



the prairie falcon

Vol. 31, No. 02
OCT 2002

WIND POWER FORUM
Wed. Oct. 16, 7:30-9:30

NOTE:
DIFFERENT LOCATION
K-State Union
K/S Ballroom, 2nd Floor
(Anderson Ave.
on K-State campus,
turn in at 17th St.)

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

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A panel of experts about wind power and its impact will convene for a discussion on wind energy in Kansas. Come learn more about this issue and have your questions answered. The event is co-sponsored by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, the Flint Hills Sierra Club, and Students for Environmental Action (SEA) from K-State. Wind power is a non-fossil fuel based/renewable source of energy. Kansas is in a unique position for wind harvesting, and wind farms are springing up in the state. The towers may impact local ecosystems, however. Panelists confirmed as of this date are: *(see page 5 for panelist bios)*

Charles Benjamin	Sierra Club, Kansas Chapter: law/policy
Ron Klataske	Audubon of Kansas: Flint Hills conservation
Richard Nelson	K-State: renewable energy
Alan Pollom	The Nature Conservancy, Kansas Chapter
Kyle Wetzel	Wind energy consultant
Gene Young	Bird studies

Dr. Dusty Becker, Board member at-large of NFHAS, will moderate the discussion. We will meet for dinner before the event at the Little Apple Brewery in West Loop Shopping Center at 5:45 p.m.
Any questions-please call Judy Roe 539-5519

Field Trips

BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK

Join us Saturday, Oct. 12th 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:

DRU CLARKE
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LEANN HARRELL
THOMAS MORGAN
JUDY ROE
PATRICIA YEAGER

UPCOMING DATES:

- Oct 11 Bird Feed ORDER Deadline**
- Oct 12 Beginning Birdwatching**
- Oct 16 Wind Power Forum**
Wed. 5:45 PM DINNER
7:30 PM - PROGRAM
***KSU Union Ballroom**
- Oct 19 Bird Feed PICKIUP**
9 AM - 1:00 PM
UFM 1221 Thurston
- Oct. 20 1:30PM Field Trip**
(See page 4 for details)

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MANHATTAN, KS



MESSING ABOUT DRU CLARKE

- Mole: "Do you know, I've never been in a boat before in all my life."*
- Rat: "What? Never been in a - you never - well, I - what have you been doing, then?"*
- Mole: "Is it so nice as all that?"*
- Rat: "Nice? It's the only thing... There is nothing half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats... simply messing..."*

Kenneth Grahame, The Wind in the Willows

The pond swells and recedes with seasonal rains. The last downpour was not enough to increase it much, but the pond still had an open deep hole ringed by a thick, soaked, weedy mat that would have deterred all but the most desperate to satisfy that craving for water. I was, and there was enough liquid to float my boat. Constructed specifically to be light enough to carry after a crushed vertebra made heavy lifting prohibitive, the thirty-one pounder was relatively easy to trundle across the gooey mud to the water's edge. Sukie, my smallest best dog, hopped into the bow, eager to play her role of ballast and "tracker." One push with the double paddle and we slid over a flotilla of weed to open water. The other two dogs took off around the pond to greet us on the other side. We were seriously messing about. The natives, however, weren't as thrilled as we were. Havoc, evidenced by "eeeks" everywhere, erupted. Frogs - frightened into flight - leapt, skidded, and dove, launched from semi-aquatic pads of weedy mud, into safe water. Northern Greens - between one and two dozen - scattered, then burped to the surface, a wet circle of improbable profiles, amphibious spectators at a one-boat show. One

hit the water like an artfully skipped stone, rocketing twelve or more feet from shore, skimming the surface three or four times on a rapid trajectory. Another did a clean, no-splash dive, a 9.8 Olympic qualifier. A third merely jumped straight up and plopped, completing a comic cannonball.

What evolutionary force may have led to this suite of genes or escape? Their froggy musculature and reflexes are shared, but the flight patterns imply individual improvisation, variations on a common theme. Frogs do their own thing when it comes to survival. Hearing the commotion, the mares and foals, galloped to the water's edge, stood dumbstruck, then lowered their heads to drink, keeping wary eyes on the floating phenomenon. The frogs, apparently accustomed to these interlopers, sat, nonplussed. A pole, usually submerged by higher water, stuck out from the smooth surface: perched on top, like a cartoon gargoyle, was one huge green frog. All the while we floated around, it remained 'on post.' Perhaps in its pithy amphibian brain it thought we couldn't see it. We could, but didn't let on. In Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Annie Dillard confided to the

reader that she liked to scare frogs. Until one didn't jump, as the life was being sucked out of it by a giant water bug. No such luck today: all of our frogs jumped. None seemed afflicted either by the unfortunate malaise that leads to grotesque mutations of limb: our frogs jumped with agility and verve.

I got pretty good at predicting their underwater routes by watching the wakes from their powerful hind legs. Their predators must have some clues, too, to their watery whereabouts. One year, we had a frog bumper crop in our garden pool, until a mob of black-crowned night herons, foraging some distance from their colonial digs, discovered them. Raucous croaking from these joyous opportunists tipped us off to their garden party. They dined on every last frog as if they were irresistible, delectable hors d'oeuvres.

As the pond shrinks into its autumn morph and the frogs become more spatially concentrated, a similar scene may occur. A more diverse gathering of coyote, raccoon, and fox may attend. We'll probably miss that party, but will be back next summer, to do more messing about.

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Aug. 8, 2002



Many of our butterflies do not typically spend the winter here. For example, the cloudless sulphur butterfly (*Phoebis sennae*) is probably unable to survive the winter in Kansas, although some individuals try to do so. During the last few days (September 9th -11th), I observed two of them flying southeasterly with great determination. Perhaps they may travel to Florida. When the temperature plummets and I am shivering violently, I may wish I had chased after them.

On September 11th, Leann Harrell and I were watching butterflies sipping the nectar from the beautiful, native thistles in her yard. There was a regal fritillary, a great spangled fritillary, and a silver-spotted skipper (*Epargyreus clarus*). The skipper flew towards a blossom, using the power within its enormous thorax to power its diminutive wings. This resulted in the “skipping” flight which elicits an emotional response in those who are young at heart, because this pugnacious creature seems full of aggressive personality.

When threatened, this butterfly skips back and forth in mid-air. It is built like a fighter aircraft that sacrifices everything else for maneuverability. It is not designed for migration over long distances with minimal expenditure of energy. No, it stays here all year round. It is true that the adult butterfly can not survive the cold temperatures of winter. But its progeny has inherited the characteristics of its forbears. It stays right here.

I mentioned to Leann that the skipper’s caterpillar feeds on the leaves of the honey locust trees. I knew that this tree had invaded the prairie on her property, and thought that this might cheer her up. I noticed some webbed together leaves on one of the locust trees. Nestled within the leaves was a caterpillar. The caterpillar was mostly green, except for the head, which was black, and the first segment of the thorax, which was reddish black. The large head had two, bright orange spots.

Why did its head have spots? I don’t know, but when knowledge is non-existent, it is a great deal of fun to speculate. The brightly colored spots suddenly reminded me of a memory. Perhaps the contrasting colors and proportions were similar to the dark cephalothorax of a jumping spider with brightly-colored chelicerae. The orange spots on the caterpillar are located directly above each antenna which typically point downward. The position and dimensions of the enlarged segment of a jumping spider’s chelicera and the attached fangs were quite similar to the orange spots and attached antennae. Admittedly, the caterpillar does not look like a spider when viewed in its entirety. When the caterpillar is enclosed in its nest of leaves, however, one sees the warning colors of two, chelicera-like areas, and perhaps there is a frightening similarity to a dangerous spider.

After I had enjoyed my fantasy that the caterpillar had a frightening appearance, I examined the caterpillar. I brushed its head with a piece of grass and the caterpillar moved its head aggressively towards the point of contact. The caterpillar moved its head towards the point of contact, regardless of where I touched it. This seemed appropriate for a spider.

The problem is now I need to find a model for this putative mimic. I need to find a spider with orange chelicerae that rests within webbed together leaves. Well, one should have dreams to chase, when one explores the diversity of life. That is one of the reasons why biodiversity is important to me. Biodiversity can function as a vibrantly living record of intricate interactions over long periods of time. It is sacred. That is the only word that adequately describes it.

The caterpillar has moved into the litter under its host plant and has become lethargic. I hope it will become a chrysalis. Yes, I hope. For me, hope is a chrysalis. And when the temperature plummets and I start to shiver, I will think about a chrysalis of a pugnacious skipper. And I will hope that all of the diversity of this earth will still be here to greet the warmth of a new spring.



Since May I've been looking at the state of the sky's light at night, and in September mentioned that some states and municipalities were moving to get control over the increasing light pollution – a list that needs to grow.

One special resource for such efforts is the International Dark Sky Association (IDA) which tallies the various and cumulative effects of lighting, and offers a great deal of information about where those responses are ongoing, about what equipment is involved, where it might be obtained, and about what specifications are involved.

The IDA expresses the scientific aspect neatly:

“Information that has traveled for billions of light years – sometimes twice the age of our solar system – is lost in the glare of our civilization in the last 1/1000ths of a second of its journey.”

IDA can explain the advantages of low pressure sodium over other outdoor lighting options. It seeks out kilowatt charges and equipment inefficiencies to sum up that needless glare and scattering can cost a town of 400 people \$1000/yr in wasted energy, and a

city the size of Topeka a figure approaching \$500,000. IDA can be contacted at 3225 North First Ave., Tucson, Arizona 85719-2103, (520) 293-3198, ida@darksky.org and at www.darksky.org.

You can contact Saturn this period as it retrogrades (shifts eastward instead of westward) past the horn tips of Taurus toward Gemini, rising about 10p30 in mid-Oct. and 7p30 by mid-Nov. *The Old Farmer's Almanac* says telescopers will see the rings broadly exposed. Jupiter will get in the picture, showing up from about 2a00 to 11p00 the same nights, rather far upward and to the left of Sirius. Bright Venus, after sinking into the mid-Oct. sunsets, reappears as a “morning star” about 5a40 Nov. 11th and earlier thereafter. It will rise below and left of Mars, who rides the dawn sky very dimly, preparing for a strong performance next summer. *StarDate* bets Mars'll be below and right of the waning crescent moon Nov. 2nd, and *Astronomy* is in for it to pass just 3 degrees north of Spica by mid-month. An arc extending from the

end of Big Dippers's handle, through Arcturus in Bootes, eventually reaches Spica, the lone bright star in Virgo. Another lone ranger, Fomalhaut, the most sparkling scale of the southern hemisphere's Southern Fish, can be found just below the moon on Nov. 12th.

Ah, yes, the Moo. He will be shining full just when we don't need him. On Oct. 21-22, he will challenge the Orionid meteors, that usually give about 25 shots/hr. with remnants from the trail of Halley's comet. On the morning of Nov. 19th he'll be fully there again watching for the Leonids. Once more this year I've seen predictions that these fugitives from the trail of the Temple-Tuttle comet could be better than last. They seem in no hurry to fade into their 30-year hiatus. The figure of 25,000/hr is mentioned. *The Old Farmer's Almanac* seems to favor buying a seat on the East Coast side of the stadium. *Sky and Telescope* thinks that'll be too much the sunny side and you'll be better off in the darker bleachers further west where dawn comes later and thus more in time with the show. Moon's new Nov. 4th.

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FIELD TRIP - Sunday, Oct. 20, 1:30pm

Grasses and Insects are the focus of this field trip. We will meet at the eastern most entrance of the K-mart parking lot near Dara's Fast Lane on Sunday Oct. 20 at 1:30. From here we will carpool to Leann Harrell's natural prairie acreage and explore. This is a banner year for grasses and this trip will no doubt open your eyes and ears to a wonder of nature you have not noticed before. Refreshment and restroom facilities will be available at this field trip. We will be strolling not hiking. Please join us.

Patricia Yeager



THANK YOU

A big thank you to the people who joined Patricia Yeager and myself for a work day on the restored prairie area of the Northeast Community Park on Sunday afternoon, Sept 22. We hand pulled cocklebur and removed a lot of seeds that will not have a chance to germinate on the prairie next year. Although by natural succession the cocklebur, a reseeding annual, will be shaded out and not able to establish itself as the root systems of the perennial plants dominate, our efforts will speed up the process.

Thank you to Earl Allen, Sonja Pfeifer, Jacque Staats, Dick Oberst, Mary Ann Fleming, Tom Morgan, Susan Blackwell, Molly Edmunds and Patty Hawkins. Thank you also to Kent Yeager who prepared the food to feed the work crew after the work session.

Leann Harrell

PANELIST BIOS:

Charles Benjamin is an attorney based in Lawrence, Kansas, where he primarily represents the Kansas Chapter of the Sierra Club as a lobbyist, litigator, educator, and fundraiser. Charles is involved with Kansas Sierra Club advocacy for renewable energy production and energy conservation. Charles also represents Prairie Wind Power, LLC, a subsidiary of a German corporation that specializes in developing large scale wind turbine projects.

Ron Klataske is Executive Director of Audubon of Kansas. One of the group's missions is to "promote restoration and responsible stewardship of tallgrass, shortgrass, and mixed-grass prairies".

Richard Nelson is currently a renewable energy engineer with Engineering Extension Programs in the College of Engineering. His current areas of interest include assessment of biomass, wind, and solar energy resources and the energetic and economic feasibility renewable energy resources for alternative energy purposes.

Alan Pollom, Kansas State Director of The Nature Conservancy, is a life-long Kansas resident and 1971 graduate of Washburn University. Representing the nation's largest non-profit conservation organization, he administers more than 34,000 acres of natural area preserves located throughout the state.

Dr. Kyle Wetzel is president of K. Wetzel & Company, Inc., a Lawrence engineering consulting company serving the wind power and aerospace industries. Wetzel has worked in engineering, research, and development of wind energy systems since 1993, including a stint as Technical Manager of the Next Generation Turbine Development Program at what is now GE Wind Energy. Wetzel is Acting Chairman of the Kansas Renewable Energy Working Group and serves as one of five members of the Peer Review Panel for the U.S. Department of Energy's Wind Energy Program.

Gene Young has studied under Max C. Thompson (undergraduate, Southwestern College, Winfield, KS) and Dr. Charles Ely (graduate school, Fort Hays State University), the authors of "Birds in Kansas vols I and II". He has been studying avian mortality associated with communication towers, and later to include wind turbines, since the early 1990's. Current work has emphasized a large communication tower near Topeka, in a collaborative effort with Mark Robbins, University of Kansas.

Judy Roe, Program Chair

FYI: 54th Meeting of the Kansas Ornithological Society

Forst Center, Meade, Kansas October 4, 5 & 6, 200

Check website for more information <http://ksbirds.org/Fallmeeting2002.html>

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



Northern Flint Hills
Audubon Society
P.O. Box 1932
Manhattan, KS
66505-1932



Printed on 100% post-
consumer recycled
paper

Non-profit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 662
Manhattan, KS 66505

Return Service Requested

Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society
Edited by Cindy Jeffrey, 15850 Galilee Rd., Olsburg, KS 66520 (cinraney@ksu.edu)
Also available on the World Wide Web at the URL <http://www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html>

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. Membership Renewals 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.

If you do not want to receive the national magazine, but still want to be involved in our local activities, you 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 HOTLINE: For information on Kansas Birds, subscribe to the Kansas Bird Listserve. Send this message **<subscribe KSBIRD-L>** to this address **<listserv@ksu.edu>** and join in the discussions!

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