



the prairie falcon

Vol. 33, No.9
MAY 2005

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

The Flint Hills Prairie Bison Reserve

George & Denis LeRoux Alta Vista



All are cordially invited to a very special Audubon program. The Flint Hills Prairie Bison Reserve is a prairie restoration project started by George and Denise LeRoux several years ago. This couple is striving to reestablish balance on the prairie by giving bison back to the earth. The former dairy facility near Alta Vista boasts an historical stone horse barn and a herd of bison, which the LeRoux treat with honor and respect. They will talk about the natural history of the bison and their role in the prairie ecosystem, and provide opportunity for interaction with the animals.

A hayrack ride and dinner featuring bison burgers, trail beans, ambrosia salad, and fixin's is optional. Due to the special nature of this program, advance registration is required. Contact Paul Weidhaas, program chair, at (785) 293-5559, or by email at paulweidhaas@kansas.net, by **May 12** to reserve your spot. There is no charge for the ranch tour, but dinner is \$10 per person, payable at the meal. Paul will advise those that register where to meet to carpool to the ranch. This special program will go on rain or shine.

Field Trips

The May Beginning Birding is on Migratory Bird Day, therefore there will not be a Beginning Bird walk - however, please join us on this great day of birding. Call Hoogy, at 539-7080.

May 14
Migratory Bird Day

May 15
Flint Hills Prairie Bison Reserve

May 18
General Meeting
at Manhattan Public Library

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UPCOMING DATES:

May 14 **Migratory Bird Day**
Call 539-7080
(beginning birders welcome)
May 15 **SPECIAL PROGRAM:**
Flint Hills Prairie Bison
Preserve - Sunday 2-6 p.m.
May 18 **General Meeting**
Manhattan Public Library
7 p.m. see pg. 5
Jun 11 **Beginning Birding** 8 a.m.
Ackert Hall Parking Lot, KSU

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MANHATTAN, KS



MY KITCHEN WINDOW

dru clarke

Over my kitchen sink is a window, a simple double-hung one, threaded with abandoned spider webs in the dead space between the inner panes and the storm sash. A jerry-built bird and squirrel feeder stands crookedly next to the window, poking above a thick tangle of spirea, and beyond is a sloping lawn studded with crab apple, catalpa, pear, and lilac. On a clear day, looking southwest, you can see the Kansas River valley and the Flint Hills rising above the Zeandale and Deep Creek roads.

Because I handwash my dirty dishes, I get to look out the window frequently. I have a perfectly good automatic dishwasher which is useful at Thanksgiving and other holidays throughout the year, but my preference is to wash dishes by hand. Although this habit may seem peculiar, I share it with a famous actor, Willem Dafoe, who would be an interesting and useful dinner guest, should he ever happen by. The warm, sudsy, and fragrant water substitutes for a long and languorous bath, which I seldom indulge in, and it soothes cramped fingers and stimulates blood flow to my parched hands. Each plate and cup, fork and knife, demands a special handling, the symmetry and edge of each requiring a certain flourish or care which restores each to its original gleam and smoothness.

Another added advantage - other than the therapeutic time - is seeing what is going on outside the window. It occurred to me that I would have missed much had I not had this window with the sink under it. During winter, I take down the single curtain, a remnant with a delicate oriental design, to let in all of the slanting light. I can always see when the feeder needs filling and who is visiting it. Sometimes when I am accustomed to anticipating birds feeding, and there are none to be seen, I know there is a predator, usually a raptor, in the yard. This morning I found it, perched deep in the dark maze of branches of the catalpa tree, a goshawk down for the winter, furtively swiveling its head, surveying for the unwary, the unlucky. Yesterday I caught a blur of it tumbling by, clutching a sparrow or junco. I wondered how it could fly out from the tree with any sort of grace and agility, having to negotiate the tangle of twigs and branches. Last year and the year before that, a sharp-shinned hawk filled this niche. I wonder where it is this year.

A fox squirrel has found this feeder and fearlessly faces my way, twitching its bright, soft tail, as it nibbles cracked corn. When satiated, it scurries for dessert to a peculiar cultivar sporting pale pink as well as fuchsia blossoms in spring, where it plucks cherry-sized 'apples' from their stems. I have seen no other animal utilize this fruit, so I don't begrudge her this treat.

A week before one of our dogs flushed an enormous tom turkey, beards a-bobbing, into the space beyond the window. It lumbered like a cargo plane into the lilac windbreak.

When our old cat was younger, he used to climb the feeder and sit on it, looking in the window until someone appeared in it, then slid down to wait by the door to be let in. Now he just sits inside, looking out at the birds feeding on his former perch.

Sometimes I stand by the window even when there are no dishes to wash. It affords me a view of the sky, of cloud, weather, and sun. If the clouds are particularly interesting, I can step quickly to the deck to snap an image. I can see a storm building, and imagine the turbulence within it, while I am safely watching from inside. One spring afternoon, my family stood at that window and watched me drive a bulky van out of the hollow, skirting the edge of tornadic winds that literally spun our basketball goal around in the ground. That same wind leveled houses in Louisville minutes later. I fell in through the door, emotionally mended by their hugs. Looking out the window, the clouds- shades of gunmetal and carbon - were breaking up.

Canada geese, wintering on the river, occasionally fly in loose skeins over the house. I catch them changing position in their long, flowing lines through the window. From this window in spring, I can see the fires from Konza prairie on the ridge. I can see when my husband pulls into the drive late at night, and know when to warm his supper.

Savvy architects plan a kitchen with such windows in mind. While I don't expect anyone to forsake their modern conveniences and go back to washing dishes by hand, having a window over the kitchen sink is a grand idea. Should you ever be a guest for a meal at our house, you don't need to offer to help washing the dishes. But if you are so inclined, I just might share the task with you, and you, too, can experience the view from the kitchen window.

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On a beautiful day, April 17, 2005, MJ and I had trouble leaving our room in North Kansas City. The motel room was comfortable and a nicely diverting movie was playing on a TV channel, and we were bantering back and forth about topics that attracted our momentary interest. After a continental breakfast, we were finally proceeding south over the old Paseo bridge over the 'Big Muddy' and then following highway 71 towards Swope Park Zoo. I had visited this establishment in the 1950s with Mom and Dad and my sister, but those memories from early childhood had receded into haziness. And in the warmth of the new moment, I was walking in with my bride, my MJ, by my side.

This establishment has recently chosen to emphasize the fauna of Africa in an extended cluster of exhibits. And best of all, the zoo has large paddocks with groups of animals. The animals had been returned to their outdoor paddocks and were still reveling in their increased freedom to saunter, to smell, to taste. While MJ and I ate slivers of frozen lemonade, we sat on a deck overlooking a paddock with groups of lesser kudu, Thompson's gazelles, giraffes, ostriches, & East African crowned cranes. A relaxed type of harmony seeped into me. The kudu approached. One of the softly striped, dark hued antelopes with spiraled horns felt the pulling attraction of aromatic hay with its inborn wariness functioning as an opposing force as it eyed the peanut gallery of MJ and I and other visitors. Finally the kudu tasted it. And it was good. MJ and I nibbled the bratwurst I had purchased.

A pair of Canada geese had nested in a ring of rocks in the paddock before the African animals had returned to the area. The gander made a heartfelt charge at the tommies, the Thompson's gazelles, with intimidating outstretched wings. Then a moment of peace after the startled tommies retreated. Then an encroachment by a giraffe. And the courageous heart of the gander was once again accelerated for battle. It flew up the side of the living skyscraper and briefly touched its feet to the giraffe's flank. A second flight up to the giraffe's side convinced it to avoid the gander, and the gander was content in its glorious victory.

The managed inhabitants interacted with native and naturalized species in a suprisingly vibrant way. A male lowland gorilla voraciously plucked dandelions. He quickly chewed and swallowed the blossoms. MJ told me that the French called these L'or du Pauvre, meaning the gold of the poor. Wow, now I want to taste the blossoms of gold.

The previous afternoon, we had walked within Maple Woods Natural Area in Gladstone, MO, marveling at the reddish orange hue of newly emerging white oak leaves, the brown darkness of pawpaw blossoms with fermenting aromas, the somewhat unpleasant aroma of a Mayapple blossom, the droopiness of a pendant, yellow merrybell (*Uvularia grandiflora*), and extensive colonies of dogtooth violet. The flight of a large butterfly of the woods, the tiger swallowtail, took my spirit with it into the newly emerging canopy.

After leaving these native inhabitants, we had driven past Park Hill High School in Platte County, MO, where I had graduated in 1974 and down Cross Road to the old home where Mom & Dad had brought me home from the hospital in 1956. An old pear tree was blooming. I remembered it vividly but had never seen it bloom so profusely. A jack pine by the driveway was hoary with age. I talked with a man who lived in the northwest corner of our old home place about a spring of life-giving water which had never failed to provide a cool drink to the early European settlers in the area. I hugged my bride and marveled at the passage of the years of my life.

I've enjoyed Tony Hillerman's novels in which he weaved aspects of Navajo culture into his fiction, such as the Navajo's desire to "walk in beauty." I felt myself closer to that ideal. In other words, I was in harmony with the world becoming part of me, with the relationships of society as well as the natural world attaining a degree of resonance within me. Simply put, I was happy.



Just for fun you might try this for yourself, off and on each day for the next month or as long as your interest lasts — note down descriptions of the clouds you see so that someone else, or your own memory, would have sufficient information to begin to understand why the clouds occurred in the form and sequence they did. But you have to do this without using the words “*cirrus, cumulus, nimbus, or stratus*. You can’t use those words because you’re not aware of them, having met them only incidentally and quite separately in Latin classes, if you’ve had any. And there’s nothing to suggest it can be done in a mere four words. Thus, you can closely understand the difficulty people labored against for millenia in trying to make sense of those evanescent phenomena that so strongly still affect our senses and environment.

Clouds can resemble many things, but only a few things can resemble clouds, one of which being a band of sheep. To disinterested observers a hundred or a thousand of sheep seem only repetitions of any one, but become an interested observer and individual difference appear. Then, what to do about those differences? How to keep track of and pass on information on the effects of different pastures and matings—without having terminology that will outlast individual animals and seasons? This was the challenge, regarding clouds, that baffled the ancients, and even the not so ancients of the Enlightenment. Galileo had long ago discovered the moons of Jupiter, Newton had long ago devised calculus, John Harrison had invented his chronometer to conquer the problem of finding longitude, and Thomas Jefferson had

become president of a new political experiment, before a till-then obscure Englishman named Luke Howard found his simple four-word answer to uniformly describing the clouds. Be my guest, take a month, this month when our Kansas clouds can be their most frolicsome—and try to match him, as other brilliant minds have, with other terms. While you’re at it, when clouds and Sun are absent, and while Old Man Moon is off tending chores, you might open an eye for the unpredictable Eta Aquarid meteor shower—some remnants of Halley’s comet that will likely come spraying bits of fire around Mars who will be within Aquarius rising SE in the wee hours, the best chance for meteors being on May 4th, though possibilities extend far into the month. More prominent and certain, and convenient to non-night-owls, will be an evening arbor of five bright points in the west. Procyon will be lowest to the SW, with Saturn on an imaginary line curving upward to the Gemini Twins—Pollux then Castor—then curving down NW to reach Capella at the edge of the sinking Milky Way. Jupiter will be glistening separately higher and southerly. Venus will become a briefly visible Evening Star in Taurus low in the west. Old Man Moon’s sociability schedule (as listed in *StarDate*) includes being lower R of Mars May 2nd, upper left of Regulus the 16th, doing a skaters’ waltz across the sky with Jupiter the 19th, passing in front of Antares early on the 24th, and a return visit with Mars the 31st. New Moon, the 8th at 4a45, Full the 23rd at 4p18.

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





MAY 14

**MIGRATORY BIRD COUNT**

Contact Hoogy at (785) 539-7080
or email him at Hoogy@cox.net

MAY 18

Save the date! May 18th
2nd General membership and planning meeting.
Everyone is welcome.

What programs would you like to see presented next year?

Do you have ideas about the direction of the organization?

We will have a brainstorming session and continue our discussion of the interests of our local group of bird lovers and conservationists.

THANKS



Thanks to the hard work of several NFHAS folks, the roadsides along the Michel-Ross Nature Preserve are once again clean and green! The intrepid crew of **Judy Roe, Kay Hummels, Tom Morgan, and Carla Bishop** along with **Jacque Staats and Dick Oberst** (and their highly-valued and heavily loaded pickup) managed to haul 425 pounds of trash to the landfill on Saturday, April 2nd.

On the agenda for future workdays at the Preserve is a slow eradication of ornamental honeysuckle that threatens to take over the whole area. This will involve mostly hand-pulling the smaller bushes, and cutting back and treating the stumps of the larger ones. If YOU would like to take out some of your frustration by attacking the runaway honeysuckle, contact Jan at jrexcoyote@aol.com. We'll try to schedule the events shortly after a rain when the pulling is easier.



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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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