



the prairie falcon

**VOL. 29, No. 8
APRIL 2001**

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

April 18, 2001

Saving the world's birds: The science of priority setting for avian biodiversity. Dr. Dusty Becker

How quickly is avian biodiversity being lost?
Where should we put our efforts to save birds and why?

Dr. Dusty Becker will provide you with an overview of the science behind global strategies for bird conservation and introduce you to a few ideas of her own. She is currently on the faculty at Kansas State University.

Before each program, we invite our speakers to join us for an informal dinner and discussion. Feel free to join us this month at Coco Bolo's 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, Apr. 14th 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.

April Program:

**AVIAN
BIODIVERSITY
Dr. Dusty Becker**

INSIDE

- 2 NATURAL COMPANIONS**
- 2 BIRDATHON**
- 3 ANIMAL OF THE MONTH**
- 4 SKYLIGHT**
- 5 TAKE NOTE**

CONTRIBUTORS:

**PETE COHEN
JAN GARTON
LEANN HARRELL
THOMAS MORGAN
MICHAEL RHODES
DAVE RINTOUL
JUDY ROE**

UPCOMING DATES:

- Apr. 14 Sat. 8 AM
BEGINNING BIRDING
Ackert/Durland parking lot
BOOKSIGNING 11AM - 1PM
Claflin Bookstore**
- Apr. 18 Wed. 5:45 PM DINNER
7:30 PM - PROGRAM
1014 Throckmorton, KSU
NE corner Denison/Claflin**
- Apr. 28 Monthly CAMPOUT
Call 539-1956**
- Apr. 28 BIRDATHON Call 539-7080**

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NATURAL COMPANIONS PART 1

DRU CLARKE

The house, build in or around 1873 – the first year taxes were paid on it – seemed to sigh when we opened the swollen west porch door, no one had continuously inhabited it since the 1950s and it may have been relieved to finally regain its usefulness as shelter and gathering place. For we planned, in time, to make it our retirement home, smaller and more efficient than our present one.

Not that no living thing had taken advantage of its vacant rooms and protective walls. Made of several thousand blocks of limestone hewn from nearby outcrops, the house was sturdy and dry and maintained a bearable range of temperature for what we would come to call “our natural companions.” Before we officially bought the place, centered in an odd-shaped 127 acre chunk of prairie wood in the Flint Hills, we walked around the house one warm March day and saw what we thought were truncated electric cables, hanging like hooks under the eaves. halfway around, one

hook moved, albeit languidly, and we realized our error; sixteen black rat snakes were warming themselves in the early spring heat. Although this event gave us pause, by the week’s end we decided that if they could live with us, we somehow could find a way to live with them, and signed the papers. The snakes have since moved to a hibernaculum in an empty well near the house.

The cellar, with its compacted earth floor and empty canned goods shelves, had its complement of live toads, an occasional frog, and ringneck snakes. Shed skins - one over six feet long - hung from the log beams that supported the century-old house. These were obviously not of ringneck origin. A really impressive ringneck might reach a foot, but the most I’ve seen resemble bright worms. Evidently the rat snakes had found not only the eaves to their liking. (I’ve read since that black snakes can exceed eight feet in length! And because of their propensity to defy gravity - they like to climb - we learned to always look up

when entering the cellar.)

The next spring, after a rain had dampened the south-facing stone wall, hackberry butterflies swarmed its surface, sipping mineralized drops, creating a fluttering facade as they jerkily hinged their tawny wings like arthritic fingers creaking open to welcome the sun.

Box elder bugs, those darned “Democrats” with their red and black geometry and proletarian ways - invaded in winter, communing on window sills and patrolling the floors of each room like tiny arthropod sentinels. Spiders set up housekeeping in every corner, making fuzzy grey balls to swaddle their eggs. We clean up their piled droplets of excrement that resemble miniature bird droppings, but leave the thin webs, and dangle a towel over the edge of the tub as an escape for the careless ones who fall into its slippery smooth trap. Annie Dillard taught us that in “Pilgrim at Tinker Creek” and its been a satisfying lesson. *(to be ontinued next month)*

Dru Clarke © March 2001

(NFHAS president - mid 1970s, taught marine Science and Field/Stream Ecology at MHS)



ANNUAL BIRDATHON

It is time for our annual major fund raising event, the **NFHAS Birdathon**. Funds raised by this event will again be used to help with several local NFHAS projects in Manhattan, as well as to support our local and regional conservation activities. A portion of the funds will go towards the Northeast Community Park (Northview), the butterfly garden at Sojourner Truth Park, conservation activities at our Michel-Ross Audubon Preserve, and other local projects. In the past, we (you, our sponsors) have donated Birdathon funds to the Washington Marlatt Park, the Rowe Sanctuary on the Platte River in Nebraska, and our El Salvador sister chapter. Many of our on-going projects and activities, such as wildlife

April 2001 pg. 2

APRIL 18

preservation, publication of the Prairie Falcon, and bringing in special speakers for our monthly programs are also partly funded with Birdathon funds.

Several NFHAS members will be counting this Birdathon. Pledges are based on how many species they can spot on April 28. If a counter contacts you, we hope you will sponsor them for their count. The pledges do not have to be large; dimes, quarters and dollars add up quickly when many participate. If you want to pledge a set amount, that works great also. On average, we see between 100 and 120 species on a good trip. The counters will report how many species they saw (or heard), and will ask you to send in your pledged amount.

PLEDGE NOW.....\$\$\$....

If you are not contacted directly and would like to sponsor a “Team Audubon” Birdathon counter, contact Judy Roe (Birdathon Coordinator - 539-5519), or just send a note to: Birdathon, NFHAS, PO Box 1932, Manhattan KS 66505, and we will apply your pledge to one of the counters for you. We’ll provide a list of the species counted. Also, if you would like to be a counter, please call the coordinator. A complimentary newsletter subscription will be awarded to anyone giving a donation of \$20 or more to the Birdathon. Your donations and the donations of your sponsors are a tax deductible contribution. Please help us continue to support the preservation of nature. Thank you in advance. *Judy Roe*



If you have cats, you may have suspected that they are not highly intelligent. I have seen advertisements that claim that domestic cat breeds with bobcat ancestry are extremely intelligent, ... but I have my doubts. Cooperative societies seem to be characteristic of intelligent animals, and neither the domestic cat or the bobcat lives in cooperative groups. I can certainly identify with their lack of social skills. Although I consider myself reasonably intelligent, I did not learn enough social skills as a boy, and often find myself challenged by social situations. So I identify with solitary creatures.

The bobcat's lack of sophistication extends into more important areas. Even after watching another creature step into a trap, it fails to understand the consequences of such actions, and will trigger a trap itself. Fortunately, the market price for bobcat fur has declined. The bobcat is a nocturnal predator, but it is occasionally sighted during the day. The mystery of its behavior challenged one of my favorite authors, Hope Ryden. She wrote in her book, "Bobcat Year" (1981), that *"... the bobcat's tendency to hide stems not so much from fear as from a simple desire to be alone. Bobcats, once they looked me over and determined I was no threat, hunted, fished, and groomed as if I did not exist. One cat even invited me to tag along behind her while she searched the brush for mice and rabbits. For longer than an hour I followed her, and whenever I lagged too far behind, she stopped, looked back, and wagged her stubby tail, as if summoning a kitten to follow."*

The under surface of the tail is white. It may be easier for kittens to follow the leader, when the leader holds the tail high enough to show the white, under surface. The upper surface is mostly black, but the bands of black are interspersed with narrow, tawny bands and the tip is white. The bobcat holds its tail high as a signal of friendliness. This is an example of the incompatibility of the language of the bobcat and the coyote, because the coyote holds its tail high when it wishes to communicate its aggressive intentions. Neither the bobcat or the coyote seem to have discovered how to communicate a desire for peace. If a coyote raises its paw in an invitation to play, the bobcat interprets this as a threat, because it is aware of the claws in that paw. When the coyote attempts to warn off a bobcat, it draws its legs in closer and rounds its spine like an enraged house cat. The bobcat interprets this as threatening because it raises its shoulders above the face with wide ruffs of fur on each side to present an enlarged face.

Communication between these species seems destined to fail and even when the coyote has had enough and rolls over to beg for mercy, this is misinterpreted as an offensive movement to free its legs for fighting.

The male bobcat gives up his solitude when females come into heat in February. When he fights for a female, he fights to kill. However, he seems to lose his bloodlust when his opponent becomes less aggressive and the looser can often retire with only a few more scars to show for it. They

seldom fight to defend their hunting territories. They are more aggressive than the lynx, however, and will displace the lynx from its territory, driving it farther north, where the bobcat itself can not survive, because it is unable to walk on top of loose snow. If a snowfall forces the bobcat to attempt to eat a frozen carcass, it finds that it is unable to eat the frozen meat, because of the absence of a shearing action in its teeth. It will hunt most animals, including deer, but its favorite prey are cottontail rabbits. Without a high population of rabbits, a mother has little chance of raising her kittens. After the kittens grow up, they become solitary, because they require large territories that they can gradually patrol.

I had an encounter with a bobcat. I was climbing a hill, with labored breath, as night gave way to twilight. During such moments, every perception seems etched into my consciousness, and my entire consciousness is filled with the immediate moment. I see her. She is on a slab of limestone at the head of a ravine. Her motion flows with easy gracefulness. She leaps with uncanny gracefulness. A half grown kitten leaps after her. A second kitten leaps after them. I envy their ability to leap free. I am too old to do so, but will be young enough to imagine being so graceful as long as I live. I also envy them because they are unshackled by social constraints. As long as they live freely, I will know that such freedom truly

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BOOKSIGNING

April 14th between 11:00 AM and 1:00 PM, Claflin Books and Copies, 1814 Claflin Rd.

Chris Cokinos – "Hope is the Thing with Feathers, A Personal Chronicle of Vanished Birds"

Elizabeth Dodd – "Archetypal Light"

Both authors are members of our local chapter and have written wonderful books. That is also the second Saturday of the month and that means "Beginning Birdwalk" – so make it an Audubon Day! Join Dave Rintoul at 8:00 AM in the Ackert parking lot, he will have you back by 11:00 AM – just in time to go to the booksigning.



Our Moon is not only a satellite, it's also a star, playing a leading role, giving visual substance to so many songs. Right off the cuff I think of "By the Light of the Moon," that old "Harvest Moon," that old "Devil Moon" and "Blue Moon," "Moonlight Sonata," and go "Racing With the Moon" off to "Moon Over Miami," plus "Claire de Lune," just for starters. On the WWII home front the air was full of "the stars at night are big and bright, deep in the heart of Texas." We've remembered when "Stars Fell on Alabama," joined Hoagy Carmichael in beseeching "That Ol' Buttermilk Sky" to help our wooing and thought wistfully of that "Lucky Ol' Sun" who's got nothing to do but roll around heaven all day.

But aside from the musical *Hair's* declaration about the "Age of Aquarius," I can't think of any song about constellations. No guitarist has strummed "Old Paint, Old Pal, Old Pegasus," nor has any poet like Edgar Allen Poe, memorialized his lovely "Andromeda Lee." It can't be just that Moon and Sun are easier to rhyme

with. "Sweet Genevieve" was not left ignored along the wall, even though hardly a rhyming partner could be found, and "John Jacob Jingleheimer Smith" has made the rounds from grungy bars to Girl Scout cookouts. While the Bears, Big and Little, are up there offering guidance ever night, unsung. Even the queen rocks alone in her chair; why hasn't "Hey, Cassiopeia, we can see ya – " become the start of something real jazzy?

Well, I'm far from knowing all the songs of history, and out of the loop of what is modernly being voiced and recorded, so maybe I'm missing some things. If not, there seems to be sky-wide, year-around opportunity available.

Songs to sing from mid-April to mid-May include a gradual farewell to the Jupiter-Saturn duo that's been so bright these past many months. Saturn will be riding off into the sunset late in the period. "Sky and Telescope's Almanac" predicts it'll pass just 3 1/2 degrees below Mercury on May 6th, and Jupiter will whisper vespers with Mercury westward,

just 2 3/4 degrees apart on May 15th. Then they'll do half a dos-a-dos with mercury rising higher (though still near the horizon) in the days that follow. (A closed fist at arm's length covers about 10 degrees. That's given as a general rule on the theory that small fists have short arms, etc.)

Mars will continue bright, rising SE in Sagittarius in the late evening, a little earlier each night. Venus will sparkle a little higher in the eastern dawn light each day. The moon will be new April 23rd and full May 7th. It'll hang suspended above Jupiter, to the left of Capella, to the right of Procyon, and below Castor and Pollux (the Gemini twins) on April 27th, and skid just above Regulus in Leo on May 1st.

Don't know about a silver lining to any clouds, but might look for a couple pre-dawn meteor showers: the Lyrids around April 22nd, the Eta Aquarids (a spray from Halley's comet) around May 4th - maybe 3-5/minute, from what I read.

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THANK YOU!

Many THANKS to **Joyce Delahanty Hoyt** for her generous contribution to the Land Preservation Fund. We are another step closer to being able to secure a conservation easement on the **Michel-Ross Audubon Preserve**. *Jan Garton*

THANK YOU!

A big THANK YOU to all the people who made NFHAS's participation in the Manhattan Area Garden Show possible on March 2-4. John Tatarko deserves special praise for arranging for a booth, putting together the display board, recruiting workers and working himself. Don Yockey built and contributed bird feeders and birdhouses for us to sell. The booth was open Friday evening, all day Saturday, and Sunday afternoon. Volunteers manning the booth were: Donna Schenck-Hamlin, Leann Harrell, Irene Johnson, Gerry Snyder, Jan Garton, Dolly Gudder, Judy Roe, Janet Throne, Carla Bishop, John Tatarko, Cindy Jeffrey, Alice Blecha, and Patricia Yeager.

The event was profitable for the chapter – we grossed \$534 plus \$88 collected from raffling one of the birdfeeders (congratulations to the winner, Deb Hamil of Manhattan) – but just as importantly, it was a great opportunity for distributing our literature on naturalistic landscaping and gardening with habitat in mind. We hope to participate again next year. Thanks to everyone who worked, created, organized and stopped by our booth. It would not have happened without your help. *Leann Harrell*



WILL YOU STILL WANT TO LIVE IN MANHATTAN IN 20 YEARS?

Are you concerned about....

- * The real cost of growth in our community?
- * Where retail stores will be located in the future?
- * Loss of open space and prime farmland?
- * New development in floodplains?
- * A community sense of place?
- * Drainage problems in neighborhoods?
- * Habitat preservation

These are all elements of the Manhattan Urban Area Comprehensive Plan, which is the official policy guide for decisions affecting the sustainable use and development of land, and the provision and expansion of public facilities and services. The Comp Plan is the guiding document for decisions concerning land use patterns, environmental resources, parks and open space, desired growth areas, density of development, housing, economic development, community character, and historic preservation and conservation.

The City of Manhattan and Riley County are currently undertaking a joint planning initiative to update the Manhattan Urban Area Comprehensive Plan, originally adopted in 1991. The city anticipates this process will take about two years to complete. Public participation will be an important part of this effort,

Join with us in a citizen-sponsored workshop to learn more about what the comp plan is, why it's important, who uses it, and how it influences public decision-making. You'll also discover more about what's involved in updating the comp plan, and how YOU can participate effectively in that process. Learn how to make your voice heard by attending our

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 101 WORKSHOP
Thursday, April 5, 2001 7:00 PM
Headquarters Fire Station (Denison & Kimball)
Sponsored by: Sustainable Manhattan,
Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society,
and the Manhattan/Riley County League of Women Voters

FEBRUARY BIRDSEED SALE

What a miserable day for the February pickup especially considering the sale was about twice its usual size. As we were unloading the truck amidst a downpour, the water was flowing over the curbs on Thurston Street. Rainwear was *de rigueur* as the stylish foursome Jan Garton, Walter Dodds, Carla Bishop, and myself unloaded the order leaving the 50 pounders outside under the overhang and taking everything else into the fireplace room—how very exciting. Thankfully, in the time between unloading and 9:00 o'clock, the rain stopped so that when Marge Muenzenberger appeared with the expanded store inventory, nary a drop fell upon her uncovered head. Carla Bishop made most of the deliveries. Tom Morgan filled orders during the entire pickup and made the final delivery of the day. Jan Garton demonstrated her characteristic "Field Marshall" tendencies with typical aplomb. Leann Harrell appeared about 10:15 with refreshments and pleasant conversation.

Michael Rhodes

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 MAILING: contact Carla Bishop 539-5129



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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

Kansas (statewide): 316-229-2777
Kansas City area (incl. W. MO): 785-342-2473
Nebraska (statewide): 402-292-5325

NFHAS Board:

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Addresses & Phone numbers of Your Elected Representatives (time)

Write ✉ - or call ☎ (any-time)

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/>