



THE PRAIRIE FALCON

NORTHERN FLINT HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY
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DECEMBER 1999

MIST NETTING & MIGRATION

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Dr. Calvin Cink is Professor of Biology at Baker University in Baldwin City, Kansas. He has been teaching courses in ecology, biology, genetics, human anatomy and physiology, zoology, and ornithology at Baker for the past 22 years. He is a native of North Dakota, and has a bachelor of science degree in zoology from North Dakota State University. His master of science degree is from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where he studied the behavior of Bobwhite Quail. He holds a doctorate from the University of Kansas where he studied the winter behavioral ecology of House Sparrows. His current research is on the ecology of Whip-poor-wills in Kansas. He has studied the bird populations of the Baker Wetlands using banding since 1971.

Mist netting of birds during migration provides valuable information on population movements of species we often overlook. It gives us insights on biology we can't reveal by observation through our binoculars. Least and Traill's Flycatchers were studied at a mist netting station at the Baker Wetlands in Lawrence, Kansas, where both are regular but low-density transients. A total of 110 Least Flycatchers and 84 Traill's Flycatchers were handled during a period of 5 years. This presentation will document the peaks of migration during the spring and fall, the differential movements of adults and immature flycatchers, and changes in sex ratios during migration. It will also suggest some possible reasons why these patterns have evolved.

7:30 PM

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 15TH, 1999
RM. 1014, THROCKMORTON HALL

Before each program we invite our speakers to join us for an informal dinner and discussion. Feel free to join us this month at Carlos O'Kelly's. We will meet at 5:45 PM. The program will begin at 7:30 PM on Wednesday, November 17th. Refreshments are served after every meeting. Please bring your own cup. All meetings are open to the public.

Field Trips

Sat., — **Beginning Birdwatching Walk** — Join us Saturday, Dec. 11th, 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.



"I like to think that Spring begins on the tick of the Winter Solstice, when the sun starts North again. It isn't until the middle of January that there is any great difference in the height of the sun in the sky at noon, or any noticeable earlier rising or later setting of the sun. But definitely—and astronomically—the Winter Solstice marks the turn for the better, if we look at it in that light despite the fact that practically all the hard weather of the winter lies ahead of us at that time. That, however, is taking a rather lofty view of things. Underfoot, conditions are more realistic..."

John Kieran, "Footnotes on Nature," Doubleday and Co., Garden City NY (1953)



I know several folks who celebrate the arrival of the Winter Solstice, and the fact that the days are getting longer again, a lot more heartily than they celebrate the first day of Spring, or any of the more traditional holidays. In fact, I'm sort of surprised that some greeting card company hasn't found this niche market, although most of the people who celebrate this pseudo-Druid holiday are decidedly not the type who seek and send a greeting cards for every occasion. But it is cause for celebration, and offers much comfort and hope for the future. However, the present also deserves some positive consideration. As noted elsewhere in this newsletter, the shortest days of the year are filled with the highlights of the birdwatching season -- the Christmas Bird Censuses (CBCs). These collaborative exercises in "citizen science" offer an opportunity for all birdwatchers, from youngest beginner to grizzled veteran. If you are just getting interested in birds, the winter is a good time to start learning. There are fewer varieties of birds about, there are no leaves on the trees for birds to hide behind, and there are CBCs in abundance, where

you can go afield with experienced birders and learn very rapidly. And the daylight is scarce, so you won't get too tuckered out by the end of the day. If you have any interest in birds, please consider joining a local CBC; you'll probably be hooked for life! Although the true purpose of the CBC is to gather data on the numbers and distribution of the wintering birds in an area, there are several subtexts as well. The hotshot birders like to use this opportunity to look for rarities, and compare lists, so there is a competitive aspect to this enterprise. The first birder to find a Snowy Owl, a Northern Goshawk, a Saw-whet Owl, or some other northern species that has drifted to this latitude will have an opportunity to regale his or her companions with all the details at the compilation banquet. It may be a good year for Winter Wrens; our Beginning Birding group found two of these elfin nomads in November, and hopefully that means that there will be more around in December. And there have already been reports of Snow Buntings in the state this fall; if a flock of these appeared for the Manhattan CBC, it would make my year. I have never happened across one of these birds, so maybe I can get one before the Y2K bugs wipe out all of my computer records. It would definitely be worth it! Alternatively, summer birds can linger and become famous seasonal rarities. CBC counters will be on the lookout for Hermit Thrushes, Brown Thrashers, Gray Catbirds, or other birds that are common in summer or immigration. The Manhattan CBC has recorded all of these, as well as truly unusual winter birds such as Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Forster's Tern, Spotted Sandpiper, and Pine Warbler. Since it has been

unseasonably warm (at least at the time that this article is being written), perhaps one of these, or some other warm-season bird will be added to the list in 1999. Another under-appreciated aspect of the CBC season is the chance to do some socializing and birding at the same time. The winter season is historically the season for parties and get-togethers of all sorts, and a CBC is just exactly that. The highlight of the winter season, for some people. It is a chance to see old friends, make new ones, and mingle with both people and the birds that bring us all together. Humans are social animals, and the CBC is a great occasion for socializing. Fringe benefits include the opportunity to introduce youngsters to a healthful activity, a chance to work off those extra pounds from the Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, and learn something new about the world around you. I find that I learn something new every time I go out birdwatching; I see a new bird, observe a new behavior, or gain a new insight into how these creatures keep on making a living in an increasingly hostile world. It is truly a lifelong educational opportunity, and that alone should be enough to get you started. So even if the conditions "underfoot" are marginal, please consider taking some time and participating in your local CBC. There are over 50 of these in Kansas, held in cities and hamlets and wildlife refuges across the state, so you will have lots of opportunities. Details and contact information can be found on our website (<http://www.ksu.edu/audubon>), and elsewhere in this newsletter. Just don't find all those Snow Buntings before I do!



Birders Exchange: Local contact - Dusty Becker Donations accepted any time at 1606 Throckmorton Hall, Dept. of Horticulture office, NFHAS monthly meetings and Bird Seed Pick-ups.

Bird Seed Pick-up -- Dec. 4, 9AM - 1PM 1221 Thurston, Manhattan

**CBC****51st Manhattan
Christmas Bird Count**

The 51st consecutive Manhattan KS Christmas Bird Census (CBC) will be held on Saturday, December 18, 1999, mark your calendars and make plans to join us in our annual contribution to "citizen science." There are six quasi-independent groups covering our CBC circle (centered at AndersonHall, see map below); if you wish to join one of these groups, please call the group leader at the numbers listed. If you can't make up your mind, ask me (Dave Rintoul at 532-6663 or drintoul@ksu.edu) and I will try to get you hooked up with a group. The count commences at dawn and ends at dusk (unless you are part of a group counting owls). The count numbers are compiled and stories are swapped at a chili dinner. Donations will be accepted to help defray the cost of the dinner and rental of the facility. I would also like to ask our readers who live within the Manhattan CBC area to plan to count the birds at their feeders that day and pass the count results along to me. If you would like to do that, please contact me using email (drintoul@ksu.edu), phone (785-532-6663 days, 785-537-0781 evenings), or snail-mail (Dave Rintoul, 1124 Woodland, Manhattan KS66502-2716) and I will send you some brief instructions and a checklist. After the count day, you will need to send that information back to me as quickly as possible so that I can add it to the count results.

Group Leaders Phone (day, eve)

D. Burnett 537-2502
D. Kerr 456-2771

C. Ferguson 532-6730, 539-4856
D. Rintoul 532-6663, 537-0781

H. Hoogheem 539-7080
C. Smith 532-6656, 539-6918

**NFHAS CBC Potluck Supper December 18, 1999**

After spending the day tramping through the wilds of the Manhattan countryside counting birds, come on over to the Christmas Bird Count Potluck Supper at the Senior's Service Center on Fourth & Leavenworth, Manhattan. The doors will open at 5:30 PM and the potluck meal will begin at 6:00 or whenever you arrive till 9:30 or when we run out of food. During the course of the evening, we will swap stories and compile the numbers. If you would like to donate food to the potluck please call **Carla Bishop** for coordination of the menu. The plan is to serve chili, pizza, chips or crackers, relishes, desserts, hot & cold drinks, and whatever else anyone is inclined to bring. **The number is 532-1859 (w); 539-5129 (h); or e-mail at cbishop@ksu.edu.**



CBC KANSAS CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Webster Reservoir - Mike Rader
Thursday, December 16
 Cedar Bluff Reservoir - Scott Seltman
Friday, December 17
 Quivira NWR - Gary Meggars
Saturday, December 18
 Dodge City - Joleen Fromm
 Halstead/Newton - Dwight Platt
 Hays - Greg Farley
 John Redmond - Bob Culbertson
 Lakin - Leonard Rich
 Lawrence - Galen Pittman
 Manhattan - Dave Rintoul
 Olathe - Don Weiss
 Parsons - Paul Milks
 Salina - Harold Lear
 Sawyer - Ken Brunson
 Topeka - Gary Haden
 Waconda - Mike Rader
 Wichita - Don Vannoy
Sunday, December 19
 Emporia - Jean Schulenberg
 Oskaloosa/Perry Lake - Richard Rucker
 Syracuse - Art Nonhof
 Wakefield/Upper Milford Lake - Chuck Otte
 Wilson - Mike Rader
 Winfield/Udall - Max Thompson
Monday, December 20
 Cheyenne Bottoms - Helen Hands
 Olsburg - Gary Jeffrey
 Sandhills - Debra Bolton

Tuesday, December 21
 El Dorado - Bill Langley
Wednesday, December 22
 Canyonlands (SE Logan Co.) - Tom Shane
 Slate Creek Wetlands - Gene Young
Sunday, December 26
 Arkansas City - Gene Young
Monday, December 27
 Baldwin - Roger Boyd
 Junction City - Chuck Otte
Wednesday, December 29
 Linn County - Roger Boyd
 Old Garfield County - Barbara Campbell
Friday, December 31
 Cimarron National Grasslands (Morton Co.) - Sebastian Patti
 Leavenworth - John Schukman
Saturday, January 1
 Black Mesa, OK - Sebastian Patti
 Kirwin NWR - Bill Schaff
 Southeast KS Mined Land
Sunday, January 2
 Bonner Springs - Galen Pittman
 Liberal - Sebastian Patti
 Red Hills - Barber County - Pete Janzen
 Scott Lake - Tom Shane
Saturday, January 8
 Blackwolf - NW Ellsworth Co - Mike Rader
 Garden City - Marie Osterbuhr
Sunday, January 9
 Kanopolis - Mike Rader
 Ulysses - Dan LaShelle
1st week of January
 Black Wolf (NE Ellsworth Co)

OLSBURG CBC: For those interested in the Olsburg CBC on Dec. 20th, we will meet at the Randolph Cafe between 6:30 and 7:00 AM. Lunch at the Jeffrey's.

ALSO: Feb. 18-21, 2000
GBBC (Great Backyard Bird Count) count the numbers and kinds of birds that visit your feeders during any or all of the four days and report them to: **BirdSource web site** - <http://www.birdsource.org> OR The Cornell Lab <http://birds.cornell.edu>

Check the KOS (Kansas Ornithological Society) Website: <http://www.ksbirds.org/meetings/99meetingabstracts.html> for the most complete and up to date list.



FYI: "Coffee, Birds and Trade Policy: Making the Connection." This interesting document was put out last month by Seattle Audubon Society (part of their Northwest Shade Coffee Campaign) along with Equal Exchange West and the Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund. It's a good combination of material, with a primer on coffee production, sun vs. shade, shade gradients/spectrum, the impact on birds, organic, fair trade, small-scale coffee production, and the WTO. It's a commendable effort to blend the issues of fair trade and shade coffee. You can access the 12-page report from one of the following sites:
www.earthjustice.org/work/international.html www.seattleaudubon.org/conservation/cons.asp

editor's note:



PLEASE: Articles for the Prairie Falcon Newsletter must be received by the editor by the 15th of the month. I can not guarantee an article will be included in the Newsletter if received later than the 15th.

It is doubtful that this plan will accomplish all the desires of NFHAS, but keep in mind it is only a 10-15 year plan. This is very short-term, and a beginning from which to build. It is especially important to remember that establishing a Tallgrass Praire National Preserve is a VERY BIG accomplishment, hard won by dedicated and caring individuals, mostly from the environmental and conservation community. The new Preserve, now more than ever, needs positive support from the people who have always worked hard to promote it. Establishing a lowland prairie along Fox Creek and re-introducing bison to the preserve cannot be implemented until the General Management Plan is approved. Implementaion will necessitate additional planning and resources for which there is already limited funding. Immediate changes to the stocking and grazing regime could possibly be agreed upon, but requires money to compensate the lease agreement. Funds are also needed for basic upkeep and developemnt, such as trails, natural resource inventory and monitoring, invasive weed management, historical buildings, public programs and interpretive displays. It also takes money allocated by the U.S. Congress for additional personnel to do these things. Without a doubt progress will be slow. I hope this report gives great optimism for the preserve. It is a spcial place and will grow to be even better with all our help.

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

General Draft will be available for public comment from mid-November to January 19th, 1999. It will also be available on-line at [www. Nps.gov/tap](http://www.Nps.gov/tap)

Three open house dates have been set:

Nov. 30th - Strong City/Cottonwood Falls

Dec. 1st - Wichita

Dec. 2nd - Lawrence

For more information call National Park Service at 316 273-6034, or National Park Trust at 316-273-8139.



SKYLIGHT

I suspect there are still parents who, when a gifting occasion approaches, warn their offspring not to ask for the moon. The phrase itself is a quiet tribute to the appealing beauty of the moon, and particularly this month its glow is something worth hoping to see. On Dec. 22nd it will be full at the same time that it's at perigee (its closest approach to the earth), and at the same time that the earth is almost as close as it gets to the sun. That means a little more apparent size, plus a little stronger light, and if there's a clear sky and a spread of fresh snow, the darkness should be scintillatingly bright. Then add in the fact that it's all occurring on the night of the winter solstice, when longer daylight begins to return, and one could feel challenged to do something equal to the occasion.

Just going out and looking up and around might well qualify, and while doing so, contemplate that kids born this year could be college students before the same confluence will come again, about 19 years down the road. It might also be a good time to get a picture of the moon as a huge glowing ball about to roll down the slope of the roof, or as a grinning Cheshire cat gleaming in the crook of a tree. Or find a place where two opaque objects let a searchlight beam of moonlight pass between. I saw the October moon strike a large tuft of grass that way with enough power that the grass glowed startlingly and memorably yellowish amid the black shadows and against the grayness beyond. Very likely there are people who will be scheduling plantings, surgeries, and other activities, based

*When the good ship Moon unfurls all sails
shadows sharpen, much else pales.*

*Some day-dark shapes take a misty glow
on a sea of sparkles when there's snow.*

— Pete Cohen

on the timing of this event. However those projects turn out, I know there's a pleasant feeling to pacing oneself to lunar phases, a sense of being meaningfully involved in the workings of the universe, of receiving some cooperation that the arbitrary numbers on a watch or calendar do not give. Of course it could be an awkward plan for governing, for while legislatures can stall clocks and cover calendars to finish their work, they could not alter the moon's passage. Which reminds me to clarify something I wrote in October, that the successive plump moons during the fall months occur because in its orbit it comes over our horizon at shallower angles in the fall than in the spring. I meant shallower if its position is plotted from day to day. If considered hour by hour from the point of rising on a given night, the full moons of spring and fall will rise overhead at the same steepness; while the full moon of December will soar higher through the sky, and the full moon of July will pass across lower. This happens because in order to see the moon full, it has to be, from earth, diametrically opposite the sun. Therefore, each full moon rises at sunset (and not at midnight, as some romantic novelists would have it), reflecting from the position the sun will be in, six months hence; and with full coming this year at the winter solstice, the moon will be at its highest as the sun will be at its lowest. Joy, and enjoy!

The dark of the new moon will occur on the 7th, and there's at least a couple other December phenomena that should be noted: one, a sporting chance to see distant Uranus, especially on the evenings of the 12th - 14th.

Reddish, easily noted Mars will be a helpful guide in the southwest, for less than one degree to the north will be Uranus. A degree is about the same as a finger's width at arm's length. To look more precisely, I have some extra, very helpful guidance from the staff of the Kansas Flint Hills Observatory Complex, that is being developed in Wabaunsee county. They say that Uranus, at 6th magnitude, is barely visible to the naked eye, so perhaps best to have binoculars (figuring that on average they will present about a ten-degree field of view). The sporting part comes because it's harder to see dimmer objects when they're near brighter ones, and there will be a (brighter) 4th mag. star along with a 6th mag. star close to the northwest of Uranus, and another 6th mag. star to the southeast, plus other background objects. A small telescope could show individual items more clearly, though the narrower focus would make it harder to locate them in perspective. But why quibble? Might as well try for it. I guess it doesn't come any easier. During those same nights, keep an eye out for the Geminid meteor shower, which the Flint Hills Observatory folk say can be as good as the August Perseids, at one or two notables a minute. Meanwhile, Jupiter and Saturn will be well up and distinctly bright by nightfall, all month, Jupiter leading westward. And on the 3rd, the moon and Venus sing a dawn duet, with Venus singing low and the moon a little higher, and quiet Mercury listening to the lower left of Venus. By dawn of the 5th, Venus will be higher and near the star, Spica, while to the lower left a thinner moon will be just above Mercury as the new day claims the stage.

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PLANT OF THE MONTH

— Thomas Morgan

One Christmas, a man did not have enough money to buy a Christmas tree. He was determined to provide a tree, so he trimmed the lower branches of jack pines that had been planted as a windbreak. His seven-year-old son helped him bring the branches home. He gave the boy the important job of holding branches in place, while he nailed each to a 2 x 2 that served as the trunk of the Christmas tree. I was the seven-year-old. Making a tree from jack pine branches is my favorite memory of Christmas. I've forgotten all of the carefully wrapped presents that Dad gave when he could. I remember the gift of togetherness when we built the tree. Dad never begrudged spending money for Christmas, but held tight to the dollar at other times of the year. Sometimes he worked half a day to build a contraption that would save a dollar. If his contraption wasn't as good as a store-bought one, he shook his head and told me, "Son, poor people have got poor ways." I will always remember Dad as a determined man who could accomplish anything with his will to make do. I learned it early. Don't be beholden. Make do with what you have. Don't give your money to a rich man with fancy ideas about expensive odds that he claims you should have. After more than three decades have passed, I still despise "rich ways" and honor "poor ways" that remind me of the most honorable man I ever knew.

Jack pine has the soul of a miser, who spends less of his income than anyone else and is mighty proud of that fact. Jack pine is adapted to live where short summers do not allow sufficient recycling of minerals for the growth of big leaves. Its short needles are twisted into a curve, as if it pained the tree to spend the resources to grow the needles. The cones are curved, as if everything about this tree was

twisted by its miserliness. It clutches its cones to its branches, hoarding them, refusing to spend the seeds. A cone sometimes remains unopened for twenty years, becoming embedded in the thickening branch. There is variability for this trait, however. The trees hedge their bets, as they wait for a wildfire. When fire races through the trees, the heat melts the resin between the scales of cones and releases the seeds into freshly fertilized soil and the full sunlight that the jack pine must have. A tree laden with unopened cones is a storehouse of food, but birds must be determined, since it is difficult to open the cones. Red crossbills are determined. One type of red crossbills is known as "type 5" and it is a specialist on cones of lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*), a close relative of jack pine (*Pinus banksiana*). These pines become indistinguishable because of hybridization whenever present in the same area, so I'm tempted to imagine that crossbills can open the cones of jack pine. At any rate, there is much that remains unknown about "type 5" and most people agree that it should be classified as a separate species (see article in Jan. '99 Audubon).

Craig Benkman has studied the arms race between "type 5" and the pine tree that holds tightly to its seeds. As populations of trees evolve a bird-proof cone, the birds evolve a better bill to open the cone. Benkman believes that changes in one area of Canada began less than 7,000 years ago. The easiest way to distinguish the species of red crossbills is by call notes. Benkman discovered that one of the populations of "type 5" has unique call notes, although the process of divergence into species may have just begun.

The red squirrel is remarkably proficient at cutting open the cones. When

the squirrel is present, the crossbills are less abundant, mainly because of the competition for the cones, but the squirrel is predacious and doesn't hesitate to prey on nestlings. Despite its predacious nature, I'm fond of this squirrel and was overjoyed to see it cutting open the cones of jack pine in Minnesota this fall. The squirrel's alarm call sounds like a bird call. The long, clicking, saw-like buzz is a characteristic sound of conifer woods. I feel deprived of it now. Kansas has no native conifers and therefore no resident red squirrels or crossbills, although one or more types of red crossbills occasionally wander through the state.

Kirtland's warbler nests almost exclusively in jack pine trees that are less than 20 years old. They sometimes nest in plantations of Christmas trees that duplicate conditions found in young forests of jack pine. They migrate from Michigan to the Bahamas each fall, but pass to the east of Kansas. Their preferred habitat during the winter is within pine groves, and some biologists believe that careful management of pines in both summer and winter habitat will be required to ensure the survival of the endangered Kirtland's warbler.

Under jack pines this fall, I saw short plants with shiny leaves and small red berries. With my limited skills, I misidentified the plant as bearberry, which has bland-tasting berries. I ate several. The taste was distinctive. It was on the tip of my tongue, ... wintergreen. That is what it was, wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*). The taste put me in a festive mood. I will remember the taste of the jack pine woods when I trim the tree this year. On Christmas Eve, I'll dream of magically tasting the entire wilderness, savoring the ultimate wealth of relationships that makes me feel fully alive in wilderness.



TAKE NOTE

Endangered Species Coalition: contact GREEN Policy Coordinator, Ed Lytwak, at elytwak@defenders.org.

— Chris Cokinos

COSPONSORS NEEDED FOR ESA BILLS! Rep. George Miller's (D-CA) Endangered Species Recovery Act of 1999 (HR 960) has 86 cosponsors (to see the full list, go to <http://thomas.loc.gov>) The Endangered Species Coalition has been working hard to get a companion bill introduced in the Senate. Our efforts are paying off with Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) ready to introduce an ESA reauthorization bill very soon IF he can get enough Senators to join him. **WHAT YOU CAN DO:** Call your Representative and Senators. Let them know you stand for stronger protections for endangered species and you want them to fully support HR 960 and the Lautenberg Senate ESA bill by signing on as cosponsors. The Capital Switchboard number is 202-224-3121. Better yet, write a letter.

The Honorable Representative (or Senator) _____

U.S. House of Representative (or U.S. Senate _____)

Washington, DC 20515

FIGHT GRIZZLY BEAR DELISTING - Administration is under heavy political pressure from oil and gas industry, developers and the State of Wyoming to delist the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear before it has really recovered. Until strong habitat standards to protect grizzlies are in place, removing the safety net of the Endangered Species Act is premature. Delisting will lead only to more commercial development of our National Forests and destruction of grizzly bear habitat. **WHAT YOU CAN DO:** Send an electronic postcard to Interior Sec. Bruce Babbitt through the Sierra Club's Grizzly Bear Ecosystem Project web page <http://www.sierraclub.org/wilderness/grizzly>.

SAVE SNAKE RIVER SALMON - Up to 15 million wild salmon and steelhead once returned to the Columbia and Snake Rivers. Now, only a few hundred

thousand wild fish return each year. Hydro power dams kill between 80-95% of migrating young salmon and steelhead. The best available science calls for creating more natural river conditions—colder, cleaner and free-flowing water—as the only way to save salmon and steelhead from extinction. The Columbia & Snake Rivers Campaign is fighting to bring back salmon and steelhead by modifying or partially dismantling 5 federal dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers, restoring over 200 miles of vital river habitat. The Clinton Administration is scheduled to make key decisions in Fall 1999. **WHAT YOU CAN DO:** Sign the Save Our Wild Salmon Citizens's petition. Over 10,000 citizens have already signed on. The goal is to get 25,000 signatures before Fall 1999, when the Lower Snake River Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) comes out. To sign the petition go to: <http://www.columbia-snake.org/SOS-site/action/petition.cfm>



Have you been wondering what this column is about? Just to remind readers (and myself) I am keeping you notified about the progress of the Northeast Community Park prairie restoration and the Cecil Best birding trail. We are planning to start work! Most of the background stuff has been done and we have periods of time when there's not much to report. During these times I get to write about anything I want — that was the deal. So, lacking any other ideas, I'll tell you a curious little tale about a night lost on the prairie — actually I could write a whole series of columns about getting lost, which maybe I'll do — it's a few months yet to spring.

It's interesting about being lost — in a desperate situation it feels like the sweaty hand of a mischievous troll reaches into the pit of my stomach, steals away all of my inner confidence and replaces it with a cold hungry stone. But it can also be a time of awakening. I lose my grip on my normal daily, somewhat rational, mental function and tend to rely more on subtle senses and intuitions. This story isn't desperate or scary but it does have a little awakening moment — it could be called "The Peanut on the Prairie."

A few years ago, it was in the fall I think, I was out at Charlie and Denise's to

join them for dinner and a sauna and then I was going to camp up in the hills that night. In the late afternoon I set up my tent in a little hollow, grabbed a bag of peanuts and walked to a grassy ridge to watch the sunset. I would eat a peanut, toss the shell back into the bag, eat another, watch the sky, eat a peanut — like that. While there was a little light left I got up to go down to the house for dinner. I put the bag in my pocket, ate the last peanut and threw the shell to the ground.

On the way down to the house I paid attention to landmarks, what gullies I crossed, certain memorable trees, what landforms were on my right and left. I even set signs for myself — a log across the path where I would leave to cut across the prairie. I would be coming back in the dark. The sauna and good conversation broke up late in the night and I headed back up into the hills to sleep. I was relaxed and half-way spaced-out and must have stepped over that log in the trail because after a while I stopped and said to myself, "Where's my camp?... Where am I?" Afterandering around in the hills for an hour or so, totally disoriented (my little flashlight was almost out of juice so it didn't help at all), I started to think about finding a comfortable spot to sit and watch stars until morning.

Then something felt kind of familiar about this certain hill and a thought occurred to me, "If I could find that peanut shell I would know where I am and then easily make it back to my tent." Of course this was a crazy idea! But before my rational mind had a chance to talk my intuition out of it, I switched on my flashlight. I followed the dim yellow pool of light a few steps — there it was, the peanut shell, patiently waiting for me. And even though I was surprised, part of me expected the shell to be there — like a little elf-friend had left his hat to guide my way. I turned and walked down into the hollow where my tent was standing in the starlit tallgrass with my warm sleeping bag inside — home for the night.

All that prairie and one tiny shell and senses we have that I don't need to understand — they're just there. Our old animal experiences, thankfully, are still with us — just barely below the surface.

Then there's the story of Leann Harrell and Dave Redmon and I, flabbergasted and giddy at how we could get so lost on a Christmas bird count day in a thick prairie fog — just like I said, I could go on.

CONCERTED EFFORT RESULTS IN PRESERVE CLEAN-UP

The Michel-Ross Audubon Preserve, located on Stagg Hill Rd. in southwest Manhattan, benefitted from four separate clean-up efforts in October. When NFHAS acquired the 20-acre parcel in early 1998, I noted two areas where construction debris had been illegally dumped in the past. Thanks to volunteers from the Alpha Gamma Rho and Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternities, over THREE TONS of rubble was hauled out and properly disposed. One of the areas was a veritable talus slope of waste material, requiring the volunteers to form a fire brigade-type of operation, with broken concrete blocks and the like, passed hand-to-hand up a steep slope. Another volunteer devoted time to dig up several tires imbedded in the soil in the ravine, which were then also properly disposed. Lastly, six "Auduboners" spent two hours policing roadside and ravine litter, hauling out another 600 lbs. of trash, including a lawn mower and more rubble. Thanks to all of these volunteers our preserve is clean and green for the first time in years. Check it out for yourself and see if you don't agree.

- Paul Weidhaas,
Land Preservation Chair

Michel-Ross
Preserve
THREATENED

Michel-Ross Audubon Preserve

Wouldn't you know it? Our Chapter establishes a nature preserve in Manhattan and right away, somebody wants to build a road through it! That somebody is the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) and the road they propose would connect Seth Childs Road directly to Stagg Hill Road — right through a couple of real estate offices and our Michel-Ross Audubon Preserve. But KDOT's proposal also creates a problem — an unworkable intersection at Canyon Drive. KDOT's solution? Close Canyon Drive's Allison entrance and build another road from Stagg Hill across the preserve (again!) To connect the nine households along Canyon Drive. The Board of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society is opposed to this plan, and has expressed its views to the Manhattan City Commissioners. At this time, we are not certain how excited the city is about implementing KDOT's plan, but it would help if Audubon members and greenspace enthusiasts would contact the commissioners, too. One letter will do — address it to Manhattan City Commissioners, 1101 Poyntz Ave., Manhattan, KS 66502. If you want to write them individually, they are: Ed Klimik, Karen McCulloh, Carol Peak, Roger Reitz, and Bruce Snead. We'll update you as we learn more. KDOT has asked for a decision from the City by April 2000.

-Jan Garton

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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 to Betsy Hax at the National Audubon Society (bhax@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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Write or call anytime