



the prairie falcon

VOL. 29, No. 4
DECEMBER 2000

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

December Program: ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION & NATURE CENTERS IN KANSAS Lori Hall

Environmental Education & Nature Centers in Kansas

Lori Hall, Director of Wildlife Education at the Rolling Hills Refuge Wildlife Conservation Center near Salina, will present an interactive program about conservation and environmental education in Kansas. Currently, Lori is focusing on education about wildlife, emphasizing rare and endangered species, but she will also discuss the development of the Lakewood Natural Area and Discovery Center in Salina.

Lori was recognized as the Conservation Educator of the Year in 1999 by the Kansas Wildlife Federation, and was recently appointed to the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission by Governor Bill Graves.

December 20, 2000 - Before each program, we invite our speakers to join us for an informal dinner and discussion. Feel free to join us this month at El Cazador, at 5:45 PM. The program begins at 7:30 PM, 1014 Throckmorton, NE corner of Denison and Claflin. Refreshments are served after every meeting, please bring your own cup. All meetings are open to the public.

Field Trips

BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK

Join us Saturday, Dec. 9th and every second Saturday at 8 AM in the Ackert/Durland parking lot on the KSU campus. We will carpool to a local birding hotspot and should return by about 11 AM. Birders of every age and interest level are welcomed. Children are especially encouraged to attend. Call Dave Rintoul, 532-6663 or e-mail him at drintoul@ksu.edu for more information.

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CONTRIBUTORS

PETE COHEN
CHRIS COKINOS
LEANN HARRELL
THOMAS MORGAN
DAVE RINTOUL

UPCOMING DATES:

- Dec. 2 - Bird Feed PICKUP
- Dec. 9 - Sat. 8 AM
BEGINNING BIRDING
Ackert/Durland parking lot
- Dec. 16 - Sat. Manhattan CBC
537-0781
Compilation Dinner
539-5129
- Dec. 20 - Wed. 5:45 PM Dinner
7:30 PM "Environmental
Education & Nature
Centers," Lori Hall
1014 Throckmorton, KSU
NE corner Denison/Claflin
- Jan. 6 - Eagle Day 9:00 AM
Tuttle Creek/Corps of
Engineers Office

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MANHATTAN, KS



BIRDING

DAVE RINTOUL

The 52nd consecutive Manhattan KS Christmas Bird Census (CBC) will be held on Saturday, December 16, 2000, mark your calendars and make plans to join us in our annual contribution to "citizen science." Last year, for the first time EVER, another CBC in Kansas compiled more species than we did. To make things even worse, it was the Lawrence CBC! So call your friends, go out with one of our groups, and help us reclaim the title of the best CBC in Kansas.

There are six quasi-independent groups covering our CBC circle (centered at Anderson Hall, see map below); if you wish to join one of these groups, please call the group leader at the number listed below. If you can't make up your mind, ask me 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. Donations will be accepted to help defray the cost of the dinner and rental of the facility.

I would also like to ask our readers who live within the Manhattan CBC area to plan to count the birds at their feeders that day and pass the count results along to me. If you would like to do that, please contact me using email (drintoul@ksu.edu), phone (785-532-6663 days, 785-537-0781 evenings), or snail-mail (Dave Rintoul, 1124 Woodland, Manhattan KS 66502-2716) and I will send you some brief instructions and a checklist. After the count day, you will need to send that information back to me as quickly as possible so that I can add it to the count results.

Group Leaders; Phone (day); Eve

D. Rintoul; 532-6663; 537-0781

D. Kerr; 456-2771

C. Ferguson; 532-6730; 539-4856

C. Smith; 532-6656; 539-6918

H. Hoogheem; 539-7080

D. Burnett; 537-2502



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Area Christmas Bird Census:

Manhattan Dec. 16
Dave Rintoul 537-0781

Topka Dec. 16
Gary Hayden
785-273-5598

Wakefield Dec. 17
Chuck Otte 238-4161
or 238-8800

Perry Lake Dec. 17
Richard Rucker
785-597-5144
ext. 14

Olsburg Dec. 18
Gary Jeffrey 468-3587

Junction City Dec. 26
Chuck Otte 238-4161
or 238-8800

Blue Rapids Dec. 30
Tom Parker 363-7228

For a complete listing check out this website:

KSIRDS.org

and thank you Chuck Otte!

NFHAS Christmas Bird Census Supper, December 16, 2000

After spending the day tramping through the wilds of the Manhattan countryside counting birds, come on over to the 52nd annual Christmas Bird Count Supper at the Senior's Service Center, located on Fourth & Leavenworth in Manhattan. The doors will open at 5:30 PM and the meal will begin at 6:00 PM (or whenever you arrive) through 9:30 PM (or when the food runs out).

During the course of the evening, we will swap stories and compile the bird numbers. The meal will consist of chili, crackers, relishes, desserts, & drinks. If you wish to contribute to the meal with your special dish, please contact Carla Bishop, who is coordinating the supper, at 539-5129 (h), 532-1859 (w), or email cbishop@ksu.edu.



One year during his childhood, he was often hungry. But he had faith that his father would buy him a treat for Christmas. His father bought him an orange. Now after more than 70 years, he remembers the satisfaction of biting into that orange. He remembers the satisfying sweetness of the juice. He is no longer poor. But the years have not erased his memories.

This man is my father.

In recognition of his own childhood memories, he always gave me an orange for Christmas. He also gave me other tasty foods such as Brazil nuts for Christmas. I remember the corrugations of the dark outer shell, the smooth inner surface of the shell, and the paper-thin, brown layer which enclosed the firm, white meat. The meat was slightly dry, but it had a rich, oily flavor that was slightly bitter.

When such a nut falls from a tree in a tropical forest, it is enclosed in a pod that holds 10 to 25 nuts which are arranged like slices of an orange. The pod can weigh six pounds. When it falls from a tree which can be as tall as an eight story building, it is sometimes driven deep into the ground. The nuts within the pod cannot germinate unless an animal chews open the woody wall of the pod. An agouti, a house-cat-sized animal that has sleek, brown and black hair, can chew through the thick wall of the pod. An agouti buries the nuts, so that it can eat them later. Some of them sprout. And they become new trees. Most Brazil nuts are gathered from remote natural forests.

By the end of this century, 95% of these rain forests will probably be destroyed. Some

people want to protect these forests for both their value to the economy and their value to the ecology. The Brazil nut crop is worth more than 44 million dollars a year. Some people who enter a natural forest do not return. A few of the people who gather the pods are injured or killed by falling pods. But that is just one more danger. A forest is not domesticated. It is not safe. It is natural in the authentic meaning of natural. The richness of such a forest has a slightly bitter, slightly dangerous flavor that I love. Now the agouti finds a buried nut in the forest. Now the agouti tastes the slightly bitter flavor of the firm, white meat. Now I savor the taste in my memory. Now I remember that there is much worth fighting for.

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EXOTIC PLANTS FROM BIRD SEED

**Iralee Barnard, Herbarium,
Kansas State University**

In November 1998, a peculiar grass growing in a residential yard in Wamego was submitted to the KSU Herbarium for identification. That grass, *Themeda quadrivalvis*, had previously never been collected in Kansas. The source of this exotic grass was determined to be thistle bird seed. This discovery led to further investigation of potential introduction of viable exotic plant seeds from commercial bird seed. Inspection of nine sacks of locally purchased commercial thistle seed with different lot numbers revealed

that not only was *Themeda* consistently present in varying quantity, but numerous other types of seeds were removed and compiled. Some of these seed samples were planted in the greenhouse. Of these, three species germinated, and were identified as weedy annuals from southeast Asia.

At the same time, an effort was made to examine yards with birdfeeders for *Themeda* or other unusual plants. NFHAS members feeding thistle seed were called on to volunteer for this project. Several people cooperated in a survey of the plants near their bird feeders. No unusual exotic plants were found. From germination tests, it appears most of the *Themeda* and other seeds recovered

from the bird seed were inert, but a few were viable. The majority of the deviant species, including *Themeda*, may not be able to persist in Kansas. However, *Themeda*, an Asian species, has flourished for more than 40 years in Louisiana. Gene Towne collaborated with me on this investigation. He spent many hours at the microscope looking through pounds of bird seed. We both wish to thank the Audubon members who consented to a survey of their yards, and remind all of you to be aware of the plants growing under your bird feeders. If anything looks suspicious give one of us a call. For more details about the *Themeda* findings, refer to the journal, *Sida* 19(1):201-201, 2000.



*“Last night as I lay on the prairie,
and gazed at the stars in the sky,
I wondered if ever a cowboy
could drift to that sweet by-and-by...”*

The start of this old ballad is another example of the talent of the night sky to stir up contemplation. That not everyone turns their thoughts inward is evidenced by all the external measurements that've been taken, and all the instruments that have been invented, till now it seems that for many people it's their instruments that gaze at the sky, while they focus on various kinds of electronic reports. Then they supply us with bright four-color displays of cosmic goings-on which come to us either as glowing screens or as infusions of ink into wood pulp.

These translated images give an impression that the sky up there is a vastness of seething fires and forbidding ice and dead gray rock all moving outward- and crossward-bound at colossal, restless speeds. Then I step outside, and the sky I see up there is, to the contrary, a quiet, dark, calm neighborhood, decorated with benignly glistening,

subtly tinted, seasonally dependable, nicely relaxing twinkles.

My sky is not the sky of the instruments, which is in effect much closer. Which raises the thought that the essence of anything depends in great measure on its distance from anything else. Mayhem a continent away can disturb fewer sleepers than a howling cat in the garden. So if distance is that important, the next question in line is, What do we mean by “distance”? To some it's a measure of time (“We live 30 minutes from the mountain.”), to others a measure of space (“We're 30 miles from the mountain.”). Few of us use size as a measure (“The mountain looks as big as my thumb.”). Yet both miles and minutes have varying meanings. If we go to a time and/or place where normal travel is by hoof or hoofing it, 30 minutes, or miles, are different substances than where modern autos exist.

Looked at from that angle, distance turns out to be an amorphous chameleon. So let's reverse the angle and ask what is the absence of distance? Finding

oneself in the company of such considerations is the risk one takes by lying on the prairie and gazing at the stars in the sky. We'll postpone trolling for answers till January to fit in here some outward sights that could repay the risk from mid-December to mid-January.

The Christmas Day eclipse is still scheduled to begin over Kansas about 11 AM, and reach about 40% coverage (60% toward evening in the Northeast), while the “Jupiter and Saturn in Taurus” show continues brightly through the nights.

On December 19th a waning moon will be above a rusty, brightening Mars and blue-white Spica in the SE before dawn. On the 20th they'll be in a nearly horizontal arc. On the 29th a returning crescent will be cheek to cheek with Venus within Capricorn at dusk. Sirius, the brightest star, will mark New Year's by climbing to its highest point due south. Then in January, Mercury will reappear low in the dusk of the 14th.

The moon: full Dec. 11th and Jan. 9th; new Dec. 25th.

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HAWKWATCHERS

Benson Venegas, Executive Director of ANAI in Costa Rica just reported that the hawkwatchers in Talamanca (Jennifer McNicoll & Pablo Porras-Peñaranda) have counted their one-millionth migrating raptors this season! In the long history of hawkwatching worldwide, there are only two hawk counts that have ever achieved this level. (These are the famous sites at the Veracruz, Mexico [River of Raptors] and at Eilat, Israel.)

This location is in the SE corner of Costa Rica, near the Panama border on the Caribbean coast. Its geographic makeup is similar to that of the now-famous Cardel region of Veracruz — a narrow coastal plain and nearby mountains which squeeze migrating raptors into a tight corridor. The Talamanca team's accomplishment is all the more stunning for several reasons: this is the first year of counts at Talamanca, they have a tiny and overworked staff, and the season isn't even over yet. Their effort and success are truly Herculean.

Charles Duncan cduncan@tnc.org, *Wings of the Americas Program*
The Nature Conservancy

FYI: Submit Newsletter articles by 15th of month to Cindy Jeffrey, 128 Dole Hall, KSU, or 15850 Galilee Rd, Olsburg KS 66520, or email to cinraney@ksu.edu MAILING: contact Carla Bishop 539-5129



Conservation Committee

LEANN HARRELL

Ways to Support your Local Audubon Chapter

Do you support the activities of the Chapter, but find yourself without the time to attend meetings or scheduled workdays? You can still be a very important part of the Chapter. As the end of the calendar year approaches and you look for a non-profit organization for a tax-deductible contribution, please consider the Northern Flinthills Audubon Society.

As the result of a generous donation by local residents, Harold Ross and Joanne & Bill Michel, our Chapter owns a lovely, wooded property within the residential area on Stagg Hill. The Chapter has decided to protect this property with a conservation easement which will be written to prevent development in perpetuity. The property has been visited and approved by the Kansas Land Trust, which oversees and monitors that the stipulated language of the conservation easement is followed. For this service the Chapter will pay the Kansas Land Trust a one-time, up-front fee of ~\$5,000. We are beginning a fund raising campaign to cover these costs.

We hope that members and non-members alike will recognize the importance of preserving a natural area within the city limits and make a contribution. Any amount will help. Due to a recent contribution in the form of stocks, we now have an account that allows the Chapter to receive stock donations. If you would like more information about this account, please contact Jan Garton at 539-3004. Or, mail your contribution to

Northern Flinthills Audubon Society
P.O. Box 1932, Manhattan, KS 66505-1932.

Thank you for your support!

Biodiversity – does it matter?

By Ari Jumpponen

(Assistant Professor of Biology, KSU)

Our global environment is experiencing drastic rates of extinction mainly because of anthropogenic factors such as landscape fragmentation, altered nutrient cycling, and the global change. The high extinction rates can be interpreted as loss of biologic diversity, *i.e.* diversity of living organisms and the functions that they perform in their natural environment.

Biodiversity is a complex issue that has recently received a considerable interest in the scientific community. Although the importance of biodiversity can be defended from ethical – every species has a right to exist – or aesthetic – more diverse ecosystems or plant communities are more pleasing to the eye - points of view, there has been a call for more experimental evidence to justify

extensive efforts to preserve species.

The current focus of the debate rotates around whether a greater number of species makes ecosystems function more efficiently when measured by either their biomass production or ability to hold mineral nutrients. Underlying themes include whether the ecosystems with limited diversity can provide ecosystem services that equal those observed in more diverse systems.

Some present evidence on the relationship between ecosystem function and the species diversity supports the hypothesis that more diverse systems perform more efficiently. However, studies from different ecosystems appear conflicting and inconclusive: while some studies have found clear support for greater productivity and nutrient retention in more diverse communities, others fail to show any distinct patterns. Furthermore, two opposing,

theoretical views have been presented. First, one states that the observed improved function in more diverse communities is nothing but an artifact: when sampling communities with different biodiversity, the more diverse communities are likely to include species that have greater ability to contribute to the functioning of an ecosystem. Second, while acknowledging the importance of the artifactual effect, another school of thought argues that a pattern beyond including certain species in the community can usually be observed – the whole is more than merely the sum of the components.

Currently, the debate has stalled on this theoretical dispute. However, no matter what the grounds for the preservation effort – ethical, aesthetic, or ecosystem function – our society should become aware of the potential risks of anthropogenic impacts on the global species pools.



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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. Renewals of membership 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.

Nonmembers may subscribe to the *PRAIRIE FALCON* newsletter for \$10 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.

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Kansas City area (incl. W. MO): 785-342-2473
Nebraska (statewide): 402-292-5325

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Write - or call (anytime)