



the prairie falcon

VOL. 32, No.3
NOVEMBER 2003

November 19, 2003
Clean Water Farms
Mary Fund
Kansas Rural Center
7:30 p.m.
1018 Throckmorton
KSU

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

"Clean Water Farms, and the Politics of Water in Kansas" Mary Fund

Mary comes to us from the Kansas Rural Center. She will talk about Clean Water Farms, the status of the politics of water in Kansas, the work of the Kansas Natural Resource Legacy Alliance and its quest for a vision for the environment.

(PLEASE NOTE CHANGE IN ROOM - NOW 1018 THROCKMORTON)

Before each program, we invite our speakers to join us for an informal dinner and discussion. Feel free to join us this month at Golden Wok at 5:45 p.m. The program begins at 7:30 p.m. Refreshments are served after every meeting. All meetings are open to the public.

Field Trips

OWL PROWL: Nov. 1, Meet at 8:00 p.m. at the Ackert parking lot. We will carpool and return by 11:00 p.m.

LEOPOLD EDUCATION PROJECT WORKSHOP, Dec. 6 (details on pg. 5)

JEFFREY ENERGY CENTER (If you missed the last one - call Patricia Yeager, 776-9593 for the date and time of a repeat visit this month)

BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK

Join us Saturday, Nov. 8th 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 or e-mail him at drintoul@ksu.edu for more information.

INSIDE

- 2 GNAWING CONCERN
- 3 BITTERSWEET
- 4 SKYLIGHT
- 5 TAKE NOTE

CONTRIBUTORS:

DRU CLARKE
PETE COHEN
THOMAS MORGAN
PATRICIA YAEGER

UPCOMING DATES:

- Nov 1 OWL PROWL Field Trip
See pg. 5 8p.m.
- Nov 8 Beginning Birding, 8 a.m.
Ackert/Durland Parking Lot
- Nov 19 CLEAN WATER FARMS
Dinner 5:45-Program 7:30
1018 Throckmorton, KSU
Corner of Claflin & Denison
- Nov 22 Bird Feed ORDER DEADLINE
- Dec 6 Bird Feed PICKUP
9a.m. - 1p.m. UFM
1221 Thurston

PRINTED BY
CLAFLIN BOOKS & COPIES
MANHATTAN, KS



Remember those tiny Golden Books that had their own cardboard slip case (to me, it was a bookcase)? The themes were of animals anthropomorphized: a goat, a baby blue whale, and, of course, the ubiquitous house mouse- usually a prim, dowdily dressed mother trying to keep track of her rambunctious mouslings. Mice show up often as the heroic or victimized protagonists of children's stories, always coming off as sentimental favorites who deserve our support and loyalty. The occasional rat sometimes gets a bum rap, but mice, never.

This impression calls for remediation, and while kids don't need to be hit over the head with more reality, a more balanced view of these cuties seems in order. A \$300 bill for wiring repair on our tractor, scrapping of a beloved winter coat chewed into ribbons, mouse urine and turds in the closet, consumption of a tube of hemorrhoid cream, and wild scrabbling overhead at night all have convinced me that my choice of reading as a child was misguided.

Not that they aren't amazing and intelligent problem-solvers. A friend who told his wife he had stopped smoking kept a pack in the garage for an infrequent burn. But the cigarettes had disappeared, one by one. Quite accidentally, he discovered while perched on a stepladder, a neat line of butts above the joists leading to a pack rat nest. This "glitter weaver" (so called in William Least Heat Moon's *Prairyerth*) had a habit. The pilfering ended when my friend found a shed snake skin dangling from the rafters. When my van choked to a stop on a highway once, I found a nest on my engine block. Pack rats' nests are sometimes centuries old, and one has been estimated to date back to the Pleistocene. The one under my hood, however, was more recent. Mice don't seem to cache tobacco (probably too awkward to carry), but manage dog kibbles quite well. I've discovered neat piles in the corner of a linen drawer, the bottoms of paper sacks, and inside a rolled-up rug.

Nests of finely minced paper towels, quilt batting, and pillow stuffing appear in infrequently visited places, snug spots for rearing their litters. And, they are prolific, as many as ten in a year, with up to six in each litter, ready to reproduce in a little over three weeks! They seem to thrive in close proximity to dogs and cats; in fact, they are drawn to abodes with domesticated companions, sharing their nutritionally balanced fare.

The array of rodent repellents and death-dealing agents is mind-boggling. What seems to work best is a brand of fabric softener sheet of a particular fragrance as repellent. That, and a mouse trap baited with extra sharp cheddar, the expensive kind, as death-dealer. The latter is repugnant, but practical. There are others - sonic devices, live traps, poisons, like warfarin which causes hemorrhaging - whose effectiveness or humaneness is moot. (I tried a live trap, but always forgot to check it, and invariably found a stinking or mummifying body in it. Not so humane.)

Maybe we need more children's stories like Gary Larsen's "There's a Hair in My Dirt" (E.O. Wilson wrote the foreword) that portray our natural companions and interrelationships in the environment in a more honest manner. Larsen's book features a worm family (not mice) and a dizzy, misguided "nature lover" hilarious, as usual, with some profanity (so beware), but unrepentant in telling the truth. I'm not suggesting that we toss Beatrix Potter, but wouldn't a choice be nice? Like, a set of small golden books, treasures of truth about our natural companions. They are fascinating enough without behaving like us or dressing up in the fine frippery we are accustomed to seeing them in on the pages of many children's books.

© 2003 Sept. 11 Dru Clarke
(Two books for very young children that address this
are "Animals should definitely not act like people"
and "Animals should definitely not wear clothing"
by Judi Barrett, illustrated by Ron Barrett,
Aladdin Paperbacks, 2nd ed. 1989)



American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) is native to the eastern half of Kansas. As the orange coat of its berry loses moisture, the coat peels away, uncovering the crimson berry. The delicately-hued coat splits into three sections which persist long after a songbird has harvested the berry. Although the berry may be tasty to birds, it is somewhat poisonous to people. The inner bark has been used as an emergency food by the Potawatami and other Native American tribes.

I transplanted two vines into my yard last fall. Neither vine produced berries this year. Although some vines may produce male and female flowers, most individuals have only one or the other. I could plant more vines, but perhaps I should be patient with my vines, since four years is the minimum age for an American bittersweet to produce berries.

Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculata*) begins producing berries at two years of age. The planting of Oriental bittersweet was popularized by Arnold Arboretum at Harvard University over a century ago. This bittersweet has faster growth and maturation, higher fecundity with an impressive display of ornamental berries, and an ability to tolerate a wider range of conditions. These advantages are the reasons why it may cause the extinction of American bittersweet. It has substantially displaced American bittersweet from parts of its range. Oriental bittersweet has escaped from cultivation in 25 states and in portions of Canada. The western edge of the range of American bittersweet is its stronghold for now, but there is no part of its range that appears unsuitable for its competitor. Kansas is on the western edge of this range. Oriental bittersweet has not been reported as a problem here, although it has been reported in Missouri, Iowa and Arkansas.

The rapid growth of Oriental bittersweet was considered such an advantage that it was recommended to control soil erosion. It actually grows so rapidly that it shifts the balance of the competition between itself and the woody vegetation that it uses

for scaffolding. It may reduce profits from forestry. And it is a problem in a not-for-profit national treasure, the Great Smoky Mountain National Park.

The most vitally important task is to identify the factors that limit the vigor of Oriental bittersweet. For example, the vigor of some non-native plants is known to be partly due to the absence of pathogens. In the mean time, hard work and herbicides must be used for several years to exterminate this plant, because of the delayed germination of some of its seeds.

Learning about the competition faced by American bittersweet has made me appreciate it even more. When collecting a cluster of the beautiful berries, I carefully snip off a short, terminal segment of the vine next to a single cluster of berries. Then I put it in a place of honor, where it can serve as a decoration for a bittersweet thanksgiving.

The species name *Celastrus orbiculatus* may be changed to *Celastrus orbiculata*, because a committee of experts is expected to decide whether the word *Celastrus* is feminine, and whether the name used for the species should therefore be feminized. A less trivial detail is that people can maintain and expand their plantings of Oriental bittersweet. This invasive plant can also be obtained from a company on the internet that allows gardeners to trade seeds. Although many nurseries sell American bittersweet, I doubt that any reputable nursery would sell Oriental bittersweet.

Information on the web includes an up-to-date review of the botany by taxonomists who work at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

<www.fs.fed.us/global/iitf/pdf/shrubs/Celastrus%20orbiculatus.pdf>



Writing this before deadline I'm still enjoying the sensation of springtime in September-October, and haven't gone south of the equator to find it. After a summer that was, to paraphrase Rudyard Kipling: aridity, aridity, absolute unvarying aridity, aridity – plus a heat beat stronger than anything Calypso – suddenly some graying skies, a clap of occasional thunder, and a hearty several days of fluvium, and we had over ten inches of rain in the guage. The yard grass popped up yelling to be mowed, and the pasture slopes, after observing this reaction a couple days, greened up through the older strands and there were wildflowers everywhere. Several kinds of violets and purples mixed it with light blues, yellows galore, and some whites modest but there. I know some of the names but will mention none to protect the innocent, for some are living on the dole of overgraze, without noting whether that opportunity results from carelessness or lack of economic alternative.

Meanwhile, the stars have not joined in with these fall frolics. Like strict grammarians of time, they are saying, "Here, now, we can't have such colloquial usage. You may put an indian summer, in small letters and in parenthesis, between summer and autumn, but you can't put a FRESH SPRING all in capitals." They are so uptight about it that no wonder novas occasionally explode and some meteors go unpredictably zipping through the sky just to break the tension. Even Saturn is in that mood. If you noticed it gradually slipping steadily eastward through Gemini, you can notice it slipping westward for a change (until January) as the Earth on its inner orbit overtakes it.

In our garden, pepper plants idle all summer are having little peppers, an eggplant is showing its first, luxuriously purple blossom, and some volunteer cantaloupes are still forming, poor things. I've seen pictures of trees blooming. To avoid such confusion, look up. The stars of autumn-into-winter are in proper grammatical order: bold nouns, dim modifiers, and all as moderately active verbs. The bright white star low in the NE during late November will be Capella, in the pentagonal constellation of Auriga the Charioteer. The little

triangle of dimmer stars closeby are The Kids. That family is the more socially prominent of the celestial goat delegation. The constellation Capricorn very dimly stretches across a lot of space low in the SW. On November 30th the Half Moon will be in Aquarius, the star Fomalhaut in the Southern Fish will be halfway below the Moon and a bit to the W; further W on the horizon will be Capricorn.

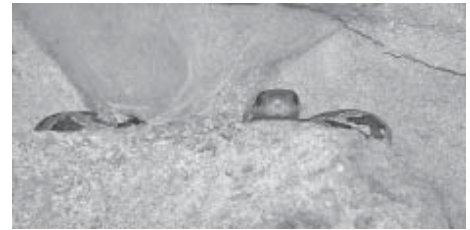
Into December Capella will begin the evening higher, with Gemini-cum-Saturn beneath, a little north of E, and the very prominent Orion a little south of E. *Sky & Telescope* notes that the Full Moon on December 8th will separate Auriga from Orion's raised arm. A time exposure from mid-November to mid-December would show Perseus in the Milky Way moving ahead of Auriga, but behind the narrow horizontal V of Andromeda, below the Milky Way. The point of Andromeda's V blends into the hind legs of Pegasus with its Great Square and its upside down head just above Aquarius. Beneath (southward) Andromeda is the brief bent line of three or four stars that is Aries. beneath Aries the slender Pisces the Fish, beneath Pisces, the thicker Cetus the Whale. Coming along back east of Cetus are the long, sharp curves of Eridanus the River. With Cetus between Eridanus behind and Aquarius plus the Southern Fish ahead, and beneath Pisces, this a rather moist part of the sky. On drier turf will be Aldebaran, the reddish eye of Taurus, whose long horns will be snaring that Full Moon of November 8th between them.

Jupiter, meanwhile, rises in Leo the Lion after, to a little before, midnight. Though only a little bigger than Saturn, it's just a little more distant than half the 748 million miles to Saturn, thus much brighter. Venus will be moving gradually higher into the twilight SW, on November 30-December 1 coming exceedingly close to the top star of Sagittarius' teapot. Mercury will then begin a fortnight's stint to the lower right of Venus, best on December 9th. Mars, already high each evening, will move along dimming from Sirius' second fiddle to Capella's equal. New Moon November 23rd, Full Moon, yes, December 8th, so again sayeth *Sky & Telescope*.



PEEK-A-BOO

We needed these to go with Dru Clarke's story in the last issue! But Patricia Yeager took these only a few weeks ago. Can you identify the species?



Things to Do...

OWL PROWL: Nov. 1. Meet at 8:00 p.m. at the Arkert parking lot. We will carpool and return by 11:00 p.m.

JEFFREY ENERGY CENTER (If you missed the last one - call Patricia Yeager, 776-9593 for the date and time of a repeat visit this month)

LISTENING TO THE PRAIRIE

Traveling Exhibit Mounted By Smithsonian Institution to Promote Environmental, Cultural, and Artistic Significance of the Tallgrass Prairie
2nd Floor of Hale Library,
Oct. 24 through Dec.15, 2003

NEWLY DESIGNED NORTHERN FLINT HILLS
AUDUBON SOCIETY
T-SHIRTS ARE NOW
AVAILABLE - ON
SALE AT THE BIRD
SEED PICKUP,
DEC. 6, 2003



LEOPOLD EDUCATION PROJECT WORKSHOP

at Possum Hollow Ranch (PHR) – farmhouse and prairie/woodland landscape.
Sat. Dec. 6. \$40 (NFHAS members \$30) Registration includes copy of Sand County Almanac, related materials, lunch, and snacks.

Send to the following by November 26:

Dru Clarke
3755 Rockenham Road
St. George, Ks 66535

Include e-mail address for directions to PHR and schedule.

PHR is a member of the Northern Flint Hills Nature-based Tourism Association.



**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 66502

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 Informtion:

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!

NFHAS Board

President:	Carla Bishop	539-5129
Vice President:	Dave Rintoul	537-0781
Secretary:	Eloise Thomas	456-8519
Treasurer:	Jan Garton	539-3004

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Conservation:	JoAnn Hablutzel	776-7649
Education:		
Program:	Judy Roe	539-5519
Fieldtrips:	Dave Rintoul	537-0781
	Patricia Yeager	776-9593
Membership:	Carla Bishop	539-5129
Finance:	Ann Feyerharm	539-0483
Public Outreach:	Dolly Gudder	537-4102
Land Preservation:	Paul Weidhaas	539-4805
Newsletter:	Cindy Jeffrey	468-3587
At-Large Board Members:	Dusty Becker, John Tatarko, Ingrid Neitfeld, Jacque Staats	
Audubon of Kansas Trustee:	Hoogy Hoogheem	

Addresses & Phone numbers of Your Elected Representatives (anytime)

Write ✉ - **or call** ☎

Governor Kathleen Sebelius: 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/>