



the prairie falcon

**VOL. 29, No. 6
JANUARY 2001**

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

Dr. Charles Barden, K-State Research and Extension Forester, will present a talk entitled "Why Kansas Needs More Streambank Trees (aka Riparian Buffers)," that will describe the role that riparian forest buffers can play in Kansas to improve water quality in our lakes and streams. He will provide a brief summary on buffer research conducted nationally, and also describe some current projects he leads here in Kansas.

"Prairie grass filter strips can only do so much for a stream," Barden says, "while trees provide the long-term nutrient retention, and the deeper rooting needed to stabilize streambanks." If time allows, he will also provide some tips on making your own tree-planting endeavors more successful.

Barden, an associate professor with the department of Horticulture, Forestry, and Recreation Resources, has been with K-State three years, and worked in Oklahoma for five years. Although he was born and educated back east, he has grown to love the Midwest. A native of Rhode Island, he earned his BS degree in Natural Resources from the University of RI, a Master's from Virginia Tech in Forest Biology, and his Ph.D. came from Penn State's School of Forest Resources. A short stint with the US Forest Service rounds out his experience.

February 21, 2001 - 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 Cazar 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, Feb. 10th 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.

February Program:

**RIPARIAN
BUFFERS**

Charles Barden

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CONTRIBUTORS

**PETE COHEN
LEANN HARRELL
THOMAS MORGAN
MICHAEL RHODES
DAVE RINTOUL
JOHN WESLEY**

UPCOMING DATES:

- Feb. 10 Sat. 8 AM
BEGINNING BIRDING
Ackert/Durland parking lot**
- Feb. 10 Final Bird Feed Sale
ORDER DEADLINE**
- Feb. 16 Great Backyard
Bird Count**
- Feb. 21 Wed. 5:45 PM Dinner
7:30 PM Riparian Buffers
1014 Throckmorton, KSU
NE corner Denison/Claflin**
- Feb. 24 Final Bird Feed PICKUP
9:00 AM - 1:00 PM UFM,
1221 Thurston**
- Feb. 24 Stargazing on Lower
McDowell Creek, Overnight
Camping CALL 494-2556**

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BIRDING

DAVE RINTOUL

“ A man can scarcely point to anything like irrefutable evidence for the beginnings of spring. He knows that the sun arises a little earlier, and that the floods are going down. That the noons are mild, and that in the last pockets, under the hemlocks in the steep shaded glens, the snow lingers, or a paper of ice on the trout pools. There is an air of certain success to be detected in each day, as the warm yellow mists rise up and become soft patches of sunlit cloud in the sky; this geniality may last but an hour or two and give way, in the afternoon, to pale gray-blue skies and air with a keen edge to it.”

“An Almanac for Moderns,” Donald Culross Peattie (1935), G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York

The air has quite a keen edge on it as I write this in mid-January, but certainly spring is coming, and small clues can be seen by the observant. Cardinals are singing on fine mornings, titmouses are scrapping in the thickets for the best nesting territories, red-tailed hawks are sitting (albeit warily) side by side in the afternoons, and great horned owls are incubating eggs destined to become next winter's tigers of the night. February will bring even more clues, and the end of the month will include days that promise summer, making the nights seem even longer and colder by comparison.

Although most migration through this part of the continent doesn't start in earnest until March,

birds are undergoing physiological changes right now to prepare them for this event. They are also starting to pair up, finding the right partner for the next season, hoping to get a head start on producing the next



generation. Many ducks, like the Common Goldeneye shown here, are primping and preening, making sure that they impress the appropriate lady ducks. If you have a chance to spend some time looking at ducks this month, you will see all sorts of interesting behaviors designed to attract attention. Other birds will look more impressive at the end of the month too. Feathers will be brighter and more colorful, due not to a molt (which would be dangerous while it is still winter), but due to feather wear. Many birds, including house sparrows and cardinals, have dull brown edges on their freshly-grown

feathers in the fall. As the season progresses, these dull brown edges wear off, revealing the brighter colors underneath. So the birds look better, even though the feathers are now 5-6 months old!

But beauty is more than skin (or feather) deep. Birds are undergoing some serious physiological changes at this time of year. Puberty. Unlike humans, birds have to endure the equivalent of puberty and menopause every year. After the breeding season, sex hormone output declines, and avian gonads shrink. As the days grow longer in the spring, hormonal levels change and the gonads enlarge (the testes mass increases 400-500 fold in some male birds!). The hormones produced by the gonads initiate some of the other seasonal changes, such as increasing the frequency of songs, changes in bill color (e.g., starling bills become bright yellow in the breeding season), and other behaviors like aggression, migratory restlessness, etc. So hormonal storms are quietly raging inside that junco or titmouse at your feeder. Be thankful that you are a mammal, and don't have to deal with puberty and menopause on an annual basis! And get out there to see what the month brings to the prairies and woodlands of Kansas. Hints of spring are all around you. © 2001, Dave Rintoul, know where to look.

1999 Bluebird Nesting Box Count

Entwash (upper McDowell Creek Rd.): From 22 nesting boxes 30 Bluebirds, six House Wrens and six Black-capped chickadee were fledged. Mike Rhodes, monitor.

Stagg Hill Golf Course: From 30 nesting boxes, 78 Bluebirds and five Carolina Wrens were fledged. Edgar Bagley, monitor.

Yacht Club Trail: From nine boxes, five bluebirds were fledged. Sam Lacy, monitor.

Blue River Hills Trail: From 26 boxes, 71 bluebirds fledged of which two from one box were albino. Also 22 tree swallows and seven Bewicks wrens. Jean Wesley, monitor.

The future of bluebirds and tree swallows is now largely dependent on nesting boxes and monitors. If you have interest in starting a trail, or reporting the success of an existing one, please contact Jean or John Wesley at 9022 Blue Ridge Rd. Manhattan, KS 66503 or call 785-485-2856.

John Wesley



"Robert Pemberton, a weed scientist with the USDA Agricultural Research Service in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, recently leafed through old catalogs from the Royal Palm Nurseries, a famous, trend-setting company that bred and sold plants in Manatee county, Florida, from 1881 to 1937. He found that plants sold for just 1 year had only a 1.9% chance of establishing in the wild, while favorites that were in the catalog for over 3 decades had a 68.8% chance of taking hold."

Enserink, M. (1999) *Biological Invaders Sweep In. Science*

285:1834-1836.

In January, I received a catalog from Gurney's Seed & Nursery Company which advertized salsify seeds. According to this catalog, the edible roots have "... a flavor that hints of oysters." Salsify (*Tragopogon porrifolius*), meadow salsify (*T. pratensis*), and yellow salsify (*T. dubius*) are Eurasian species. They have been planted in gardens throughout our state. They have become naturalized and are now growing wild. Yellow salsify grows on the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve in Chase County and on the Konza Prairie in Riley County. Its yellow flower is pictured in Clenton Owensby's book, "Kansas Prairie Wildflowers." I agree with that author that naturalized species are worthy of inclusion in a book on wildflowers. Salsify resembles another naturalized species, the dandelion. I have a fondness for this naturalized species, and have enjoyed watching goldfinches feeding on dandelion seeds. Despite repeated requests from a neighbor, I have refused to discourage dandelions in my yard, except for occasionally eating them. I would like to eat salsify also. One expert claims that the roots are more palatable if harvested before the salsify produces a flower, while another expert states that palatability is improved by a hard frost, which merely reinforces my opinion that

there are no experts.

There is little overlap of the ranges of the species of *Tragopogon* in Eurasia. But there is considerable overlap of the ranges in North America. Yellow salsify has hybridized with meadow salsify and produced a new species (*Tragopogon miscellus*). The new species has only recently become established in large populations, and little is known about its potential functions on the prairie. Like yellow salsify, the new species tolerates dry soil. The new species occurs in northwestern states (Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming) and also in Arizona. It sometimes occurs in new places because of independent hybridization events which occur in that location. The parental species are in Kansas, but it is not known whether hybridization has occurred here.

The first hybridization probably occurred after 1930. The primary hybrid may have had low fertility, but after the occurrence of chromosome doubling, the new species had greater fertility. It was reproductively incompatible with the parental species, however, because of the extra genetic material. Some of its extra genes could take on unique functions in a hundred thousand years. In a million years, ... as it achieves a more perfect relationship with competitors, pollinators and

herbivores, the new species might become the one that is closest to achieving a perfect fit within the ecological community of a tallgrass prairie. I doubt that it was wise to introduce salsify and its relatives, but I would like to be here a million years from now to consider this intriguing question again. Additional species are being formed at the present time. Yellow salsify and salsify have hybridized to form another species (*T. mirus*) that is becoming widespread. The botanist, who discovered *T. mirus* and *T. miscellus*, introduced several exotic species of *Tragopogon* into his plots at the Department of Botany at Washington State University, and some of these species have hybridized and escaped from the university's gardens.

Please don't accept the opinions of others. Examine the information yourself. Visit the university library – the American Journal of Botany (78:1586-1600) has an incredibly interesting paper written by Novak et al. (1991) that examines population trends of *Tragopogon* species in the northwestern United States. Informative sites on the internet include a range map for *T. dubius*, http://stratsoy.ag.uiuc.edu/~vial/html_pubs/WEEDS/238.html, a range map for *T. porrifolius* and *T. pratensis*, <http://plants.usda.gov/>. Other intriguing sites include <http://www.best.com/~timj/herbage/A485.htm> and <http://waddell.ci.manchester.ct.us/id1290tsbea>

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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 MARIANO: contact Carla Bishop 539-5129



It's a likely temptation, when contemplating the constellations, to want to include in one's thought the stories of how each one in focus got its name. But a little research can dim one's enthusiasm because so many of the stories are loaded with gory violence driven by anger, jealousy, revenge and greed. not exactly bedtime fare.

Orion for example is said to have had his eyes put out and to have been murdered in at least three different ways resulting from at least two different affairs with women. I propose it wouldn't hurt to offer something cheerier.

Once upon a time, before power movers, when baseball was really "pasture pool" played where livestock had trimmed the grass and where a ball might disappear into rabbit hole pockets, a group of farm animals, weary of being chased off their favorite pasture every weekend, formed a team of their own. They learned to hold a bat or ball by teeth or claw and the resident bull became their star pitcher. his bone structure wouldn't let him throw overhand, yet by

gripping the ball with his cloven hoof he could flip a mean combination of knuckler and slider. So – there they were at the end of their very first season playing against a team of town men for the country's amateur championship. Because they were playing a large crowd had come, and dozens of reporters were focusing the nation's attention on this remote country contest.

In the bottom of the 9th they got into one of those wonderful duels with two outs and the count 3-and-2 and a huge fellow, Orion, who made his living hunting, at the bat. The Dog-Catcher slyly shifted his position before every pitch; the Bull-Thrower tried to give each toss a different spin, and the stirred-up batter, trying to wham it, and fouled off 17 straight pitches. Then came pitch 18 ...

Because of space limitations, what happened next will be told next month. meanwhile you can see the action just as those on the scene witnessed it. After dark each night the next few weeks, high in the western sky

Canis Major, Dog-Catcher, will be crouched behind the huge right-handed Orion, his bat uplifted, with Taurus, the Bull-Thrower, glaring toward the plate with his red eye. Gleaming Jupiter and subtler Saturn, will be hovering about Taurus' neck.

And if you want some other planetary refreshment, drink in Venus, lower in the west, at her brightest on February 21st. She'll already be appearing lower in the sky each night, and will make more or less a line with Jupiter, Saturn and the moon, on February 27th, and will be out of the ballpark by the end of March. mars meanwhile chats with the Moon just west of Scorpio's head on February 15th, on the 16th Mars is just north of Scorpio's heart, Antares. An interesting meeting because both are red bodies and Antares' name means "the anti-Mars" (considering Mars as the war-god), which seems more appropriate when they appear at opposite points in the sky. Mercury is very shy in the sky before dawns during this period. The moon, new Feb. 23rd, then full Mar. 9th, meets with Jupiter and Saturn Mar. 1st.

(CORRECTION: FULL MOON - Feb. 18th - not 8th as stated in Jan. issue)

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Great Backyard Bird Count - Feb. 16-19

Reports are made online at www.birdsource.org. The count was developed and is managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society.

To participate count the highest number of each bird species seen at one time, during any or all of the count days, however do not add the days together. Then log on to www.birdsource.org, and click on the appropriate state for a checklist. Project manager is Matthew McKown, mmckown@audubon.org.

Stop by the NFHAS booth at the
Manhattan Area Garden Show:

Friday, March 2nd 5:30 - 7:30 PM

**Saturday, March 3rd 9:00 AM -
5:00 PM**

Sunday March 4th 12:00 - 4:00 PM

You can order Audubon Store items,
sign-up for peonies and get general
information on Audubon activities.



Northeast Community Park UPDATE

LEANN HARRELL

After a brief rest it is now time to seed the prairie. I want to thank **Larry Patton**-KSU Agronomy, **Greg Kramos**-U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and **Kevin Religa**- Natural Resources Conservation Service for walking the site and giving important help along the way. Also, Brad Loveless with Western Resources Conservation program will contribute money toward the purchase of seed.

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society (NFHAS) member **Irene Johnson** will the Riley Co. Conservation District will make a no-till grass drill available and perhaps by the time this article appears I will have once again coerced her husband, **Rick Johnson**, into operating the equipment to plant the seed into the ground.

As I rode around in the tractor with Rick last spring, planting the sorghum cover crop, it was very moving to think that this was hopefully the last time that field would ever be plowed.

All the people who contributed to hand-collecting seeds

from the local area can feel good about adding 95 species to the diversity list. And thanks to **Tom Morgan** for weighing and formulating a list of material and to those who sat in my sunroom with me and helped clean the chaff from the seed. We will purchase additional grass and forb seed, but much that was hand-collected is not available commercially.

This is also the time of year when the new budget starts for Manhattan parks and Recreation Department. As a result of **Jan Garton's** work with neighborhood spokesperson, **Doug Benson**, money was placed in the CIP for grading and seeding to be done this year in the northern portion of the park. We consider this a triumph. Without the funding, the northern section, which will be the more active use area, would have continued to be farmed.

When the grading is complete, the drainage will be directed into a meandering waterway on its way to the Old Blue River Channel,

which is the southern boundary of the park. I have reason to think we will be eligible for a Clean Water Neighbor or Stream Steward EPA Grant to convert this area into a Wet Meadow, increasing the habitat potential.

Ralph Charlton- KSU Entomology and NFHAS member, who studies the threatened regal fritillary butterfly, has expressed his willingness to work with us on planting ideas, which will enhance the area for regal fritillaries, which frequent wet meadows in Nebraska where habitat is still available.

The remaining natural aspect of the park (called for in the master plan) is a woodland. NFHAS member **Donna Schenck-Hamlin** is currently pursuing the availability of grants to provide funding for this element. A big thanks to her.

I went into this knowing it would be a huge project – but now I know there is a huge list of people who have helped all along the way.

Cecil Best Birding Trail Dedication

On Sunday afternoon, Nov. 19th, some 70 people came out to face the strong winds that were notable even for Kansas, to honor the memory of Cecil Best and celebrate the dedication of the Cecil Best Birding Trail. Family and friends joined Audubon laborers and members of City Park Staff, Commission and Park Board for the dedication. Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society members Clyde Ferguson and Jim Koelliker spoke fondly and eloquently of their memories of associations with Cecil. Mayor Karen McCulloh assisted Pete Garfinkel in releasing his white doves as the official opening of the trail and the group walked the trail.

We wish to thank Gene Donovan for video taping the dedication and presenting a tape to the family members. And we thank Jan Garton, who, after all the hours and hours of work spent on lumber preparation and transportation and bridge building, still found the energy to organize this memorable dedication.

Two weekends later we were finally able to plant the shrubs and trees to supplement habitat along the trail. These plants had been waiting for the hot, dry summer of 2000 to finally break. Thanks to neighborhood residents and longtime park activists Marj and Steve Pfister for helping plant those trees along with Terri Branded, Jan Garton, and Leann Harrell. Additional thanks go to June Snitker of Master Landscape who donated some of the plants and to Duane Kerr who watered the other plants as they waited in pots for the heat to subside.

We will make additional plantings in the spring and will maintain the mowing of the trail next year. Don Yockey offered to make all the bluebird nest boxes for the trail. And he did make and install boxes, but even he may not have anticipated how many more hours we would “con” him into “volunteering” as he build and installed benches and was willing to serve as second-in-command under Jan Garton on the bridge construction. No small task, as anyone knows who has worked with Jan Garton. The bluebird boxes will be monitored by Peter Oviatt. Don also made an additional contribution of two of his well-known bird feeders for a fundraiser at December's Christmas Bird Count Dinner.



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P.O. Box 1932
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Edited by Cindy Jeffrey, 15850 Galilee Rd., Olsburg, KS 66520 (cinraney@ksu.edu)
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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.

RARE BIRD HOTLINE

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