



# the prairie falcon

VOL. 32, No. 9  
MAY 2004

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

May 19, 2004  
7:00 p.m.

Discover Lewis and Clark

Steve Prockish  
Manhattan Public Library  
Upstairs

“Discover Lewis and Clark”  
Steve Prockish  
Wed. May 19, 2004  
7:00 p.m.  
Manhattan Public Library

Steve Prockish, of the Army Corps of Engineers at Tuttle Creek, will present a program on Lewis and Clark’s Corp of Discovery expedition. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers manages more miles of the Lewis and Clark Trail than any other governmental or private entity.

An interpretive program, including reproductions of items taken on the journey, will focus on the natural history of the expedition.

*Before each program, we invite our speakers to join us for an informal dinner and discussion. Feel free to join us this month at Gold Fork, (next to the Ramada Inn) at 5:30 p.m.. The program begins at 7:00 p.m. Refreshments are served after every meeting. All meetings are open to the public.*

## Field Trips

### BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK

Join us Saturday, May 8<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto:pyky@flinthills.com).

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## CONTRIBUTORS:

DRU CLARKE  
PETE COHEN  
THOMAS MORGAN

## UPCOMING DATES:

- May 8 Beginning Birding, 8 a.m.  
Ackert/Durland Parking Lot
- May 8 Migratory Birding Day  
Call 539-7080
- May 19 PROGRAM: 7:00 p.m.  
Manhattan Public  
Library  
Dinner 5:30 p.m.

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MANHATTAN, KS



## SMALL BIRDS AND THE ORIGIN OF MYTH (OR FOLKBIOLOGY)

dru clarke

Responding to a question regarding the identity of the source of a trilling whistle, the naturalist/guide said, "Ah, that... that is a small bird."

*Paraphrased from Kandell, Jonathan.*

*"Vaunted Vancouver." Smithsonian. April 2004, p. 6*

Small birds (usually lbb's, or little brown birds) are my nemesis. Blame it on nearsightedness, or lack of proper equipment (for example, binoculars), or a random, cursory nature: I've never been very good at identifying them. Not that I didn't have adequate field guides. My first, given to me at age nine by "Ruth" (either my cousin or her mother), was a Golden Nature Guide entitled: *Birds - A Guide to the Most Familiar American Birds*. 112 birds in full color! In the back of the book are two pages for "Records," and in my best script is written "mourning dove," and beneath it, "robin." A pair of mourning doves nested in our pear tree year after year (I was sure it was the same two birds), and robins, cheering on spring, splotted the lawn with their brick-red breasts. This was going to be easy: they were large and distinctive in shape, coloration, and song. I was on my way to being a naturalist extraordinaire.

In the highlands of New Jersey, where our summer place was, a pair of phoebes nested on a second story windowsill. I learned to stand in the dim hallway away from the window to prevent startling the birds as they flew to and fro, bringing beaks full of bugs to their babies. From the house I could hear the flute-like melody of the wood thrush in the close woods, although I can't remember ever seeing it. Another two-note call I was sure was not from a bird, but a signal between groundhogs. I must have seen two groundhogs when I first heard this call, and

assumed they were communicating with one another. Luckily, the only one I authoritatively revealed my discovery of the groundhog whistle to was my mom, who may or may not have known the true origin of the call. It wasn't until many years later that I realized that it was a titmouse, a 'familiar, small bird.' Why I didn't write 'phoebe,' 'wood thrush,' or 'groundhog' in the back of this first guide book I don't remember, but I think it was because I was having too good a time exploring to take the time to add to my "life list."

When I moved to Kansas, and discovered that folks shot doves, I reacted with disbelief. (Did they shoot robins, too?) Phoebes, however, are not game, and they "found" me at the farmhouse, nesting on the porch fan's motor housing. When we had to enclose the porch due to poor drainage from its slab, we waited until the young had fledged, but worried about where they would nest this year. I think I saw them last week, wagging their tails in puzzled fashion, looking for a new site. Sorry, guys. The wood thrush remained in New Jersey, preferring the thick, lush woods. But its song I can play on a newly purchased CD, and if I shut my eyes, I can recapture that place and get a catch in my throat listening to its pouring voice.

Tucked inside the cover of my first bird guide are three yellowed 3 by 5 index cards, one with my son's distinctive hand printing on it: "flycatcher," and underneath it, "east medolark (sic)." The same meticulous attention to detail as his mom. I wonder if he heard the groundhog's whistle, too, and if I should let on that I discovered it many years ago?

© 03/28/04 Dru Clarke

BIRDATHON (held April 24)- ANY ONE DESIRING TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION, CAN STILL DO SO BY CONTACTING CLYDE FERGESON, ANY BOARD MEMBER, OR MAIL TO:

**Northern Flint Hills  
Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 1932  
Manhattan, KS  
66505-1932**



*"And the little tree bears them with a royal grace, tier upon snowy tier, the slim trunk often leaning slightly from the hillside, as though to offer its burden of blossom, princess-like, to the spring world."*

Donald Culross Peattie,  
*"A Natural History of Trees of Eastern & Central North America," 1966*

Flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) orients its floral display towards the most light, thereby increasing the reflection of light from its display. Perhaps this makes the display more attractive to insects that are needed for pollination. The display might face towards an opening where a tree has fallen or towards a partially cleared hiking trail. At night, the display appears to glow in the moonlight.

This medium-sized inhabitant of the understory is native to the southeastern edge of Kansas. It thrives best in well-drained, acidic soils, but it is so beloved, that it is often planted in unsuitable areas. I succumbed to temptation last month. I planted one where it will be somewhat shaded and sheltered from the wind. The truest expression of its loveliness is inseparable from its native woods, however. As Donald Peattie expressed it, the flowering dogwood's loveliness is consistent with "... the most classical traditions of flower arrangement." And yet it is free of artificial embellishment. It is pure.

It performs photosynthesis at a maximum rate in a third of full sunlight. It may convert some of its photosynthate into 20 pounds of berries which may be harvested by over 80 species of birds. If the birds delay completing the harvest, some of the berries may be shared by foxes, rabbits, beavers, and others. Like a member of the community, I tasted one berry. It wasn't bland. But I had to agree that it wasn't edible by people.

Flowering dogwood may have a better right than hop hornbeam to the nickname "ironwood," since its wood is even harder than that of hop hornbeam. Its

wood is even more resistant to shock than that of persimmon. Although hickory is somewhat more resistant, hickory wears rough with usage. Flowering dogwood wears smooth with hard usage. That's what I aspire to. I doubt I can achieve it. I would like to be tough enough to have all of my faults polished away by hard work. Flowering dogwood has been used for items like knitting needles, sled runners, bearings, and handles of chisels.

Its red berries are arranged in an attractive cluster which is derived from the cluster of flowers between the large, petal-like bracts. In the winter, the flower bud is already present, a bud with four scales, which will not be discarded when the bud opens, but will be converted into four, petal-like bracts. In the springtime, the scales peel away from the center of the bud and become the large, white bracts. And the loveliness of a community of life has been made manifest.

Flowering dogwood blooms a little after redbud blooms. One flowering dogwood is blooming, as I write this on April 14th in an alcove close to Waters Hall at Kansas State University. Unfortunately, this one is not shaded by other trees. Its display is oriented towards an empty sky, lessening the impact for earth-bound admirers. It may be a clone of a specimen that had pink instead of white bracts. The pink color of its floral display seems appropriate, since its ability to attract pollinators is irrelevant for this cultivar. And the specimens that grow in their native woods are pure.

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AUDUBON SOCIETY BOARD

WE NEED YOU!!!

Be a part of the decision making process... what do you want to see the NFHAS do? We have openings for Education, Secretary, and at-large. Call any board member for more information.



Once again here is the season, with daylight stretching toward its mostest, when the colorful constellations of wildflowers light up over the prairie. They remind me of the time when I once stepped outside in dark wee hours to attend to lambing duties – and was stopped in my tracks by an unexpected light formation in the sky, right at eye level. Educated as I was I could recognize – rather breathlessly – a comet. Yet it seemed to me that I had in that moment an inkling of how I might have felt, 20,000 or 30,000 years ago, coming out of the my cave to such a vision, while lacking the explanation-of-things that my current education has provided. I like to believe I would have been calmly cautiously curious, not a Chicken Little.

Now I'm wondering what I would have made in my caveman way of the wildflowers. I would have noticed they came when the cold days ended – what would I have made of the how and why? What about the colors? My mother made sure in my pre-school days, that I could identify a purple card as “purple,” a green card as “green,” etc. Can I picture my cavewoman mother similarly holding up cut flowers for her child? Would she have had a separate name for each color, or instead called red blossoms “blood flowers,” blue blossoms “sky flowers,” etc.? To me it seems likely, living that close to nature, that she would have had a specific reference to every different kind of flower. Thorned roses, I think, might have been bitter-hurt-blood-plant, with one more word added to indicate the variety. If she wanted to condense that into one word, what might that word have been? How would she arrive at it?

Research on the home shelves indicates that we derive “yellow” from earlier words referring to something very noticeable, either by flaring or bragging. And somehow it's now become a synonym for cowardice. “Orange” goes back to the Sanskrit “naranga,” “mauve” to a French mallow flower, “puce” and “taupe” to the Latin for “flea” and “mole” respectively, “maroon” to the French for “chestnut,” “violet” to the same Greek source that gives “iodin” its name, “purple” to the shellfish that provided the dye, and which, I've read, was once a

rare, expensive commodity claimed by royalty for their exclusive use. And speaking of “red,” it and “blue” seemed to have been simply “red” and “blue,” though with variations like “reudh” and “bhlaio,” as far back as my dictionaries can take me. “Green” seems to have developed through its association with “grass” and “grow.”

Well, now as our yellow evening primroses modestly flare for their own star gazing, what might we expect in these current May-into-June skies. Comets again, as referred to last month. *Astronomy* informs that C/2001 Q4 (so-named) will be at its brightest May 14<sup>th</sup>, and should remain naked-eye visible till the end of June as it moves from between Gemini and Leo toward the big spread of stars called Ursa Major (of which the Big Dipper is the hindquarter and tail). C/2002 T7, better seen from the southern hemisphere, should be best seen here, though not too brightly, low in the SSW evening twilight the second week of June.

But the main show seems to be Venus' transit of the Sun June 8<sup>th</sup>. No one alive is presumed to have seen such a thing, since the last crossing was in 1882. *StarDate* adds that telescopes have only seen six of them, that special expeditions to view the transits of 1761 and 1769 were used to gain a measure of the Astronomical Unit, the Earth-Sun distance, which was pegged at 92-96 million miles, pinpointed to 92,955,807 miles by modern radar. The dates were not random happenstance. Venus transits (as seen from Earth) eight years apart, then 105.5 years, then eight, then 121.5, and on. The next transit for us will be just eight years away. A good thing, since this year's will be close to over by time the Sun rises over the central US. By means of high-tech or pinhole box that protects the eyes, look for a black dot, 1/30<sup>th</sup> the Sun's diameter, near the Sun's bottom at about the 5:30 position if the Sun was a clock face.

From May 20 - 24<sup>th</sup>, notice Venus, Mars, and Saturn making a vertical threesome in the western twilight, with the last two coming within a finger's width of each other while the Moon chaperones. New May 18<sup>th</sup>; full June 2<sup>nd</sup>.



## Volunteers Needed:

Students for Environmental Action is recycling dorm carpets during the week of May 17<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup> SEA members will have cages set up outside the dorms to allow students to donate their used carpets to families in Kansas. Every night SEA will empty the cages and store the carpets at a members house near campus. Then on May 24<sup>th</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup> we will sort through the carpets, clean them and then they will be picked up by a company that distributes them to lower income families.

Volunteers are welcome to help us with collection or/and cleaning of the carpets. Help the environment and people at the same time! To sign up or for more info please contact Holly Smith at [has7879@ksu.edu](mailto:has7879@ksu.edu) or call 776-1758.



FOR the Kids -

Who am I?

Color this bird after you've identified it..

(drawing by Ellen Rintoul)

## ATTENTION: MAY PROGRAM (MAY 19TH)

Unfortunately Dusty Becker, our speaker for the May program, is moving on to New Mexico, she has been a wonderful addition to the NFHAS, and her work in South America added so much to our "mission" over the past several years. We will miss her. GOOD LUCK Dusty.

The May program is still on MAY 19th, but the time is 7 p.m. and the place is the Manhattan Public Library - upstairs. Our speaker will be Steve Prokish of the Corps of Engineers. He will bring a Treasure Chest of items related to Lewis and Clark - and talk about their experiences when exploring this part of the country.



**Northern Flint Hills  
Audubon Society**  
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**U.S. Postage Paid**  
**Permit No. 662**  
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May 19th Program  
Manhattan Public  
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7 p.m.

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 Informtion:**

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](mailto: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](mailto:listserv@ksu.edu)> and join in the discussions!

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