



the prairie falcon

VOL. 30, No. 9
MAY 2002

MAY PROGRAM
May 15

“Prairie Spirit Trail”

Trent McCown

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

The Prairie Spirit Trail Trent McCown

Trent McCown, manager of the Prairie Spirit Trail, a public trail located on a converted railroad right-of-way, will describe the history and availability of this “rails to trails” project in Kansas.

The trail is centered in the southeastern city of Garnett, Kansas, and is operated under the management of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

Come and listen as Trent tells us more about this 33- mile trail available to biking and hiking enthusiasts, runners, bird watchers and nature lovers.

Before each program, we invite our speakers to join us for an informal dinner and discussion. Feel free to join us this month at the Texas Star 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

MIGRATORY BIRD DAY MAY 11th

Birders are needed! So join others on the North American Migratory Count for this area. For more information check www.ksbirds.org/kos/namc or for the Riley County Coordinator Hoogy Hoogheem at 539-7080.

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UPCOMING DATES:

May 11 Migratory Bird Day
Call 539-7080

May 15 Wed. 5:45 PM DINNER
7:30 PM - PROGRAM
1014 Throckmorton, KSU
NE corner Denison/Claflin

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MAY IS BIODIVERSITY MONTH

The first American Biodiversity Month is planned for May 2002 and is being coordinated by the International Biodiversity Observation Year (IBOY). Tens of thousands of people are taking part in more than 50 registered events across America. To see what is planned: - registered events (information and resources available at <http://www.nrel.colostate.edu/projects/iboy/biomonth/holdevent.html>) - a calendar and map of events across the country is at <http://www.nrel.colostate.edu/projects/iboy/biomonth/join.html>) - viewing the official press release to media contacts (<http://www.nrel.colostate.edu/projects/iboy/biomonth/pr/030902.html>)

Events include, bioblitzes, backyard bioblitzes, biodiversity fairs and festivals, habitat restorations, public lectures, special films, classes and exhibits. Founding participants include major museums (e.g. the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Field Museum, and National Museum of Natural History) and Botanic Gardens (e.g. the Missouri Botanical Garden), nationwide citizen science programs (e.g. the North American Butterfly Association and International Migratory Bird Day), and schools and community groups.

An interesting cooperative venture for American Biodiversity Month is being initiated by the Biodiversity Project based in Madison, Wisconsin. The Project has just launched a media release on "Five Ways to Create Healthier Homes and Habitats." This campaign is designed to reach food and garden writers and to encourage them to provide their readers with simple actions they can take to protect biodiversity.

The recommended "five ways" are:

1. Just say "no" to lawn and garden pesticides
2. Create some backyard wildlife habitat
3. Make smart seafood choices
4. Buy organic and locally produced foods whenever possible.
5. Switch to shade-grown coffee.

Two of these efforts (#2 and #5) are particularly bird-oriented. To see what the Biodiversity Project is doing about this media effort see the following similar pages: <<http://www.biodiversityproject.org/Press.htm>> and <<http://www.biodiversityproject.org/5ways.htm>>

*Paul J. Baicich
American Birding Association*

Organic Landscaping

With the coming of warm weather, many of us are spending more hours in our yards and gardens. According to the book *Redesigning the American Lawn* (cited in the Winter 2000 *Dyck Arboretum* publication), the average urban homeowner uses 10 times more pesticides and commercial fertilizers per acre than a farm does. Lawns cover more than 20 million acres in this country, so in effect, urban lawn owners are contributing the same amount of non-point pollution that comes off of 200 million acres of farm ground.

This year Kansas is once again mentioned as one of the states with the most polluted water. We in the Audubon chapter have long promoted low input, native plantings adapted to our geographic region. We would hope our members are more enlightened and willing to make the environmentally friendly choice as they think about their lawn care this year.

We are aware of one Manhattan landscaping and lawn care company that is offering, new this year, an organic lawn and landscape maintenance program. The company is Master Landscape, Inc. at 2040 Ft. Riley Blvd. They can be reached at 539-2842 for more details. Consider this option for your lawn and let us know if there are other such services available locally.

Leann Harrell

An Iridescent Beetle

The cowpath tiger beetle, *Cicindela purpurea*, is sometimes seen on cowpaths that have reddish clay soil. Some of these beetles are green over much of their surface, and can blend well with vegetation, but most of them are reddish purple over most of their surface, and can blend with reddish soil.

This beetle is slightly longer than half an inch so you will need to see it under magnification to be overwhelmed by its beauty. This can be challenging, because of the rapidity of its movements, as it charges across the ground or nimbly takes to the air and utilizes its delicate wings which were previously folded beneath its protective wing covers.

Perhaps you might catch this predator between your fingers. I've watched one crazy fellow do just that, but I've always been in awe of this predator's mandibles which resemble curved, ebony-colored thorns. I allowed one of these creatures to crawl onto my hand this March. It did not recognize my skin as something living, and crawled from one hand to the other, until my mother gave me a small sack to put it in. Even under the influence of the cool temperatures of that Easter morning

in my mother's vegetable garden, I suspect it might have been too fast for me if I had moved in a way that it perceived as a threat.

The adult emerges from its pupal cases in late summer. After preying on insects, the adult spends the winter in a burrow, and emerges in early spring. In April or May, the female lays eggs, which develop into larvae which have humpbacked structures with hooks. Each larva remains motionless in a burrow with its head plugging the hole of the burrow, and its mandibles spread wide in anticipation. When a prey item wanders by, it grabs it, and then digs its hooks into the dirt wall of its burrow, and it resists all attempts of the prey item to drag it out of the burrow.

When it has eaten well and becomes too fat, it closes the top of its burrow, and sheds its clothes and now has a bigger set of clothes. When winter comes, it seals its burrow and hibernates. During the following summer, it pupates, and in about a month, the adult emerges.

Several thousand years ago, someone stared at a tiger beetle. Later, he said, "I saw a beautiful creature, but I'm not foolish

INSECT OF THE MONTH

TOM MORGAN

enough to describe it.
Well, I'm foolish enough.

Iridescent green striations curve around the lower half of its large, bulging eyes, and between the eyes, there is a lavender field that flows between the eyes until it finally meets a finely textured, green, lacquer-like collar which dips down only to roll up in a lavender curve. White markings within the central area of the wing cover are important characteristics, but my eye is drawn to the edge which has a dark, raised ridge which borders a narrow, reddish purple area, which is outlined with a wavy line of iridescent gold which merges into a blue coloration which has so many shades of blue that I could get lost in it like getting lost in the blue of heaven. And when I look at a shade and consider whether it might be a metallic turquoise, I see flecks of gold dispersed in that blue of heaven. My attention lingers on exquisitely delicate shapes and textures, but no words can describe such loveliness. We can ensure that such beetles will amaze admirers in the millennia to come by refraining from over collecting them and by using pest control techniques that are non-lethal to predacious, living jewels.

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North American Migration Count

On May 11th the North American Migration Count will again be held throughout the nation. This is a snapshot of what birds are present on that day throughout the country and will be held rain or shine. I am trying to put together a group of counters (knowledgeable and some who are not so knowledgeable) to survey Riley County.

It should be great fun to see the recent migrants and those who are here setting up their nesting territories. I will try to pair folks up to cover all sections of Riley county. Last year we had 28 folks to cover the areas and even though some had quite extensive areas, we do the best we can. For further information, email me, Hoogy@kansas.net or call me at 785-539-7080

Driving across the New Mexican plains of San Augustin, pale arid grass spread widely under a usually bright blue sky west of Socorro, one can begin seeing 27 huge white mushrooms; each 82 feet tall, over 75 feet wide, containing 230 tons of concrete and metal that have been standing since the 1970s. They are mounted on big railroad carriages that travel over a Y-shaped arrangement of rails, each arm 13 miles long. They are radio telescope antennae whose variable sitings, we're told, give them the fine focus of a single antenna 22 miles across and the sensitivity of a dish 422 feet in diameter. They are there because the low latitude gives them a road view of the total sky, their high altitude gives them air clearer and closer to the sky. Their white paint reflects the summer heat, and the surrounding mountains give them some protection from human-generated electromagnetic interference.

Some protection. The first display offered visitors at the VLA – this Very Large Array – points out that such instruments are sifting non-visible radiations from space, whose frequencies have special

advantages in the search for information about our universe. But the display also describes how “radio space” assigned to human electronic communications, which are becoming so preponderant that the interference therefrom is increasingly overleaping the mountains and beginning to blot out what these antennae can detect. This problem of sky pollution and some activities concerning it I'll be mentioning further.

Right ahead, the Flint Hills will witness a mild penumbral eclipse of the full Moon in the dawning hours of May 26th. The lower half will be dimmed as enough of the Sun's brightness glows around the Earth to prevent full darkening. With June 10th's new Moon, an annular eclipse of the Sun will send a full but narrow shadow starting in the Pacific's Marianna Islands, ending toward evening south of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. Our share: about a 60%. The Moon will be too far from Earth for its image to cover the Sun's, so an annula, or ring, of light will outline the Moon.

More prominently, bright Venus and Jupiter will be having near-conjunctions in the long rectangle of Gemini, May 31-June 4, closing to within 1.6° (barely wider than an extended finger) June 3rd. The bright stars of the host constellation should be acknowledged, too. If you'll come closer I'll whisper the latest astronomers' gossip, as passed on by Chet Raymo in his *Intimate Look at the Night Sky*. They say that Pollux, the larger yellow one, the latest to rise (some 35 light-years away) is a swollen giant, about to burn up. and that paler Castor (about 49 light-years distant), pretending to be living single, is really a gathering of three pairs of binaries, bound by what I'd call consan-gravity, interacting on site with each other. Please don't let the zoning administrator know.

Also, Venus will be 2.5° north of Saturn, June 7th, and on June 13th, 2° from the crescent Moon.

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WORKDAY:

A work day at the Michel-Ross Audubon Sanctuary is scheduled for Saturday, May 18 at 9:30 am. Bring a trash bag and gloves, and meet at the Elks Lodge parking lot, 2605 Stagg Hill Road. We'll pick up litter along Stagg Hill Road and install a second entrance sign on the recently-donated northwestern portion of the sanctuary. If you have a pickup truck, you are encouraged to bring it.

In the event of inclement weather, the cleanup will be postponed to May 25.

Please share in this important effort to preserve a little bit of wildness in Manhattan, Kansas. Call Paul Weidhaas at 539-4805 for more information.



Chapter Given More Land on Stagg Hill

Paul Weidhaas

Three years ago, through the generous gift of Harold Ross and Bill and Joanne Michel, twenty acres of hardwoods in a steep, wooded ravine on Stagg Hill was donated to Audubon. Now, they have donated another 6.5 acres of land joining the original gift on the north. Canyon Drive and Ridgewood Drive access it from the north. This important area is teeming with wildlife.

This most recent donation completes the Michel-Ross Audubon Sanctuary as far as title to the land goes. But it is just the beginning regarding our efforts to preserve this unique area for posterity. The land preservation committee is looking into establishing a conservation easement and devising a long range management plan. Your input is welcomed. Contact me (Paul Weidhaas) at 539-4805 with your ideas of what you'd like to see happen with this area. I intend to have another plaque dedication following the May 18th cleanup. All members are urged to attend, and personally thank our benefactors for their thoughtfulness.

Michel-Ross Wildlife

Dozens of species of birds and other animals have been recorded on the sanctuary.

Some of the more interesting ones include:

Yellow-bellied sapsucker
 Bell's vireo
 Red-breasted nuthatch
 Carolina wren
 Ruby-throated hummingbird
 Ruby-crowned kinglet
 Wood thrush
 Ovenbird
 Black and white warbler
 Wilson's warbler

Mammals include:

Deer, raccoon,
 rabbit, opossum,
 skunk, vole, fox

Reptiles and amphibians include:

black snake
 chorus frog

Clearly, the sanctuary is a refuge for a surprising array of animal life.

Visit your preserve soon, and let's add to the list.

Thanks

Northeast Park Update —Thanks.

On St. Patrick's Day this year the Riley County Emergency Team, with Pat Collins, burned the weedy cover off the restored prairie area in the Northeast Park. It was used as a training practice and we are very appreciative of their help. After the burn, Al Alspach contributed seed and his time to cover the area again with a prairie grass mix. The drainage area was seeded with native, water-tolerant grasses at the same time. Once again, I am very grateful to these people who have helped with the project.

Leann Harrell



Northern Flint Hills
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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

For information on KS birds, subscribe to the Kansas Bird Listserv. Send this message (subscribe KSBIRD-L) to this address (listserv@ksu.edu), and join in the discussions!

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Addresses & Phone numbers of Your Elected Representatives Write or call (anytime)

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/>