

NOVEMBER PROGRAM:
WED. NOV. 15, 2006 7:30 P.M.
MANHATTAN WORKFORCE
CENTER (CORNER OF 4TH
& HOUSTON)



I feel a bit dizzy!

SHOW & TELL

Everyone is encouraged to bring some of their snapshots (any format - digital, hard copy, slides, black & white, color, old or new) of birds and/or a birding experience. We want stories too! We don't share our birding sightings and experiences enough - and it is so much fun to hear about what others have seen. This will be a very informal, social event (with refreshments of course). We will have the ability to project slides, digital images too. Remember the photo above by Dave Rintoul? While Dave and others take some spectacular photos of birds, most of us are more in the "snapshot" category -- and that's what this night is all about.

ANY format will work - hard copy, old, new, B&W, color, slide, digital!! Refreshments provided. Mark your calendar, and start digging for those "interesting" photos. Manhattan Workforce Center (corner of 4th and Houston)

NORTHERN FLINT HILLS Audubon Society,
P.O. Box 1972, MANHATTAN, KS 66505-1972



PRAIRIE FALCON

NORTHERN FLINT HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

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Upcoming Events:

- Nov. 11 BEGINNING BIRDING FOR THE NOVICE
BIRDER 8 A.M. MEET AT PARKING LOT
SOUTH OF ACKERT HALL, KSU
- Nov. 15 SHOW & TELL 7:30 P.M.
BIRD PHOTOS, BIRDING EXPERIENCES
MANHATTAN WORKFORCE CTR,
4TH & HOUSTON
- Nov. 22 BIRDSEED SALE ORDER DEADLINE
- DEC. 2 BIRDSEED PICKUP
UFM 9-12P.M.

GIFTS OF THE CHINKAPIN

TOM MORGAN

Chinkapin oak (*Quercus muehlenbergii*) is a tenacious tree in the dry, shallow, alkaline soil of limestone bluffs. At the western edge of its range here in Riley Co., KS, it is still an abundant species. Chinkapin oak and another member of the white oak group, the bur oak (*Q. macrocarpa*), are the dominant oaks of the gallery forests of tallgrass prairie in northeast Kansas.

At the Open House of Konza Prairie on Sept. 30th, I stepped along the trail and saw a gift of small acorns strewn across the trail. Picking one up, I cracked the thin, delicate shell with my teeth and peeled it, discovering the generously plump white meat. I chewed and swallowed, and once again was amazed by this gift of the forest. It is the sweetest of any acorn in the eastern half of the United States. It is quite edible raw, unlike the larger acorn of the bur oak. I have boiled the latter, changing the water several times, and still found my mouth puckering. In contrast, the taste of this acorn was a pure, innocent sensation. It is relished by many including the wild turkey, northern bobwhite, blue jay, wood duck, raccoon and many other mammals. Perhaps these creatures are even more thrilled than I to see, feel, or smell the gift of delicate acorns strewn across the land.

This oak hybridizes with a number of other oaks, including most notably, the dwarf chinkapin oak (*Q. prinoides*), which also occurs in eastern Kansas. This shrub oak may grow to 15 feet, but begins

bearing acorns when four feet tall. It has been grown as an ornamental since 1730 or thereabouts. Similar to its larger sibling, the chinkapin, it has relatively thick, leathery leaves with coarse teeth. The dark, gleaming green of the upper surface contrasts with the flashing white of the lower which has diminutive, silvery hairs. The leaves hang from the twigs in such a manner that they often flutter within a canopy of rustling, gleaming green and flashing white. Yes ... a gift to the traveler, who perhaps now will stop to rest his sweat-stained torso against the thin, pale bark of the chinkapin.

Chinkapin acorns, like other white oak acorns, can germinate in the fall, and seed dispersers have little motivation to carry them away and bury them intact since they would likely sprout before onset of winter. Indeed, the acorn-loving animal has little motivation to do anything but savor the pure taste. The dispersal of chinkapin and bur oak acorns is limited. The seedlings do thrive, however, with adequate sunshine and rainfall, and with an emphasis of expenditure on growth of the root mass which comprises 60% of the biomass when the seedling is three months old. The seedlings of the chinkapin are more abundant and successful than those of bur oak on drier sites, perhaps as a consequence of their more limited leaf area, which may lose less water during transpiration. It seems that this modest oak has wisdom, providing gifts with generosity, yet conserving vital resources. These modest trees may live for more than 400 years.

© 2006 Tom Morgan

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

Patricia Yeager

Hello fellow Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society members. As the new president of NFHAS my vision for our group is to be the local birding group that is also the environmental conscience of our community. As birders, we are keenly aware of the contribution that even a small green space provides. Neighborhood groups and Northern Flinthills Audubon have been the most effective voices to protect/create green spaces in our community and have earned due respect from fellow citizens. Collectively, as birders, we know where important sanctuaries of green are. Where we can have a voice, we need to step up to the challenge by writing an e-mail, a letter, or just being present at a town meeting to show numbers of supporters for a specific issue.

continued on bottom of pg 3

Much of September felt like an Indian summer, but it was just the tail end of the real summer season. We had not yet had a killing freeze, required for a true Indian summer. In addition to a hard frost, light winds, clear skies, calm nights and no precipitation complete the formula for one. Climatologically speaking, cold Canadian air moves offshore (that is, over the Atlantic), and a subtropical Bermuda high (air mass) grows deep, extending high into the atmosphere. An inversion from sinking air inhibits cloud formation; there is rapid surface cooling, associated with patches of fog and a persistent haze in the air (due to the temperature inversion which traps airborne particles, sort of like L.A.'s or Denver's smog, but which smells much better in Kansas). The air is "mellow, rich, delicate, almost flavored"* as Whitman wrote, oblivious to its stagnant nature. Typically, temperatures during the day are 65 to 72 F. and 35 to 48 F. at night.

It is magical to step from the artificially controlled conditions of a house into an Indian summer day, where you are bathed by soft and fragrant vapors that swirl languidly under an azure sky. From our porch, the Kansas River valley becomes an impressionist masterpiece on these days.

One version of the term for these lovely, welcome days was that Native Americans (Indians) attributed the pleasant weather to the good grace of gods from the southwest. It also fell around the time of harvest of their late season crops, like squash and pumpkin, and it was a term in use as early as the mid 1700s by American settlers. Another version that I find intriguing is that it was the later time of year when cargo ships from the Far East could be loaded more heavily than in any other season because of the calm seas and

clear weather, their hulls marked with the letters "I.S." – the "I" denoting the Indian Ocean through which these ships sailed – to show the safe draft depth. The "S" referred to "summer" to denote the anomalously warm conditions.

For birders, the term "halcyon days," often used to describe what we call Indian summer, might be more poetically appealing and less socially "charged." The fourteen days of calm weather the ancients believed to precede the winter solstice converged with the brooding of the halcyon, fabled to be in nests floating on the sea: the birds supposedly charmed the winds and waves so that the seas during that time were especially calm. I personally find this a charming notion, though a bit farfetched.

The killing frost preceding an Indian summer is a boon to me as I look for those elusive green tomatoes, peppers, and zucchini that have remained camouflaged under the thick foliage. The frost withers the leaves by causing the water in their tissues to expand, but the veggies often escape this fate, probably because they are bigger and fatter. We eat a lot of fried green tomatoes in the weeks after that big freeze. I notice, too, more turkeys hanging around, close to the feedlot where we grain our horses daily. Not far from there is the chinquapin gallery forest where they stuff their crops with acorns, but they still gather expectantly for domesticated droppings.

This year, if the gods are filled with grace, we will be lucky to have an Indian summer. I hope it comes after a particularly cold, wet and depressing series of days. It, then, would be a time when it is "enough to live – enough to merely be." *

* Walt Whitman, *Diary in Canada*

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My main interest is birding. So it is my challenge to get every one of you to show me where the best birds are. As many of you have experienced, it is much more fun to share your birding finds with a fellow birder over the most agreeable nonbirder. So let's get together and do some birding! Birding field trips are every second Sat. at 8:00 a.m. If your home is an excellent birding spot, please consider inviting a group to your place.

Choose any second Sat. you would like and let me know. My number is 785-776-9593. My e-mail is pyky@flinthills.com. Please share any concerns, great ideas and birding finds. As a group we can have a louder voice in local government and we can have even more fun birding by sharing.

Patricia Yeager

A duet in “HMS Pinafore” reviews the fact that “things are seldom what they seem; skim milk masquerades as cream, etc.” A careful eye looking into the flow of a clear local creek might conclude that hungry crayfish are naught but the mortal enemy of dragonflies, whose larvae hatch and first struggle for life there. But an article in *Science News* this summer reported that when dry spells interrupt the creek’s flow and the predatory crayfish face different perils of their own, the burrows they have dug in the once submerged mud remain, many empty except for water remaining sheltered from rapid evaporation, and in those hidden crayfish-provided shelters many immature dragonflies survive the dry spells and live to fly.

What the Moon seems like to the careful naked eye no doubt varies from person-to-person. An article in *The Economist* back in May informed that what the eye sees is “regolith.” The Earth, thanks to the operatives of its atmosphere – wind and rain – and the busy work of lichens, worms, etc., is coated with a layer of soil. The atmosphere-less Moon, by contrast, is coated with a fine powder created during the eons of meteorite collisions with its rocky surface. That dust is regolith and it is so rich in oxygen it was reported that NASA has offered a \$250,000 prize for anyone figuring out a practical way to extract it. It’s called the “MoonROx” challenge.

Indeed there’s more than oxygen. Paul Spudis, a Johns Hopkins scientist, was quoted as saying “a cubic metre of regolith contains (also) enough hydrogen, carbon, nitrogen, potassium and other trace elements to make two cheese sandwiches on rye, two colas, and two large plums.” There is also abundant sunlight on a little more than half the Moon’s surface, that might be beamed as energy to Earth, and that might be used to melt the mega-tons of ice that might or might not be hidden in the unlit parts of the Moon. Might and maybe are key words, but such possibilities

have their temptations, as did the possibilities of the New World and the American West in previous centuries.

Back then, from my own personal reading of history, the dominant approach – despite notable efforts like the Lewis and Clark expedition and the voyage of the Beagle – was to put the emphasis and money on the temptations of extraction rather than on gathering information and understanding. *The Economist*, from its sources, feels NASA is being instructed to repeat history, that is by focusing on manned expeditions rather than on far cheaper probes and telescopes. I’ve mentioned this before; it seems worth considering again which option seems the wiser.

Whichever, regolith will be one of the more dominant apparitions in the sky this coming month. Once more the planets are basically away, though Saturn will be coming up near Regulus (at the bottom of Leo’s backward question mark) a little after midnight, then a little before, as the month ages. And Mercury will show up in daylight on the afternoon of November 8th by transiting the Sun (in front of those of us in this area for the first time in decades, says *The Old Farmer’s Almanac*) from 1:12 to 6:10 Central Standard Time, And the usual cautions are out about viewing the Sun face-on (old seamen wore eyepatches, it seems, more from sighting the Sun with primitive navigation instruments, than from fighting with sabers). Mercury peeks up in the ESE at dawn on the 25th. The more easily seen star Arcturus will be bright above it.

StarDate notes that the Great Regolith in the Sky will be under the Great Square of Pegasus early on the evening of the 2nd, and just above Aldebaran (in Taurus) on the 6th. It joins the Gemini Twins on the 9th, and lines up with Saturn and Regulus as dawn comes on the 12th and 13th, and is between the Pegasus square (above) and the star Fomalhaut (below) though not really near either on the 28th.

Full Moon the 5th, 6a58; new the 20th, 4p18.

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BUTTERFLY WINGS

SUSAN BLACKFORD

It was a fairly busy season at the butterfly garden located at Sojourner Truth Park (south on 10th Street at Ft. Riley Blvd, past Howies Recycling Center and the railroad tracks). The season started with a garden clean up. Jacque Staats, Dick Oberst, Jodi Whittier, and Patricia Yeager all pitched in. During the season, Patricia Yeager assumed most of the weeding task, earning the honored title of “Master Weeder,” and discovered the concrete butterfly sipper which had been lost under mulch and vegetation. There were some empty spaces in the garden, so in September Patricia and I traveled to Hesston, Kansas for the Dyck Arboretum’s FloraKansas Great Plains Plant Bazaar <dyckarboretum.com> (the largest native plant sale in Kansas), to purchase some new native and adaptable plants for the garden. We bought 48 new plants consisting of royal catchfly, October sky aster, Missouri evening primrose, blue muffin viburnum, white aster, wood aster, lead plant, scaly blazing star, bottlebrush grass, butterfly milkweed, purple prairie clover, and “misty butterflies” pincushion flower.

The following Saturday, on Sept. 16th, a planting party was held at the garden. Patricia Yeager, the speed planting duo of Jacque Staats and Dick Oberst, and Nichole Lamb from the local neighborhood (Patricia’s number one weeding partner) all helped to put the plants in the ground. As a side benefit we uncovered two sets of stepping stones.

The Ice Cream Social was held the following Thursday at the Garden. Everyone seemed to enjoy seeing the new plants and the phenomenal number of swallowtail butterfly caterpillars on the rue. The new plants are still pretty small but next year visitors to the garden should experience some new sights and scents along with the butterflies.

The annual monarch migration brought large numbers of monarchs to the garden in late September with three or four monarchs competing with each other and other butterfly species for each spire on the butterfly bush. The first frost and freeze has brought an end to most of the flowers in the garden for the year, but some of the asters that were just planted still have flowers to attract any butterflies still in the area.

THANKS to everyone who helped me with the garden this season. I could not have done it without you!



THANK YOU:

Bird Seed Sale volunteers - Carla Bishop, Tom Morgan, Walter Dodd, Kevin Fay, Marge Muenzenberger, Susan Blackford, and Patricia Yeager.

Spooktacular volunteers - Joe Blackford, Susan Blackford (who provided great skeletons!) Jacque Staats, Patricia Yeager, Cindy Jeffrey and two zoo volunteers.



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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/yr. Make checks payable to the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, and mail to: Treasurer, NFHAS, P.O. Box 1932, Manhattan, KS, 66502-1932.

RARE BIRD HOTLINE: For information on Kansas Birds, subscribe to the Kansas Bird Listserve. Send this message <subscribe KSBIRD-L> to <list_serve@ksu.edu> and join in the discussions.

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