



the prairie falcon

Vol. 33, No. 2
OCTOBER 2004

NORTHERN FLINT HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY,

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

October 20, 2004
Life on the Edge: Piping
Plovers and Least Terns
in Kansas
Dr. Roger Boyd

221 Ackert Hall, KSU
7:30 p.m.

LIFE ON THE EDGE: Piping Plovers & Least Terns in Kansas Dr. Roger Boyd

Roger Boyd is Professor and Chair of the Biology Dept. at Baker University in Baldwin City, KS. Dr. Boyd received his undergraduate degree from Baker, a Master's from Emporia State, and his Ph. D. in zoology from Colorado State University. He has been teaching at Baker for 28 years.

As Director of Natural Areas for the University, he manages the 600 acre Baker Wetlands and two smaller woodland and tallgrass prairie areas. Roger has worked on monitoring and habitat management for Least Terns and Snowy Plovers at Cheyenne Bottoms, Quivira NWR, and along the Cimarron River since 1980. More recently he has been monitoring Least Terns and Piping Plovers nesting success along the Kansas River for the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Another of Roger's interests is tropical biology. He and his wife Jan have taken over 25 student and adult groups to Mexico, Central and South America since 1981.

Before each program, we invite our speakers to join us for an informal dinner and discussion. Feel free to join us this month at Royal Thai, (3003 Anderson) 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, Oct. 9th 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.

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CONTRIBUTORS:

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UPCOMING DATES:

- Oct 9 Beginning Birding, 8 a.m.
Ackert/Durland Parking Lot
- Oct 20 Program 7:30 p.m.
221 Ackert Hall, KSU
Dinner 5:45 p.m.
- Nov 5 CONCERT Ann Zimmerman,
Connie Dover & Friends
Manhattan Art Center, 8 p.m.

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MANHATTAN, KS



DRAGONS ON THE WING

dru clarke

A radiant filigree lay gleaming in the pool of sunlight: had I lost an earring? I checked my lobes, then looked closely at the delicate transparency. Net-veined of finely spun gold with windows of shimmering chitin, the wing of an insect was transformed into this fragile jewel by the mirrored light. How could such a thin, brittle wafer hold up a heavy-bodied insect, like a dragonfly, much less carry it hundreds, even thousands of miles?* Yet, these diaphanous wings exceed our expectations, and provide lift and propulsion for their owners throughout the warm seasons and last long enough even for some to migrate seasonally. Not only do our warblers, cuckoos, and monarchs go south in autumn, but so do some dragons.

One late September afternoon a few years ago, on the same deck where I was dazzled by the fallen wing, hundreds of dragonflies swarmed, arriving in distinct loose groups, swooping and circling, as if excited to meet old friends at a class reunion. Then, suddenly, a signal known only to dragonflies swept through the swarm and gave them a reason to move on, toward the south. Green darners, a particularly social species of dragonfly, are known to migrate long distances, all the way to Mexico and Central America. The precise reason for this behavior is somewhat mysterious, which makes it all the more intriguing.

Even if dragonflies did not engage in this seasonal change in latitude, they would be worthy of lengthy discussion and our awe. While egg and larval stages of their lives are spent on, in, or under water, the adult dragonflies provide moments of visual excitement with their acrobatic and speedy flight and singular beauty of form. Their close relatives, the damselflies, are even more colorful, with a glistening spectrum of satin-like wings carrying them like floating motes over shady creeks and open ponds.

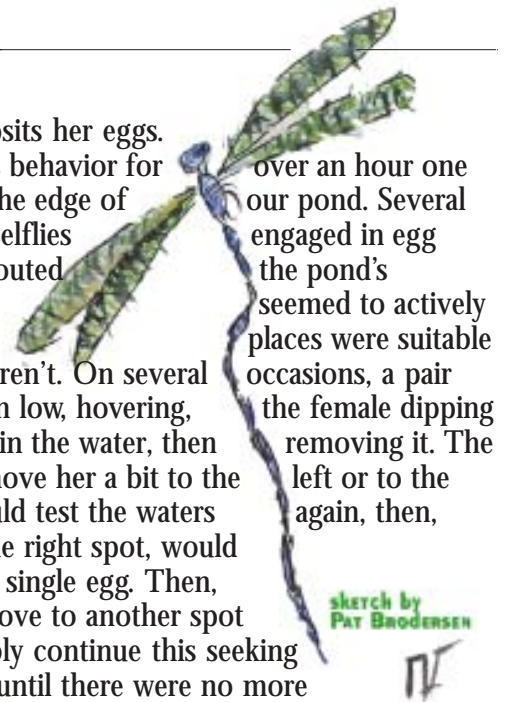
And their sexual reproduction is extraordinary and surprising in its anatomical complexity and behavior. The male produces sperm at the end of the abdomen, but transfers it to an accessory organ on the second abdominal segment, just behind the thorax where the wings are fixed. He grasps the female behind the head with the tip of his abdomen, and she tips her abdomen up to meet his accessory organ, assuming the strange but lovely 'wheel' position. He then carries her about, hovering over optimum niches of shallow, slightly submerged vegetation or otherwise attractive substrate, where she gingerly and ever so

carefully deposits her eggs. I watched this behavior for over an hour one afternoon at the edge of our pond. Several pairs of damselflies engaged in egg deposition scouted the pond's shallows and seemed to actively decide which places were suitable and which weren't. On several occasions, a pair would come in low, hovering, the female dipping her abdomen in the water, removing it. The male would move her a bit to the left or to the right, she would test the waters again, then, finding just the right spot, would squeeze out a single egg. Then, they would move to another spot and presumably continue this seeking and selecting until there were no more eggs to secret away.

The plump dragonfly nymphs (the immature stage) have bizarre, telescoping lower lips that fold under the head when not in use to snag a passing tadpole or minnow. They are always a source of amusement when caught in aquatic macroinvertebrate surveys conducted to assess water quality. It has always amazed me to find them in the most impaired bodies of water. The slender damselfly nymphs, however, are more sensitive to impurities in our free flowing waters.

Dragonflies have been given wonderful vernacular names, like skimmer, cruiser, petaltail, spiketail, clubtail, emerald, and the familiar darter. According to folklore, the latter was supposed to be able to stitch together the eyelids or lips of humans! In an effort to gather factual information about and understand better the realm of the odonates (dragonflies and damselflies), many folks now collect them. Catching dragonflies is no mean feat: just try it if you don't believe me. (Some even use shotguns to bring them down!) I prefer them free, alive, and on the wing, zigging and zagging, or thinking about them cruising south with their brethren for the winter. 'Til next summer, have a good flight.

*The study of how organisms and their parts move is called biomechanics. Natural History Magazine typically has a monthly column devoted to this fascinating branch of research.





Everyone loves to see a bird behaving fearlessly, so close, that there's no need for visual enhancement. The feathered one is simply part of your world.

And so we put feeders close to a window where we spend the most of our waking moments in our homes. I was fascinated by an article in the latest issue (116:69-73) of the *Wilson Bulletin* about a study conducted by Daniel Klem and his colleagues. This article was entitled, "Effects of window angling, feeder placement, and scavengers on avian mortality at plate glass."

Daniel Klem's article is more optimistic than most articles about conservation issues. His conclusions can be used to dramatically reduce mortality. And he states that the flight of birds into windows is a very important problem, causing about a billion deaths in North America each year, ... at least ten times more than deaths caused by other structures that our society constructs, such as communication towers, power lines, wind turbines, multistory buildings, and even automobiles and trucks.

The wonderful news is that placing a bird feeder close to your window will dramatically diminish the problem. Apparently, the birds are more apt to notice that a solid, unyielding window is actually there, if they are sitting close to it. Although 11 birds died in Klem's study when a feeder was 13 feet from a window and 9 birds died when a feeder was 10 feet from a window, ... ONLY ONE had a fatal accident when the feeder was six and one half feet from a window.

Now that's the kind of news I can appreciate. I can watch a bird behaving naturally from six feet away, with my long, inquisitive nose pressed solidly against a window pane, and be blissfully aware that the bird is relatively safe from injury from man-made materials. The study reported similar results from an experiment with different distances, in which 35 birds died when a feeder was 33 feet away, 17 birds died when a feeder was 16 feet away, and none whatsoever died when a feeder was 3 feet away.

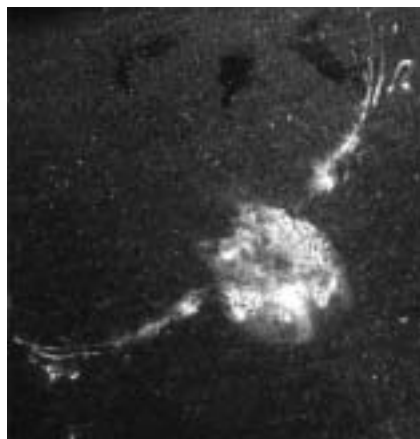
That allows me to feel oh so virtuous. Last fall, I constructed my own bird feeder, driving a metal

post about a few inches from my dining room window, and then placing a wide pipe over the post. Then I poured sunflower seeds into the white, pvc pipe and put the cap on top, and retired to my chair to watch the chickadees and nuthatches remove the seeds from the holes that I had drilled in the pipe for them. Later in the winter, one bird became momentarily confused and brushed the window soon after takeoff, but I doubt that he lost any feathers, and I suspect that he was more careful the next time he made a round trip to this bird-friendly location.

The study's other conclusion is more difficult to utilize in my home. The study found that seven birds died when the window was installed in the customary vertical position, while four birds died when the window was angled downward by 20 degrees, and only one bird died when the window was angled by 40 degrees to reflect mostly an image of the ground instead of the clear blue, inviting sky to the eyes of feathered ones. Although the construction of an angled window seems difficult to me, I am interested in the concept of "reverse window seat," a window seat that does not protrude into the outdoor environment and instead protrudes into the living space as the window angles towards the interior of the house, almost inviting the outdoors to come closer. Yes, inviting those feathered creatures to come closer in a sedate way so that I can watch them preening their feathers.

This August, I moved to a different house in Manhattan that has a large, double-paned window which faces the sun as it sets over Sunset Park. This window has dusty streaks in hard-to-clean locations, and whenever my fiancée suggests we clean these streaks, I mumble that they are warning devices for my feathered friends.

The National Audubon society web site — http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/bird_feeding/feeder_location.html — suggests placing opaque decorations outside windows and to put feeders "within three feet of windows, if possible."



Owl imprint by Dave Rintoul



SKYLIGHT

pete cohen

For some reason, perhaps the perfidies reported in the daily news, I'm reminded of a travel break we took several years ago, wandering through the historical museum in Enid, Oklahoma. The artifacts were interesting and nicely arranged, but the commentary at one display said that while on night duty during the old trail days the cowboys would keep track of time for changing their shifts by the North Star. When we asked the person in charge how a star that did not appear to move could be used to measure time, we were told quite certainly that "they" had researched everything. So afterwards I researched some authentic verses that the herders sang during those nights, but I've never gotten back to Enid so they are published here for the first time.

Oh, give me a sky where accipiters fly
And the sunlight can sometimes turn green;
Where the nighthawks display at both ends of the day
While the swallows all dart in between.
Where Orion and Taurus and the rest of the chorus
Sing the seasons and softly glide by.

Then, when they grew tired of lullabies, more raucously
they sang:

Gather round, boys, and hear now what I say;
I'll tell you what I met riding down the Milky Way—
Come a ti-yi-yippee-yippee-yay, yippee-yay
Come a ti-yi-yippee-yippee-yay

'Twas the middle of the night in the middle of July
Came a cast iron skillet a-flying through the sky.
Come a ti-yi-yippee, etc.

Well, the pan was rimmed with diamonds all brighter than
the stars,
And a-straddle of the handle there rode seven men from
Mars. (Chorus)

Each flashed a blueish smile that became a ruby streak,
And if you can't believe it, your whiskey's mighty weak.
(Chorus)

I can hear them now, as if it were yesterday, with not a
syllable changed.

Returning to the present, *StarDate* tells me that on October 18th the bright star high above the fattening Moon should be Altair, the eye of Aquila the Eagle's elongated triangle that extends downward along the Milky Way, whose appearance should benefit from the clearer air of autumn. On the 25th that will be Pegasus flying upside down above a fatter Moon, and at the full on the 27th Old Man Moon blushes in full eclipse from 9p23 till 10p45, with some shadow effects starting just over an hour ahead and lasting just over an hour later. On Halloween the resuscitating Moon will seem to be hanging from a loose rope drooping from Capella to his upper left (in the pentagon of Auriga the Charioteer) and the reddish-orange Alderbaran (in the V-face of Taurus the Bull).

Meanwhile while Saturn keeps rising earlier and earlier before midnight, bright Jupiter will be moving closer, closer to even brighter Venus and both should put on quite a show in the pre-dawn of both November 4th and 5th. There will barely be room for a full Moon to slip between them, though it probably won't seem that wide, and though he'll be shrinking into his fourth quarter he's not expected to try it. But on the 9th you could see him occult (get in front of) Jupiter —if you're in Minnesota or southeastward. On the 10th, Jupiter, Venus, Moon, and Mars should make a steep slope for the eye to slide down, with Jupiter at the top, slightly to the right. Virgo the Maiden will be hostess, with Spica a little off the slope to the right below the Moon. The Orionid meteor shower is scheduled for October 21-22, with *The Old Farmers' Almanac* reporting an average of 25 per hour. Full Moon, October 27 (eclipsed); new, November 12 at 8a27.

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Mark you calendars!!! Nov. 5th - Another Great Concert - with Ann Zimmerman, Connie Dover & Friends, at the Manhattan Art Center, 8 p.m. on NOVEMBER 5, 2004





TAKE NOTE

Some of the birds we saw in Russia

gary & cindy jeffrey

aug. 23-sept.4 River cruise up the Volga and Neva from Moscow to St. Petersburg





**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

Oct. 20, 2004
221 Ackert Hall
KSU campus

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!

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