



the prairie falcon

**VOL. 29, No. 9
MAY 2001**

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

Robert Rook:

“Water in the 21st Century”

Water is a growing concern in Kansas and around the globe. Contests over river basins, groundwater supplies, and water quality will only intensify in the 21st century. The history of these controversies will be explored along with some possible solutions.

Robert Rook is an assistant professor at Fort Hays State University. He obtained his Ph.D. in American History from Kansas State University and also holds an M.A. from Bowling Green State University in Ohio. He has also lived and worked in the Middle East studying international water policy.

This program is sponsored in part by the Kansas Humanities Council which is a non-profit organization with offices in Topeka that provides community based cultural and educational programs for adults statewide.

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, please bring your own cup. All meetings are open to the public.

Field Trips

BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK

Saturday, May 12th -NORTH AMERICAN MIGRATION COUNT. The Beginning Birding Walk will not be offered, since this is the day of the North American Migration Count. Birders who want to help count birds that day should contact Hoogy - hoogy@kansas.net or 539-7080.

May Program:

Water in the 21st Century

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UPCOMING DATES:

**May 12 NORTH AMERICAN
MIGRATORY BIRD DAY
CALL 539-7080**
**May 16 Wed. 5:45 PM DINNER
7:30 PM - PROGRAM
1014 Throckmorton, KSU
NE corner Denison/Claflin**
**May 26 Monthly CAMPOUT
Call 539-1956**

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"We inflict suffering upon ourselves when we let our purposes interfere with the way the world works. Our view is subverted by our egos; we just don't want to see through the eyes of our neighbor, including the biota with which we share the planet. Often our view is truncated by ignorance; we just can't see very far through the haze of uncertainty. And often we decide that the extended consequences of our actions have less value than the immediate rewards. We are impatient. But the important lesson to be learned, I think, is that what we do does make a difference in the future of the biosphere and that this is the arena in which our decisions need to be made. We need to correct our myopia by broadening our vision. We must learn to see that there is value in what appears to be superfluous. There is value in standing dead."

J.L. Zimmerman, *The Birds of Konza: The Avian Ecology of the Tallgrass Prairie* (1993), University Press of Kansas

John's Zimmerman's homily, entitled "In Praise of Standing Dead," has important lessons on two levels. The primary message is that standing dead grass, which appears superfluous to ranchers and is consequently burned off annually in the Flint Hills, has value for some bird species. In the Flint Hills, Henslow's Sparrows nest only in prairies which have not been burnt that spring; the standing dead grass is important to the breeding success of this declining species. Woodpeckers,

bluebirds, and many other cavity nesting birds find value in standing dead trees, which are scorned by foresters and homeowners alike because they are "unsightly." So birdwatchers need to know these things just to help them find the birds.

But the second message is a bit deeper, and maybe even troubling. As Zimmerman says, we need to learn to look through the eyes of our neighbors, and the birds, for now at least, are our neighbors. These days it is easy to justify a new road, or subdivision, or feedlot, or oil drilling, or relaxation of arsenic standards, or lower standards for Kansas water quality, simply on the basis that it is "good for people", or, even more insidious, "good for the economy." People definitely come first in the calculations of the politicians, because only people vote. That means that it is more important than ever to look (and vote) as if people were not the only organisms on the planet. There is no doubt that we would not survive long if we were alone on Earth. But there is also no doubt that this realization is not a primary concern of most folks, who worry more about their utility bills than the long term future for their children or

grandchildren. That may be "only human," but it is also very short-sighted. We are not alone, and we really don't want to be...

May is a good month to start to practice that new vision. Birds will be all around us, as orioles, buntings, cuckoos and warblers (like the Kentucky warbler pictured here) arrive to start on the hectic task of raising the next generation before the summer's end. Shorebirds will be winging their way to the Arctic, and sparrows will be making a dash for the northern prairies. None of



them are trying to push us out of the picture; it would be nice if that was a reciprocal agreement. Make an effort to learn about them, study their needs,

and appreciate their challenges. Look at the world with their eyes, and see the value in open spaces, clean water and unpolluted air, or standing dead grass. These birds need some of those resources too; we can't just keep taking more and more because it is "good for people." In the long run it won't be good at all. In fifty years when your utility bill is long forgotten, you won't want your grandchildren to wonder why you didn't worry more about their future and less about the economy in 2001.

© 2001 Dave Rintoul



In May in Manhattan, Kansas, if you see a butterfly with an incredibly beautiful, iridescent blue color on its hind-wing, it will be a pipevine swallowtail (*Battus philenor*). The female has just emerged from her chrysalis and is looking for a mate, and then she is looking for a plant, the Dutchman's pipe. This flowering vine grows abundantly over a trellis at Sojourner Truth Park and at other locations in Manhattan. The female lays eggs on this host as well as other pipevines, but the closest native pipevine (*Aristolochia tomentosa*) is native to southeastern Kansas. Pipevines do not appear to be invasive in natural habitats in our part of Kansas, and their beautiful flowers as well as their beautiful swallowtails are a wonderful addition to our city.

The pipevine swallowtail and the various pipevines have shared a long history. In east Texas, the swallowtail caterpillars consume nearly half of the leaf crop of *A. reticulata*. The caterpillars also consume the fruit crop of *A. reticulata* when it is accessible. Perhaps as a response to this selection pressure on *A. reticulata*, its fruits usually occur below

ground, where the caterpillars can't reach them. The underground fruits have little opportunity to disperse their seeds, and this could become important in the future. However, anything that can fly has an excellent opportunity to extend its range, and the pipevine swallowtail has extended its range into our city to take advantage of our vines.

In east Texas, the second generation of *B. philenor* is limited by the availability of hosts. When the female can not find a suitable host, can she take advantage of the south wind and travel long distances, perhaps even to Kansas? The closest relative of *B. philenor* in the United States is *B. polydamus*, a species which occurs in southern Texas, but can stray as far north as Missouri. It seems inevitable that this beautiful butterfly will extend its range to the north as the climate becomes warmer.

B. philenor appears to be an important model for many species that mimic it. The resemblance of the mimics to the model is far from perfect, and some butterfly enthusiasts are doubtful that the mimicry is real. The power of the

aristolochic acids, that *B. philenor* acquires from its host, is important in the sequence of cause and effect, however. These chemicals are toxic (in fact, they will kill the caterpillars of other butterflies such as the black swallowtail), and are so distasteful that a hungry blue jay may release the swallowtail without injuring it very much. This is in contrast to the palatability of butterflies such as the monarch, which has no protection at all from inexperienced predators, because its chemicals are too slow acting.

The immediate stimulus of the protective acids seems to be an effective way of training blue jays to leave butterflies alone when they look vaguely similar to pipevine swallowtails. The presence of these swallowtails may make the life of a jay more interesting, as it chases a swallowtail, while maintaining a wary respect for the sensations that it might experience when it touches it with its tongue. I may never be able to experience the sensations that a jay feels, but I feel fortunate to live in a world of such wondrous complexity, where every type of creature affects so many others.

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Guardians of the Plains Fred Downs Atchison

Windbreak trees in orderly rows
ranked like soldiers marching abreast
you spread your leaves where harsh wind blows
and provide a haven of comfort and rest.



Through the Flint Hills mid-May to mid-June those colorful daytime constellations, the prairie wildflowers, should be achieving their greatest annual intensity. Above, on clear nights, there'll be a special substitution occurring as Taurus starts his annual summer vacation from our view, taking with him the star, Aldebaran, the regular red Bull's-eye-in-the-sky. An immediate replacement will be already on stage: Mars is the name, as red and bright a target as you'll ever see him, and he'll be the bull's-eye a current space launch hopes to be aiming at. In 1997, 'Pathfinder' took the short range 'Sojourner' to poke around on the surface there. In 1999 the 'Climate Orbiter' and 'Polar Lander' got close, only to end as notorious failures. All going well, the '2001 Mars Odyssey' (named for Arthur C. Clarke's novel 2001: A Space Odyssey) should be on its way since April 7th (after this is being written) to cover 500 million

miles by October when, cautiously avoiding a landing attempt, it will swing into a 200-mile-high orbit, its instruments scanning.

The Associated Press reports it'll be searching for signs of frozen water, for silicate-rich rocks that might give clues about the Martian core and monitor radiation. While scientists on Earth puzzle over a piece of magnetite found in a meteor believed to be from Mars because it contains crystals similar to those formed on Earth by living bacteria.

Meanwhile for us, during the next few May-June weeks, Mars will be rising SE in Sagittarius starting about 10 PM, then a little earlier each day till it challenges the evening twilight in mid-June. June 13th it'll be at opposition; i.e., seeming to us to be on the far side of the sky from the Sun. On the first night of summer, June 21st, it'll be closer

than it's been since 1988, and because the sun will be high, Mars at opposition will be low, shining through a maximum of atmosphere, so both its redness and size will be enhanced.

Toward mornings, Venus will take command of the eastern sky. Mercury will be a brief witness low in the west in the evenings setting between 8 and 9. Saturn sneaks away ahead of Jupiter into the evening twilight, disappears after May 22nd, to come creeping back, now in the dawn, after the 28th, a switch that Jupiter makes during a few days in mid-June. The Moon, following a schedule set for it by StarDate (published by the McDonald Observatory in Texas), will be waning crescent to the right of Venus on the 18th, becomes new on the 22nd, glows above Spica on June 1st, then above Antares June 4th, blooms full on the 5th, and to the left of Mars on the 6th.

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Herald of Spring
Fred Downs Atchison

Redwing blackbird, harbinger of spring
how welcome is your arrival
and the news you bring
of crocus and daffodils waiting neath the snow
of redbud and cherry blossoms their beauty soon aglow.
Adoring last season's sunflower stalk
that winter thought was dead
a black velvet blossom with bright splash of red.
What attracts you to this small patch of waste,
an area overlooked in confusion generated by haste?
Is there a message in your returning
to soils restricted to the plow,
sunflowers protected from burning?



Land Preservation

Paul Weidhaas, Chair

Michel-Ross Audubon Preserve News

Fifteen members of Mortarboard Honor Society at KSU devoted an hour cleaning up litter and lumber from a makeshift "fort" in the preserve on March 31st.

Jan Garton, who led the efforts, reported that 565 pounds of debris were hauled off. Member Peter Garfinkle of Shadowsmith Photography donated images of the event for use in future publicity for the preserve.

An anonymous benefactor has pledged a matching donation to the preserve. For every dollar raised by November 1st, two dollars will be donated. To meet this challenge, the land preservation committee has decided to join the Birdhouse Acoustic Music series, to put on a benefit fund-raiser concert, which is tentatively scheduled for September 14th. A regional singer/songwriter will perform at the Manhattan Arts Center under the auspices of Birdhouse. Our sincere thanks to the organizers of this popular, live music series for allowing us to use their mailings and fliers to publicize this exciting event.

A silent auction during the concert will raise additional funds. Donations of artwork, birdhouses, and feeders, field guides, optics, and the like are being sought. Please contact me (Paul Weidhaas, 539-4805) for further information and watch for more details as things are firmed up.

NATURAL COMPANIONS PART 2

Dru Clarke

During our first summer, a rare rough (or perhaps, a smooth) green snake took up residence in the unused west chimney and occasionally ventured inside through a stove pipe opening to lounge on a folded-up lawn chair in the kitchen. Its color matched one of the plastic strips of the chair's weaving, so we (nearly) shared the chair a time or two. When I urged the snake to go outside (where it belonged, I assumed) it always seemed to find a way back to its (and my) favorite chair. When it disappeared after the electrician had been working on wires near the chimney, I missed it as much as a favorite dog, and hope that it left some descendants who, some day, will make it back to our kitchen.

In the kitchen, there is a stove, an early 1950's model, with a long drawer at its base for pans and such, and it, too, had not been used since the house was vacated. Finding all the corners of the rooms occupied, a spider turned the drawer's pull into a fine home site and spun its snare. One afternoon I thought I'd see if the stove still worked and decided to give it a good cleaning first. Hanging, strangled, from the pull was the desiccated body of a ringneck snake, its once bright colors faded like dust. One loop of spider-spun noose constricted its pretty neck! Right in our kitchen, beneath our domesticated noses, successful predation went on! But how ironic that it was perpetrated by a lowly invertebrate on a formidable (to the spider, at least) vertebrate known by all to be a consummate predator. I could see the headlines, "Spider attacks, kills and EATS snake!" for all inquiring minds would want to know this.

Occasionally we smell pot roast and potatoes and fresh brewed stove coffee although we haven't cooked a meal inside yet (we think this happens when the humidity is just right and the chimney bricks aromatically give off the house's culinary history). If we walk lightly enough, and keep looking up and down as we do, hopefully our natural companions will tolerate us as well as they have those that preceded us. For we have become stewards of a wonderful place and will always want to have them share it with us.

Dru Clarke © March 2001

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

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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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.

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