



the prairie falcon

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February 18
7:30 p.m.

"Bald Eagle, Least Tern,
and Piping Plover
Breeding Populations in
Kansas"

Dan Mulhern,
U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Service

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

Bald Eagle, Least Tern, and Piping Plover Breeding Populations in Kansas

Dan Mulhern
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Dan has worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Manhattan since June 1984, and since 1988 has worked with the threatened and endangered species program. Dan is also the migratory bird coordinator for the office.

Dan will describe the history of known breeding for each of these species in the state of Kansas, and the efforts to monitor populations and nesting success by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE IN TIME AND PLACE!
Ackert Hall, KSU, Room 221, 7:30 p.m. Feb. 18th.

Before each program, we invite our speakers to join us for an informal dinner and discussion. Feel free to join us this month at Pat's BBQ in Aggieville, 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

BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK

Join us Saturday, Feb. 14th and every second Saturday at 8 a.m. in the Ackert/Durland parking lot on the KSU campus. We will carpool to a local birding hotspot and should return by about 11 a.m. 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.

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(CBC REPORTS)

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UPCOMING DATES:

- Feb 13-16 Great Backyard Bird Count
- Feb 14 Bird Feed ORDER deadline
- Feb 14 Beginning Birding, 8 a.m.
Ackert/Durland Parking Lot
- Feb 18 PROGRAM: 7:30 p.m.
*Rm. 221, Ackert Hall, KSU
Dinner 5:45 p.m. Pat's BBQ
- Feb 28 Bird Feed PICKUP
9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
UFM, 1221 Thurston

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MANHATTAN, KS



A FAMILIAR SCENT

dru clarke

A fur coat hung in the hall closet. It was my mother's, a gift from my dad before I was born, so by the time I discovered it, the coat had taken on her scent. And another, deeper, fragrance I couldn't quite identify. The fur was a glistening, warm brown, long and soft. Whenever I'd get upset, I'd shut myself in the closet and bury my face in that fur; later, I'd emerge, feeling comforted and calm. Occasionally I'd haul the coat off the hanger, and parade around the house, dragging the coat like a royal train. It was the most elegant thing, even though it was made from the pelts of skunk.

The Flemington Fur Company was only a few blocks from our house. When they built a new factory, the old, abandoned one was easy to sneak into. Strewn on the rickety wooden floor were scraps of fur we kids would piece together, imagining the animals they were stripped from. They would end up lining makeshift beds for our cats and dolls. Skunk fur evidently lends itself to dye: no black and white scraps were ever found to betray the origin of the emerging couture.

Skunks belong to the family *Mustelidae*, a group of carnivorous mammals with well developed anal scent glands. The Striped Skunk, *Mephitis mephitis*, is doubly well named, as the adjective "mephitic" means "offensive to the smell." Their relatives use the scent primarily for marking territory or attracting a mate; in the skunks, these glands are large and produce a thick, yellow oil used, as a last resort, but effectively, for defense. Our boisterous boy dog, Bosun, mindlessly aggressive to animal intruders, has met this defense more than once, slinking to the back door, wiping paws over eyes, whimpering from a direct hit. Tomato juice, ammonia, and gasoline are recommended antidotes for the scent's removal from fur, while carbolic soap and water supposedly work for skin.

Sometimes, "a view of the small and pretty animal... arouses the ardour of the observer," according to an 1895 book entitled "Natural History in Anecdote." One late spring, on Antelope Run Road, my husband was held up in his pickup by a skunk traffic jam. A mother skunk was ferrying her litter of a half dozen across a narrow bridge, and as soon as she'd get one or two to cross, she'd go back for the rest, and the two who had crossed would scramble back to her. A full twenty minutes later, she succeeded in rounding them all up as she led them in a comical, shuffling zigzag to safety on the other side. Other folks encountering such a phenomenon at night have reported seeing a crooked line of undulating white stripes, their black bodies obscured by the dark, squiggling across the landscape.

Once I picked up a roadkilled skunk and took it to a local trapper who politely declined my request to skin and tan it for me. I ended up burying it in the back yard, fertilizer for a struggling fruit tree.

My mother gave me her old coat, and I used it along with other pelts given to me by Dr. E.J. Frick, the original director of Sunset Zoo, to show my students the seductive allure and value of fur when alternative warm clothes were unavailable. Many furbearers, like the now endangered sea otter, a mustelid relative of the skunk, were truly worth their weight in gold, and their populations declined to near extinction. Skunks, however, seem to be holding their own.

The pelts of my mother's coat are dried and brittle now, and while I made a new quilted lining for it, it is unsuitable for public wear. Even if it were wearable, I prefer to let it hang in my closet where I sometimes take it out and hold it to my cheek. I may even bury my face in it, and breathe in that familiar scent.

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**NEWLY DESIGNED NORTHERN FLINT HILLS
AUDUBON SOCIETY
T-SHIRTS ARE NOW
AVAILABLE - ON
SALE AT THE BIRD
SEED PICKUP,
FEB 28, 2004**





I love potato chips. After eating a chip, I must have another until there are no more in my house, my neighbor's house, or in the state of Kansas. Perhaps my salt intake might be excessive. I'm only certain of this. As painful as it is to think about, I could survive without chips.

People had no salt if they were in inland locations with no deposits of salt and if they had no access to trading routes. For example, people must have survived in the Ozarks without salt. Can one feel truly alive without salted potato chips? Such questions caused me to write this column.

The oceans presently have a mixture of salts with 31% sodium and are an ancient cradle of life. Like many vertebrates, our blood has salts which contain about 36% sodium. This story seems like a typical tale of the similarity of all life, but the differences are what add spice to the story.

Most plants are adapted to low-sodium soil and use potassium instead of sodium. A few species of plants accumulate sodium. Species that are rooted in the muck at the bottom of a pond acquire large amounts. This appears to be a consequence of their failure to acquire much potassium from poorly oxygenated muck. This is of no consequence to plant-feeding insects, because they need only small amounts of sodium (since most of them are adapted to consumption of sodium-deficient fare). Plant-feeding vertebrates need large amounts of sodium, and may show symptoms of deficiency in areas without deposits of salt. For example, moose require large amounts of

sodium, and their ability to reproduce and survive may depend on their ability to find sodium-rich fare. Luckily, after a winter on sodium-deficient fare, they can wade out into the muck and munch on sodium-rich fare with a more intense hunger than most of us feel when we munch on chips. So never stand between a moose and a pond with lip-smacking, succulent food.

There is a horrifying description of several Native Americans dying from the malady which results from sodium deficiency, which I will not summarize here. However, women who were pregnant or nursing would be most vulnerable to this condition. At the time of their first contact with Caucasians, Native Americans in the northwestern coastal areas did not use salt even when it was available. The people who lived in the hotter areas to the south used salt, perhaps because their losses of sodium in sweat would have killed them if they hadn't.

Although many people who had never touched their tongue to salt crystals may have been ignorant of their need for sodium-rich fare, these people must have been omnivores, and in most circumstances, their consumption of meat and aquatic plants allowed them to survive. For a hunter gatherer, meat was a critically important source of sodium. Another source was the edible portions of aquatic plants, possibly including new shoots, green bloom spikes, pollen, and roots of cattails, tubers of arrowhead, and seeds and roots of lotus.

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KONZA PRAIRIE EDUCATION PROGRAM NEEDS YOU!



The Konza Environmental Education Program (KEEP) gives tours of Konza Prairie Biological Station. Many school groups and other organizations come to learn about our ecosystem, the tallgrass prairie. Volunteer tour guides (docents) are needed to help with this program. You decide when and how much time you have available.

If you love the prairie and would like to learn more about it, training sessions to become a Konza Prairie Docent begin Wednesday evening, February 25, at 7:00 p.m. in 221 Ackert Hall, KSU Campus, Manhattan (corner of Claflin and Dennison). The first orientation session will be followed by several field trips and learning experiences, generally on Saturday mornings. Contact Valerie Wright, Environmental Educator (785/587-0381), or Verlyn Richards, Docent Coordinator (785/539-6416). See the Konza web site at www.ksu.edu/konza/keep



Hey, another Leap Year is upon us! Yet the excitement isn't what it was when Sadie Hawkins leapt from the panels of Li'l Abner comics to liberate gals from the general concept that they should wait to be asked. One day out of 1461 days, thanks to artist Al Capp and the Julian/Gregorian calendar, they could choose their guys directly with propriety, without resort to wiles only. Sadie Hawkins dances burst out like periodic bonfires. Then of course the fires spread, and the general concept these days appears to be that the freedom to ask is diurnal, nocturnal, and unisexual.

This evolution should not be confused with Leap Year itself, which, under Julius Caesar, was bisextile. He, having given proper order to the very disarranged, at-whim calendar he inherited, ordained that the needed quadrennial extra day would be achieved by calling two February days in succession the Sixth before the Kalends of March. The Romans counted toward a point of time, not away from. We would've called those twin days February 24th, but now we're not bisextile or biquintile, etc. We have a separate February 29th that is periodic, and what we are about to have also is another group of people who, three years out of four, will have a choice of birthdays, February 28th, or March 1st.

All because our cosmos is only selectively cooperative with those would have all things in symmetrical, repetitive lockstep with other happenings. Venus, who is so drawing attention these evenings, heading for her waltz across the Solar Ballroom in June, is sort of cooperative, repeating that transit performance predictably in separations of eight years interspersed alternately between separations of 105.5 and 121.5 years. This corrects my error of omitting the 105.5 figure last time. Those who would keep track of cosmic eccentricities must first learn their fractions.

And it's really been that those bent on precise precision need not wait four years to have a leap time, for modern technology discovered a need to occasionally adjust our cesium clocks at the close of December or June to add one second. One source

tells of what I'd call a "stumble second," an occasional need to hold the clocks still one second on one of those dates. However, for the past five years there's been no such Leap Second experience. Earth seems to have stopped slowing down. Discovery News reports different possible reasons: including warming of the northern hemisphere land mass, sending more moisture aloft (like a skater raising arms to spin faster), or changing gravitational tugs by other planets varying their orbits. More background info, particularly as it pertains to the timing of eclipses (and their effect on human affairs), is nicely gathered in a 1999 book, "Eclipse," by Duncan Steel.

Meanwhile the Great Galactic Ghoul or Goalie, guarding Mars has knocked out Japan's contribution to the current explorations there with a left jab to the electronics and a right cross from a solar flare. But let the USA's roving Spirit slip past to land gently, on target, camera at ready. Another USA landing will have been attempted January 24th, after this article's deadline. As I write, the European Beagle lander is being held incommunicado somewhere in the Ghoul's kennel, sine die.

Ahead, Venus will continue starting each evening higher in the west (till early April), while in the east Jupiter will be rising, in the lower regions of Leo, earlier in the evening, till on the night of March 3-4, he will sail from dusk to dawn, the brightest shine up there, except only for Venus and the Moon. Throughout the period, by observing the Moon's predictable travel across the sky, waning then waxing, one can anticipate when the celestial jeweler will have the Moon and either of the planets affixed close together in a marvelous setting, ephemeral, but repeatable from time to time. Saturn will be up at nightfall, trailing behind Orion in Gemini and setting from close to 4 a.m. to 3 a.m. through the period. The Moon will be close to him February 29th, after visiting Mars on the 25th, Venus on the 23rd. Full Moon February 20, new March 6.



Observers: 58 observers in field in 27 parties (non-owling) plus 4 at feeders
Time and Distance: 4 hours at feeders; 15.5 miles and 0.5 hours owling.
Total party hours = 246.8, total party-miles = 662.1, 96.55 hours and 94.5 miles on foot, 150.25 hours and 567.5 miles by car

New birds for this count circle – Trumpeter Swan - 3

Three Trumpeter Swans, all with orange patagial tags, were present on Pottawatomie State Fishing Lake #2. These birds were distinguished from Tundra Swan by black bill with straighter border between base of bill and gape, long straight (rather than curved) neck, large size. Distinguished from Mute Swan by color of bill (black). Photos of these birds were taken by several individuals, see www.naturalplanet.org/spotlight/january_2_2004.htm

Total species – 99

Total individuals – 103,123

Species seen count week but not on count day: Double-crested cormorant, and Blue-winged Teal.

Other comments - Loggerhead Shrike has not been seen on this count since 1995, reflecting a serious decline in populations of this species here on the northern edge of the wintering range. American Crow counts were down for the first time in many years. And Black-capped chickadees, widely rumored to be another one of the species hardest hit by the West Nile Virus, also seemed pretty scarce this season

THANKS! THANKS!

Another good chili dinner was enjoyed at the end of the day. Thanks go out to the cooking crew led by **CARLA BISHOP** from the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society

For final Manhattan CBC report check:

http://www.ksu.edu/audubon/manhattan_winter_bird_count_2003.htm

OLSBURG CHRISTMAS BIRD CENSUS 2003

Held Jan. 10, 2004, Seven observers (+ 5 birdfeeder watchers)

70 species, 11,532 birds

Highlight was a juvenile Golden Eagle, the first for the Olsburg CBC



NOW FOR THE NEXT COUNT: The Great Backyard Bird Count

Great Backyard Bird Count will take place February 13 – 16, 2004. The National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology are partners in the creation of the GBBC. For more information on how to participate, and submit your counts go to: <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>



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Audubon Society**
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February PROGRAM
AT Rm 221, Ackert Hall,
KSU 7:30 p.m.

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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!

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Addresses & Phone numbers of Your Elected Representatives (anytime)

Write ✉ - **or call** ☎

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