



the prairie falcon

Vol. 33, No. 4
DECEMBER 2004

NORTHERN FLINT HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY,

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

Dec. 15, 2004
CBC PREVIEW
Dave Rintoul
324 Ackert Hall
7:30 p.m.

Dec. 18, 2004
Manhattan
Christmas Bird Census

Preview of the 2004 Manhattan Christmas Bird Census
Dave Rintoul, Div. of Biology, KSU
Dec. 15, 2004 - 324 Ackert Hall, KSU 7:30 p.m.

The 55th consecutive Manhattan Christmas Bird Census (CBC) will be held on Saturday Dec.18. The origins of this event trace back to 1900, when Frank Chapman instituted a bird census to try to convince people that the Christmas side-hunt, another traditional Christmas-season activity, should be replaced. The side-hunt consisted of convening men and boys, armed with rifles and shotguns, who then chose sides and proceeded to shoot every living thing that crossed their path that day. The two sides would then pile up the carcasses, count them, and declare a winner based on who achieved maximum carnage. Since this was prior to the days when native birds were protected, non-game species (e.g. chickadees, woodpeckers, hawks) were considered fair game for the side-hunters. Chapman's tradition eventually replaced this barbaric activity, and thousands of people participate in CBCs every year, in all 50 U.S. states, all Canadian provinces, and many Central and South American countries.

Dave will discuss the results from past Manhattan CBC, make predictions about the upcoming CBC, and discuss the contributions of these "amateur" activities to ornithological research. The CBC is the longest-running ornithological citizen-science data collection effort, and the value of the data collected increases every year. So come hear what has been done, and what the future holds!

Before each program, we invite our speakers to join us for an informal dinner and discussion. Feel free to join us this month at Texas Star Restaurant at 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, Dec. 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 Yeager (776-9593) or e-mail her at pyky@flinthills.com.

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CONTRIBUTORS:

PETE COHEN
DRU CLARKE
JAN GARTON
THOMAS MORGAN

UPCOMING DATES:

- Dec 4 Birdseed PICKUP 9-1 UFM, 1221 Thurston
- Dec 11 Beginning Birding, 8 a.m. Ackert/Durland Parking Lot
- Dec 15 Christmas Bird Count PREVIEW, Dave Rintoul 7:30 p.m.
- Dec 17 Olsburg CBC 468-3587
- Dec 18 Manhattan Christmas Bird Count & Compilation Dinner (539-0781)
- Dec 19 Wakefield CBC 238-8800
- Dec 28 Junction City CBC 238-8800
- Jan 8 Eagle Day, Corps of Engineers Tuttle Creek, 9 a.m.
- Jan 8 Beginning Birding, 8 a.m. Ackert/Durland Parking Lot

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MANHATTAN, KS



MANHATTAN CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

dave rintoul

Dave Rintoul
532-0104 or 537-0781

Clyde Ferguson
539-4856

Chris Smith
539-6981

Hoogy Hoogheem
539-7080

Doris Burnett
537-2502

Brett Sandercock
532-0120



There are six quasi-independent groups covering our CBC circle (centered at Anderson Hall); if you wish to join one of these groups, please call one of the group leader listed at right. If you can't make up your mind, ask me (Dave Rintoul at 532-0104 or drintoul@ksu.edu) and I will try to get you hooked up with a group. The count commences at dawn and ends at dusk (unless you are part of a group counting owls). The count numbers are compiled and stories are swapped at a chili dinner later that evening.

CHILI DINNER: will be held at the Senior Service Center, 412 Leavenworth. Everyone is welcome to bring a covered dish, dessert, etc.

For more information call Carla Bishop at 539-5129.



“One year when I was six, my dad was gone out of Alaska on an academic conference in December. It got down to 70 below. No vehicles would start. No one could get out to stores or forests or anywhere. My mother made a Christmas tree out of coat hangers hung with sweetgum balls. She had saved a few of the round, spiny seedcases from Sweetgum trees in Nacogdoches to remind her of Texas. She spray painted them silver and hung them from the tree. Those sparkling seedcases shimmer in my memory like Mama’s love.”

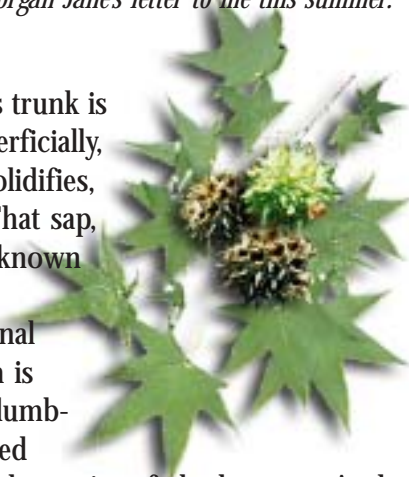
From Morgan Jane’s letter to me this summer.

Since I failed to comprehend why Morgan Jane, my wife-to-be, was fond of sweetgum trees, I began to learn about sweetgum’s characteristics, its deeply incised, 5-lobed, star-like leaves, the round, spiny, star-like seedcases, and the sweet fragrance of its hardened sap. But perhaps what matters is the resonance of its relationships with the biosphere, the way it shimmers like MJ’s memory of sparkling seedcases.

In one his books, *A Natural History of Trees*, Donald Peattie wrote, “There is something about sweet gum that looks like a living fossil, like a member of some family more abundant in another and far different sylvia than ours ...” Yes, I always thought that this tree had an odd look to it. Its genus, *liquidambar*, first appeared in the fossil record 55 million years ago. In this genus, there are at least four times as many species that are known only from fossilized, star-like remnants than there are species that glisten in the morning’s sunlight with their shiny leaves. Sweetgum has survived, even though most of its relatives are extinct.

Sweetgum is a favorite of yellow-bellied sapsuckers that drill holes in its bark to harvest sweet-smelling fluid. And when the seedcases open, as they are just beginning to this November, the seeds are eagerly eaten by at least 25 bird species, such as goldfinches and purple finches. After its raiment of clear yellow, vivid orange, fire-engine red, or deep purple falls, most of its yellow-brown seedcases remain attached by their long stems throughout the winter. When the seedcases finally fall to the forest floor, they absorb and store up to four times their weight in ground moisture, helping to buffer the effects of drought. When I read that, I could scarcely believe it, so I put it to the test. An old seedcase really does absorb several times its own weight. In the residential areas that this tree enlivens, it keeps barefoot boys vigilant as they try to avoid stepping on the consarned¹ seedcases.

When this tree’s trunk is sliced or burned superficially, it oozes sap which solidifies, seals, and protects. That sap, that liquid amber, is known for its extraordinary fragrance and medicinal properties. Sweetgum is also known for the plumb-line of its trunk, aimed like a arrow towards the purity of the heavens. And after that trunk is harvested by a lumberman, new trees sprout from its roots.



Today, I walked a leaf-strewn lawn in Sunset Cemetery and admired the remaining leaves of the Sweetgum. Although most of the diversity of the genus, *liquidambar*, has been pruned away by time, Sweetgum is a vigorous participant in the rough and tumble existence of the present moment. It reminds me of a song, “The Boxer,” in which Simon & Garfunkel sing, “But the fighter still remains.” After many of Sweetgum’s relatives are blown away like leaves by the winds of autumn, the fighter still remains. The sap of liquid ambar is still stored in the roots of Sweetgum, a resource that can be drawn upon.

Morgan Jane has been inspired by her mother’s ingenuity. Even now when her mother is gone and she has few remnants of her mother’s ingenuity, a few Sweetgum ornaments, she remembers her roots, a resource that can be drawn upon in a time of need.

1 consarned - uncommon synonym for darned , From “Whistlin’ Dixie: A Dictionary of Southern Expressions” by Robert Hendrickson (Pocket Books, New York, 1993).



Anyone who's followed the trenchant adventures of Dagwood Bumstead will have noticed how occasionally he abandons the supine position on his couch to sit up and look at various pages in the Bumstead family photo album. My gears were similarly in idle recently as I browsed through the album of a neighbor, the Sky family.

It seems the progenitor of this clan was a rather nebulous character whose name was written as Cassius Dustin Sky. Not much is sure about when he was born or where, and even his name is in doubt. Some think the first name should start with a "G," not "C," and that the middle name should end with a "y," or "y" instead of "in."

Next in line was the somewhat clearer photo of Cyril Rushton Sky, called "Cirrus" for short, although he appears a rather tall individual, and thin, with a long reach and very calm but icy and distant demeanor.

Then there was Silvestre Grahame Sky, "Steel Gray" to his friends, of whom he either had a great many or none at all because he was a great egalitarian activist. All things became equal when he took charge. Shadows shriveled to nil, leaving no demarcations, clouds dressed indistinguishably from the sea, and even hardware store windows glistened no more brightly than the sides of trash-collectors' trucks.

There was Winthrop Dylan Sky – "Windy" he signed himself. He is shown either chasing, or cheering on, a stampede of fluffy sheep whose shadows were sliding over everything, trying to darken the sunshiny grasses and the flashing tree leaves and the sparkling lakes, but never succeeding for more than a few moments at a time. Today's strobe effects are his invention.

After that came Mack Errol Sky in his signature shirt with its scalloped stitching; Stormy Sky, an exuberant clown made up like a gorilla with a Madame Pompadour hair style; then I came to Robin Eggleston Sky and her sister, Crystal Bleu, neither of whom needed any cheek blush to enhance their beauty. It seemed a good place to close the book, and get off the couch.

We can expect some album-worth pictures in the sky ahead. This is the time of year when, as one might say, the darkness shines. The earliest comes December 8th, around 5 p.m. hereabouts. As mentioned last issue, the Geminid meteor shower will have a nearly Moon-free field to play in December 13th - 14th, with perhaps some practice and encore appearances a night or so before and after. At 6:42 the morning of December 21st the Sun will be at the solstice, and the longest night of the year will follow. On the 26th Old Man Moon puts on his longest Full performance of the year.

Before then, gleaming Venus, having dallied arm-in-arm with shy Mars in the dawn of the 5th, will have moved toward a lingering three-week affair with Mercury, who will arrive in the dawns of mid-month. Mars, though, will not sulk away. *Astronomy* shows a picture of the December 25th pre-dawn with Mercury just to the left of Venus in the SE. Reddish Mars is upward a short ways to the right, with Antares, the red star at the heart of Scorpio, not quite as far to the lower right. On December 29th, Venus and Mercury should be only a little more than two Moon-widths apart.

For those whose tastes run to evenings, Saturn will be with you at the start, just below the notable Gemini Twins, Castor and Pollux, and brighter than either. But Jupiter won't get up till after midnight to appear in Virgo. For those who like to know what isn't obvious, *The Old Farmer's Almanac* whispers that our Earth will be at perihelion – its closest to the Sun – on our New Year's Day, something that hasn't happened for centuries.

Meanwhile, just to check in on some oldies, *StarDate* mentions that on the 24th, the bright star left of the high Moon is Capella in Auriga, the Charioteer, and closer by to the Moon's right is Aldebaran, the orange eye of Taurus the Bull, whose shoulders are marked by the tinily twinkling Pleiades cluster. The two rows of stars below Orion's prominent feet compose poor Lepus the Rabbit, who has right behind it Canis Major, the Big Dog, with the brightest star in the sky, Sirius, as its eye. New Moon, December 11th, full 26th.



AREA CBC: Make it a three day marathon and an after Christmas outing!

Friday Dec. 17 - Olsburg
Gary Jeffrey 785-468-3587
gjeffrey@kansas.net

Saturday Dec. 18 - Manhattan
see pg. 2

Sunday Dec. 19 - Wakefield
Chuck Otte 785-238-8800
otte@nqks.com

Tuesday Dec. 28 - Junction City
Chuck Otte 785-238-8800
otte@nqks.com



Galapagos Islands

KSU-Study Abroad Program: Galapagos Islands, Ecuador
with Dr. Jack Cully (KSU Biology) and Dr. Srimi Kambhampati (KSU Entomology)

The Galapagos islands are most famous as the site where Charles Darwin found inspiration to develop his theories on evolution. Their unique wildlife and picturesque beauty attract several thousand visitors every year. This course has four goals.



- 1) Students will be introduced to the physical setting of the islands including the geological origins.
- 2) Students will be introduced to the evolution of various plants and animals on the island.
- 3) We will observe some of the exotics to understand their impact on native species.
- 4) We will visit with the scientists at the Charles Darwin Research Centre and the Galapagos National Park to learn how the islands are being protected and restored.

Dates: June 1-12, 2005 (limited to 14 participants)

Cost: Approx. \$1300

Credit: BIOL 697 2 credit hours

DEADLINES: First payment - Dec. 25, 2004, final payment Feb. 15, 2005

For more information contact Elfrieda Nafziger, Office of International Studies, KSU 785-532-5990, elfrieda@ksu.edu, Jack Cully 785-532-6534, bcully@ksu.edu, or Srimi Kambhampati 785-532-4720, srini@ksu.edu



**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

Dec. 15, 2004
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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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