this message **<subscribe KSBIRD-L>** to this address **<listserv@ksu.edu>** and join in the discussions!

NFHAS Board

President:
Vice President:
Secretary
Treasurer: Jan Garton 539-3004

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Conservation:
Northeast Park: Jacque Staats 776-7649
Education: Madonna Stallmann
Richard Pitts
Paul Wiedhaas
Program: Paul Wiedhaas
Fieldtrips: Patricia Yeager 776-9593
Membership: Carla Bishop 539-5129
Finance: Ann Feyerharm 539-0483
Public Outreach: Dolly Gudder 537-4102
Land Preservation: Paul Weidhaas 539-4805
Newsletter: Cindy Jeffrey 468-3587
At-Large Board Members: John Tatarko, Ingrid Neitfeld,

Audubon of Kansas Trustee: Hoogy Hoogheem

Addresses & Phone numbers of Your Elected Representatives (anytime)

Write ✉ - **or call** ☎

Governor Kathleen Sebelius: 2nd Floor, State Capitol Bldg., Topeka KS 66612. Kansas Senator or Representative _____: State Capitol Bldg., Topeka KS 66612, Ph.# (during session only) - Senate: 913-296-7300, House: 913-296-7500. Senator Roberts or Brownback: US Senate, Washington DC 20510. Representative _____: US House of Representatives, Washington DC 20515. U.S. Capitol Switchboard : 202-224-3121. President G.W. Bush, The White House, Washington DC 20500. Information about progress of a particular piece of legislation can be obtained by calling the following numbers: In Topeka - 800-432-3924; in Washington - 202-225-1772. Audubon Action Line - **800-659-2622**, or get the latest on WWW at <http://www.audubon.org/campaign/aa/> To find out who represents you go to: www.capitolconnect.com/audubon/mylegis