



the prairie falcon

Vol. 30, No. 7
MARCH 2002

MARCH PROGRAM
Mar. 20

“Conservation &
Environmental
Education in Kansas”
Lori Hall

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

CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN KANSAS

Lori Hall, Director of Wildlife Education at the Rolling Hills Refuge Wildlife Conservation Center near Salina, will present an interactive program about conservation and environmental education in Kansas.

Currently, Lori is focusing on education about wildlife, emphasizing rare and endangered species, but she will also discuss the development of the Lakewood Natural Area and Discovery Center in Salina.

Lori was recognized as the Conservation Educator of the Year in 1999 by the Kansas Wildlife Federation, and was recently appointed to the Kansas Wildlife and Parks Commission by Governor Bill Graves.

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 Cazador 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. All meetings are open to the public.

Field Trips

BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK

Join us Saturday, March 9th 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.

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CONTRIBUTORS:

PETE COHEN
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UPCOMING DATES:

Mar 9 Beginning Birding 8 AM
Ackert Parking Lot

Mar 20 Wed. 5:45 PM DINNER
7:30 PM - PROGRAM
1014 Throckmorton, KSU
NE corner Denison/Claflin

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MARCH BIRDING

DAVE RINTOUL

"But I do not keep phenologies in the cause of science. Or drive the length of Nebraska every springtime and go to exactly the same place along the Platte River to watch the sandhill cranes because I am under the delusion that in doing so I will learn something undiscovered about them. If I were after information not already known to me, I would stay home, visit the library, request a computer printout of the references in the technical literature... I would do something, anything, systematic. There is nothing systematic about driving to North Platte, Nebraska, even repeatedly, and rolling down the car window."

Paul Gruchow,
"The Necessity of Empty Places," 1988,
St. Martin's Press, New York

The Oxford English Dictionary defines phenology as "the study of the times of recurring natural phenomena." But that is a pale shadow of a definition, and fails to convey the myriad impacts of such studies. To study the times of plant flowering, tree leafing-out, bird migration and/or nesting, insect swarming, etc. is to stay in tune with the natural cycles of the planet. Although in the 19th century this sort of study was relatively respectable, as were the "naturalists" who recorded such things, many scientists of the last century and the current one consider phenology to be mostly useless. It is damned as "only descriptive," and deemed vastly inferior to "experimental," "hypothesis-driven" scientific enterprises, which are credited for great progress in science, and for taking scientists to new heights of understanding. This loss of respect for phenology is coupled inextricably with an increasing loss of contact with the natural world, and such coupling is

part of an inward and downward hubristic spiral that bodes ill for our species, and our future as fellow-travelers with all the other species on Earth. There is value in phenology, and good records of natural phenomena are incredibly important in our attempts to understand the anthropogenic changes in climate and the resulting changes in the activities of the creatures who share the planet with us.

However, as Gruchow points out, there are other reasons besides science to keep phenological records. March in the Great Plains is absolutely one of the best times to rediscover those reasons. The vast and diverse flocks of waterfowl that stream northward this month are one reason. And the sandhill cranes, coming to the Platte in March as they have done for millennia, are surely one of the best reasons to keep track of the seasons. Coming from Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and even Arizona and Kansas, over half a million sandhill cranes will converge on the Big Bend region of the Platte River in central Nebraska this month. The sight and sound of a flock of cranes winging overhead is a required marker in my phenology. The resonant roar of the roosting birds as they take off at dawn from the Platte is a primal signal. It is heard with the ears, processed in the brain, but delivered ultimately to the gut. You feel it just as it must have been felt by paleo-Americans 10,000 years ago, and early humans in the Nile valley a million years ago. The Latin word for crane, *grus*, is a sound that is found not only in the voices of the birds, but in the roots of early Indo-European languages, and is still a part of our Linnean description of the birds (*Grus canadensis* is the sandhill crane; *Grus*

americana is the endangered whooping crane). Cranes and humans go back a long way together, and some of that history seems to be hard-wired into us, making the visceral connection that we get from the sound of a lifting flock of sandhill cranes on the Platte.

Phenologies of exits as well as entrances can be kept as well. This month the spectacular winter flocks of Lapland (and other) longspurs will depart from western Kansas. Rough-legged hawks will likewise depart, as will many of the Northern harriers and dark-phase red-tailed hawks. Some smaller birds, like the American tree sparrows and Harris' sparrows, will be with us for another month or so, taking wing for the breeding grounds in April or even early May. All of these phenologies have been scientifically tied to food abundance, weather, day-length, and other, perhaps more mysterious causes. But these cycles of life, whether studied for science or experienced for personal enlightenment and pleasure, can serve to keep us connected to a world which existed long before cell phones, computers, and stock options. So get out there and reconnect this month, it is a great time to be alive and outdoors in the Great Plains, and next month will be even better!



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"I can recall the sound of the wind, as it blew through the trees and the trees would bend. And I can recall the smell of the rain on a hot summer night coming through the screen. I'd crawl in your bed when the lightning flashed and I'd still be there when the storm had passed."

Lyrics of "Only a Dream"

by Mary-Chapin Carpenter, 1992

The Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*) has been widely planted because it is able to survive droughts and grow rapidly into a large shade tree. This species is commonly known as the Chinese elm although that name is most properly used to refer to *Ulmus parvifolia* which flowers in the fall. In contrast, the Siberian elm flowers during the late winter, at the same time as native elms.

The pollen of an elm tree is unable to fertilize that tree, and the flowers of that individual tree wait for the light pollen of other individuals which may float on the wind for long distances. Pollen of Siberian elms can fertilize many of our native species, including the slippery elm (*Ulmus rubra*). The resulting hybrids are somewhat resistant to Dutch elm disease, and therefore, the natural selection by

the disease provides hybrids with an advantage over native elms. Perhaps this will cause the extinction of traits that are unique to native elms, although that is simply my own speculation.

The tree outside my bedroom window, when I was a child, was a Siberian elm. I liked that huge tree, although it had been scarred by a bolt of lightning, and it shed limbs during storms. My father didn't waste money on air conditioning and during hot nights, and I would provide my own cooling, by removing the sheets from my bed and soaking them in water before putting them back on my bed, and then I would feel grateful to that elm for not letting my room get any hotter.

Non-native elms are still recommended for planting (although the Siberian elm is

considered invasive in Illinois and some other states). Planting non-native trees is a practice that was considered harmless by our forefathers. In contrast, the use of transgenic crops has occurred for a short time, and some people seem to believe that transgenic crops endanger the continued existence of natural landscapes. A non-native species has thousands of foreign genes, however, and could be disruptive to thousands of characteristics that have evolved in the geographic region that we know and love.

If non-native elms could easily hybridize with the American elm (*Ulmus americana*), everything about the disruptive hybridization would be scrutinized by environmental groups. But the slippery elm is a native tree which has value, and I will try to describe its value next month.

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ONE MORE...

A flock of turkey are called ?

-- a faculty of turkey!
(Thank you John Zimmerman)



I'm reminded by *The Old Farmer's Almanac* of a William Faulkner phrase that "the past ain't dead, it ain't even past." That seems as true of the cosmos as of his Yoknapatawpha County, with the light from stellar events that happened light-years ago still reaching us. This dovetails with the expression that the past is prelude, for thus we're all living in the past – as prelude to a notable alignment of the planets due from mid-April into May.

On March 15th Venus is beginning to make a bright, brief little mark in the sunset glows, to the lower right of the crescent moon on that date, with dim-ish Mars a little above the moon, and Saturn and Jupiter still starting the evening well above us, still in Taurus and in Gemini. They will all be a necklace of planets whose string will steadily shorten as Venus lingers more and the others appear each evening further down to the west, and by mid-April Mercury will become a bead on the lower end. From night to night Old Man Moon, waxing and waning, will be traveling along the beads to make sure they're freshly shined. The last such an alignment was in May, 2000,

an occasion hardly worth buffing up for, since it occurred invisibly in daylight.

Meanwhile, in case you're into triangles, *StarDate* predicts Saturn, Jupiter, and Auriga's brightest star, Capella, will be describing one that will become equilateral on April 1st, about 27 degrees to a side (about the width of three extended fists), Capella to their right. Through the same evenings the much smaller tricorn of Saturn, Mars, and Taurus' red eye, Aldebaran, will be steadily shrinking as the planet "beads" keep sliding closer together.

While you're waiting, you could test your eyesight against the star cluster called M44. For some it's a fuzzy glow in the middle of Cancer the Crab, the constellation that modestly, with just a few dim naked-eye stars, inhabits the Zodiac between Gemini moving ahead and Leo coming behind. It provides lots of dark space to find a glow in. The cluster is called the Beehive because it's dome-shaped when scoped.

The so-called Equinox will happen at 1p16, March 20th, as the Sun in its sky travels,

crosses the celestial equator northward. Actually, it'll be March 17th when day and night share the sky equally with 12 hours each. There seems always a little extra wrinkle, or tilt, to these mileposts.

Like in the reports of the date of the Full Moon. Actually the Moon's fully full only at the moment it is directly opposite the Sun, as we see them. That special moment can come at any hour. February's Moon reached fullness before 5 AM on the 27th; because of that you might have seen the 27th listed for Full. Or because at 5 AM the sky was still dark, and because the Full Moon is a night affair and we tend to name our darknesses by the day on which they begin, you might've seen Full listed as the 26th, when the moon could've seemed rounder for being closer to Full than on the next night of the 27th. During the period ahead it is Full on March 27th at 1p25 standard time, New on April 12th at 3p21, daylight time.

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(Note: 1p16 is 1:16 PM, 1p25 is 1:25 PM, and 3p21 is 3:21PM)



www.americanbirding.org/bex

Birders' Exchange collects new and used field equipment and distributes it, free of charge, to conservationists, researchers, and educators working to conserve Neotropical migrant and resident birds in Latin America and the Caribbean. Birders' Exchange was founded in 1990 by the Manomet Center for Conservation Science (MCCS). In 1996, MCCS partnered with ABA to run the program, and a productive partnership blossomed, building on the extensive birder network of ABA and the conservation links with Latin America at MCCS. Now, MCCS and ABA have reached an agreement to move the program in its entirety to the American Birding Association. Since 1990, Birders' Exchange has sent 1,800 binoculars, 1,025 field guides, 275 backpacks, 150 cameras, 200 scopes, 150 tripods, and other tools to more than 350 programs in over 30 Latin American and Caribbean countries. This equipment enhances awareness of birds, and it empowers local people to make wise conservation decisions.

SANDHILL CRANES

www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/othrdata/platteco/cranes.htm
Platte River Ecology Study - lots of information.

www.ngpc.state.ne.us/wildlife/cranes.html
Information, history, maps of Platte River

www.savingcranes.org/species/sandhill.asp
The International Crane Foundation (ICF) works worldwide to conserve cranes and the wetland and grasslands communities on which they depend. ICF is dedicated to providing experience, knowledge, and inspiration to involve people in resolving threats to these ecosystems.

<http://genie.esu10.k12.ne.us/~tesmile/crane.htm>
Check out the resources provided by the teachers at Overton Schools: List of the best websites concerning Sandhill cranes.

Alaska's point of view
<http://www.state.ak.us/local/akpages/FISH.GAME/notebook/bird/crane.htm>

Oregon's point of view
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon/kids/kidswildlifesite/birds/wetlandbirds/sandhillcranes.htm> Great site for Kids

California's point of view
<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/gallery/cranes.html>
California Viewing Guide

BUTTERFLIES

<http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/butterflies/>
American Museum of Natural History - great pictures

<http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/distr/lepid/bflyusa/bflyusa.htm>
Butterflies of North America - maps, distribution, photos,

<http://butterflywebsite.com/Resource/index.cfm#research>
LINK to all sorts of websites about Butterflies and Moths

<http://www.butterflies.com/>
Somewhat commercial site, but good section on Butterfly Gardening

<http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/Environment/NHR/lepidoptera.html>
Interesting article on Monarchs, Viceroy

<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~mariposa/homepage.html>
This is a web site to coordinate observations of territorial behavior, migration, life history, population studies, seasonal variations in abundance and body size, and number of broods per year (voltinism) of butterflies in the genus *Vanessa*, including *Vanessa atalanta*, *V. cardui*, *V. virginiensis*, *V. annabella*, *V. tameamea*, and *V. kershawi*. (Red Admiral, Painted Lady, American Lady, West Coast Lady, Kamehameha Butterfly, and Australian Painted Lady). Department of Entomology, Iowa State University

<http://www.ksu.edu/butterfly/>
Kansas State Butterfly Conservatory and Insect Zoo Home Page - Information - check here to find out when it will be open again - and other information.



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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 \$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 Information - Join the Kansas Birding Listserv by sending this message (subscribe KSBIRD-L) to this address (listserv@ksu.edu) to get up-to-the-minute information on birds in Kansas.

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Write - or call

Governor Bill Graves: 2nd Floor, State Capitol Bldg., Topeka KS 66612. Kansas Senator or Representative _____: State Capitol Bldg., Topeka KS 66612, Ph.# (during session only) - Senate: 913-296-7300, House: 913-296-7500. Senator Roberts or Brownback: US Senate, Washington DC 20510. Representative _____: US House of Representatives, Washington DC 20515. U.S. Capitol Switchboard : 202-224-3121. President W. Bush, The White House, Washington DC 20500.

Information about progress of a particular piece of legislation can be obtained by calling the following numbers: In Topeka - 800-432-3924; in Washington - 202-225-1772. Audubon Action Line - 800-659-2622, or get the latest on WWW at <http://www.audubon.org/campaign/aa/>