



# the prairie falcon

Vol. 31, No.08  
APRIL 2003

APRIL PROGRAM:

SHOREBIRD  
IDENTIFICATION  
GENE BREHM

APRIL 16, 7:30PM  
1014 THROCKMORTON

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

## Shorebird Identification Gene Brehm, Kansas Wildlife & Parks

Gene Brehm will be presenting the recently completed Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) video production **“The Shorebirds of Kansas.”** Gene has been employed by the KDWP since 1982 when he was hired as the still photographer. He has been the videographer since 1986. Gene worked extensively at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge and Cheyenne Bottoms to collect the footage for this production. It was compiled from over 10 years of taping.

**ATTENTION:** Please note that due to unforeseen circumstances, a couple of our programs have been shuffled -- \* Joe Collins will present the program for May 21st, and Paul Johnsgard will present the program for June 18th.

*Unfortunately, Gene Brehm will not be able to join us for dinner prior to his program.. But we will still get together at the Golden Wok at 5:45 PM. The program begins at 7:30 PM. Refreshments are served after every meeting. All meetings are open to the public.*

### Field Trips

#### BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK

Join us Saturday, Apr. 12<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto:drintoul@ksu.edu) for more information.

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### CONTRIBUTORS:

DRU CLARKE  
PETE COHEN  
LEANN HARRELL  
THOMAS MORGAN  
PAUL WEIDHAAS

### UPCOMING DATES:

- Apr 12 BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING  
8:00 AM  
Ackert Hall Parking Lot
- Apr 16 Shorebird ID  
Gene Brehm  
Dinner 5:45 -Program 7:30  
1014 Throckmorton, KSU  
Corner of Claflin & Dennison
- Apr 26 BIRDATHON see pg. 5-6  
Call 539-0483
- Apr 25-27 Wings-N-Wetlands Weekend  
Great Bend
- May 10 North American Migratory  
Bird Day

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## A Rite of Spring Dru Clarke

*So, like a forgotten fire, a childhood can always flare up again within us.”*  
Gaston Bachelard

April's lengthening days are an attractive nuisance. While we should be working on tax returns (we're usually too depressed in winter to get them out of the way) and attending to annual spring house cleaning (whoever deemed spring for this?), the yellow light, sapphire skies, and greening up of the skin of the earth are too much to resist. They bring out the kid in us. We break out the drip torches or the matches, the rakes, wet towels or water carts, the drag line behind the pickup – depending on how sophisticated your approach – and head for the pastures and twiggy wood lots with their limb and leaf litter. We've mowed the property edge, close to the fence lines. We bundle up in protective gear, cover our skin (save our faces), wear thick-soled shoes. We test the wind with a wet finger, assess the relative humidity, alert the county. It is time to burn.

An Easterner by roots, the spectacle of spring burning on the prairie confounded me when I first encountered it. Fire, to me, was an aberration, something to avoid, something to suppress at all costs. My biggest memory of fire was when our grammar school went up, a torch of glorious incendiary splendor, horrifying but awesome. Its heavily oiled wood floors, spacious halls, and twenty foot ceilings combined to produce a formula for an effective and total combustion. And we got a new, less flammable school.

Long before I moved to the Flint Hills, I flew over Kansas one spring night – it must have been April – and sections of it glowed like a phosphorescent sea. Back East, such a sight would have generated panic and finger-wagging scolding: how can you DO such a thing? Think of the air pollution, think of the poor

animals. Talk about a shift of paradigms: fire and its complement, grazing, are GOOD for this land.

It begins this way. The first bunch grass – one of the “Big Four,” little bluestem – sparks, sputters, then bursts into flame. One match to combust this patch. How deft will I have to be to raze the entire north pasture? I work my leaf rake and pull glowing leaves and stems along in its wake. New clumps catch and, soon, the northeast corner is walled in by flames taller than I. My pace quickens, my heart racing. The primordial kid in me has been loosed. The burn is on.

I back up the hill, into thin trees, a rock-strewn landscape, drawing the fire with me. I look to the south where my husband has begun a fire with his match. I wonder if he used just one? He is more experienced than I, but I am more competitive, more reckless. The fire here is spotty, but the west pasture, only paces away, sprawls for ten or more acres, and is laden with duff from two years without fire. He is far from me and if I get into trouble I am on my own. The fire jumps the fence and threatens a dead tree. I squeeze between barb wire and catch my jacket, cursing my bulky awkwardness. Flailing, then free, I beat the flames, trampling them into submission, into dead, flat ashes, and avoid our neighbor's ire.

The fire has moved into the pasture. It is ahead of me now. I run to keep up with it. On its edge, the heat sears my face, steals oxygen from my lung blood. I gasp as if drowning and lurch backward out of its ravenous grasp. It relents and backs off, like a predator waiting for its prey to weaken. But it never closes in for the kill. It reverts to a domesticated form and does what I

intended it to. The burn succeeds, and I am here to tell you about it.

I walk through the embers, loosen smoldering horse droppings, rake persistent coals into a hail of sparks that fly up, then extinguish themselves. A deer skeleton, long since cleaned of flesh, charred and disarticulated, is once again visible. I had walked by it often, never seeing it until now. Burnt *elytra* of beetles and tiny pyramids of soil granules from nesting ants memorialize the cleared landscape. But there are no dead animals, no crisp corpses to testify to the horror of fire. In prairie, the animals move out or lie waiting for it to pass in burrows deep enough to avoid the inferno above. I look up and hawks have come to this part of the sky. They know that not all have escaped, or they are waiting for the saved ones to emerge into an exposed hunting ground. Smart birds. My son and daughter-in-law helped us burn two years ago. She, from Connecticut, had never experienced this rite of spring, but became the best practitioner of all. She refused to leave a section unburned and nurtured each blade with tinder until all had been reduced to carbon.

The pleasure of accomplishment shone in her eyes, reflecting the glow of her mission. This spring, again, we will burn our land. The horses will watch attentively and move easily to safe ground. We'll accelerate the recycling of nutrients and give the new grass room and light to grow. We will be good stewards of the prairie. We will be reenacting a ritual known to early men, keeping it and the prairie alive and vital. The world will become strange and wonderful again, like it was when we were kids. And the house's spring cleaning can wait.

© 2003 Dru Clarke, Feb. 12, 2003

*(elytra - outer pair of wings you see that protect the 2nd pair of wings used for flight)*



*“Not only does it eat in the air, the chimney swift drinks and bathes on the wing, dipping to the surface of a pond for a momentary contact with the water; its courtship is aerial; it sometimes even dies in the sky.”*

Lost Woods, The Discovered Writing of Rachel Carson,  
edited by Linda Lear, 1998, Beacon Press, Boston.

When chimney swifts are building a nest, they collect twigs while still on the wing. They glue the twigs with their own saliva. Nest building may take more than three weeks if water dissolves some of their saliva before it hardens. Rainstorms are irritating and sometimes deadly. All of their sustenance is caught on the wing, which is seldom possible during a rainstorm. Following a long rainy spell, the swifts may be found in the bottom of a chimney, lifeless. However, the thoughts of such swifts have been influenced by the need for speed, and one of them may have chosen to expend its last calorie of energy in flight in its true home.

The swift's short tail, which is bluntly squared off, completes a silhouette which resembles a flying cigar. When such a bird rests from its daily labor, it props itself on its tailfeathers while clinging to a vertical surface in a dark place such as hollow sycamore tree. John James Audubon saw them return to such a location. He later wrote:

*“... three or four at a time were pitching into the hole, like bees hurrying into their hive. I remained, my head leaning on the tree, listening to the roaring noise made within by the birds as they settled and arranged themselves ...”*

*Oh, to be there “... with my head leaning on the tree, listening ...”*

Swifts might have a preference for a sleeping place. If I were a swift, I would want to rest in a hollow sycamore tree with my tail feathers and the skin of my feet in contact with the sycamore. I would feel more alive in contact with wood instead of in contact with a soot-grimed chimney.

American sycamores are not old enough to shelter swifts at present. Although swifts have been known to rest in cisterns or wells, the chimney swift would be extinct if there were no chimneys. My house has a chimney. But if I were to get evicted from my customary location on my sofa, I might discover that my chimney is somewhat narrow and cramped.

The minimum diameter of a

sleeping quarters should be eleven inches.

I replaced my furnace last year and had a metal liner installed in the masonry chimney. A narrow metal liner is required for safe, efficient operation of my furnace. But forever thereafter a swift with grappling hook like claws will attempt to find a crevice and find none. Between 1966 and 1996, chimney swifts declined in population in many of the metropolitan areas where they were most abundant in 1966. In an attempt to reverse this trend, aficionados of these wonderful beings are constructing artificial, chimney-like dormitories.

I hope that swifts will begin to find hollow sycamore trees. Preserving old growth sycamores may preserve an old way of life of the swifts. Preserving hollow trees may also preserve our connection with an ancient way of life in which we also slept in such places.

Some day, “... with my head leaning on the tree, listening ...”

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**WORKSHOP  
MAY 3**

**CALL  
785-494-2419  
or  
email  
druc@kansas.net**

The NFHAS Education Committee is helping sponsor a Leopold Education Project Workshop on Saturday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>. Many thanks to Dru Clarke, chapter member and Prairie Falcon contributing writer, who is hosting and organizing the workshop. The intent is to train people in environmental education techniques with activities based on the writings of Aldo Leopold, especially, his A Sand County Almanac.

This is a great opportunity to meet Dru, walk the farm she writes about in her articles and learn how to spread the word for encouraging a land ethic practice. I see a great potential for applying those teachings in after school activities, utilizing the restored prairie/woodland at the Northeast Park. Everyone can gain from this workshop, whether or not they teach professionally (IDP points are available for teachers).

The workshop is limited to 20 people. Registration is \$25 for NFHAS members, \$35 for students and \$45 for others. This covers the cost of the teaching materials which are yours to keep. Lunch will be provided and an optional Dutch Oven Pot Luck is offered after the workshop. For information and registration contact Dru Clarke at 785-494-2419 or email at druc@kansas.net. For Audubon Education-related questions, call Leann at 785-494-2556.

Leann Harrell



It's long-toothed wisdom that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Not so often noted is that without the phenomenon of contrast there'd be little beauty beheld. If all elm trees grew in tightly packed groves, with no solitary ones to be seen against a differing background, the expression "stately elm" would not be in the language. And during this past winter there have been during clear dawns some exceptionally scintillating contrasts available on the Flint Hills.

As the sloped and bluffed grassland began emerging from the night, with a variety of timbered creek bottoms, scattered upland trees and buildings, the sky by contrast would become smoothly pale, an immense uniformity of space, and by contrast within it: the brilliant pinhead-sized Venus rising in the east, the bright pinhead-sized Jupiter setting in the west. Sometimes the moon would park itself somewhere in between; though only half a degree wide itself, it resembled somewhat a bass player joining in with two cornetists. That exuberance of contrasts – the pale, blank, but pierced sky dome with the fuzzily irregular lateral landscape – made it well worth the waking.

In the time ahead, April 15<sup>th</sup> to May 15<sup>th</sup>, Mercury will be contrasting with the night's darkness by stirring itself to its highest point in the sky, 13 degrees above the horizon, a half hour after sunset April 16<sup>th</sup>, then – starting from a little lower each succeeding evening – falling

steeply to the horizon, as planets tend to do this time of the year. This happens because they are all traveling pretty much in the same plane as Earth and thus adhere to the ecliptic, the Sun's apparent path across the sky, which right now is quite vertical to the horizon. By May 1<sup>st</sup> it'll take quick eyes to spot Mercury just above the western horizon in the evening twilight. It will come into the sky again, this time in the early morning, from May 16<sup>th</sup> to June 28<sup>th</sup> but never get more than 5 degrees above the horizon.

On May 15<sup>th</sup> we'll have a reddish moon contrasting with its usual coloring. In other words, there'll be a full eclipse, the first of two this year, after an abstinence of three years. The other will be November 8<sup>th</sup>. The blush comes from the Sun's light, otherwise blocked by the Earth, being refracted by our atmosphere. The Moon should begin feeling the faint penumbral effects about 8PM, begin looking partially obscured around 9, with totality beginning at 10p13 according to StarDate and lasting till 11p06, when the effect should begin to wear off, becoming its full self again at 1a14 on the 16<sup>th</sup>. There is no charge for this performance, unless of course you have to circumvent clouds to see it. In the meantime, in between time (as the song goes) here's what we have for fun. Saturn, while shifting through Orion toward a new home in Gemini, leaves the sky about midnight. Jupiter keeps shining in Cancer (while shifting toward Leo) in the west till the wee hours, more or less about the time a strengthening Mars rises readily

and reddily in the east, and should be seen just above the Moon, April 23<sup>rd</sup>. Lovely Venus comes up about birdsong time in the morn, appearing with the Moon April 28<sup>th</sup>.

The Moon, he pulls up high tides April 17<sup>th</sup>, gets between the two red lights, Mars and Scorpio's Antares, the 23<sup>rd</sup>; hangs between Saturn and Capella in Auriga the Charioteer May 4<sup>th</sup>, and gets above Saturn the 5<sup>th</sup>. Jupiter will be to his left (as we look at him) on May 7<sup>th</sup>, with the Gemini Twins, Castor and Pollux, to the right. Regulus, in Leo, will be to his lower left the 9<sup>th</sup>. And don't forget to take in a shower or two. Lyra, with the bright blue star Vega, trails just behind though in front of the left wing of the big cross marking The Milky Way's Cygnus, the Swan (left wing as far as Cygnus is concerned), and the Lyrid shower should more or less appear from there, peaking April 22<sup>nd</sup>. The dust from a comet named Thatcher, is expected to produce about 12 squirts an hour, according to *The Farmers' Almanac*. Then Aquarius should be low toward the southeast in the predawn of May 4<sup>th</sup>, from which should come an expected 20 meteors/hour – the Eta Aquarids (referring to the constellation's fifth brightest star) – courtesy of a more well-known comet's dust trail: Halley's. They're not billed as highly as the Perseids of summer and Leonids of fall, but, hey, you can see good games in the minor leagues, too, you know. Full Moon April 16<sup>th</sup>, new May 1<sup>st</sup>.

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10p13 = 10:13 PM  
11p06 = 11:06 PM  
1a14 = 1:14 AM





## BIRDATHON 2003

April 26

If you love the outdoors, spring weather and enjoying nature, join us in our quest to count as many bird species as possible in one day. Funds raised by the event this year will again be used to help with several local projects in Manhattan. A portion of the funds will go towards the Northeast Community Park (Northview), the butterfly garden at Sojourner Truth Park, and educational activities at our new Michel-Ross Preserve.

In the past, we (you, our sponsors) have donated Birdathon funds to the Washington Marlatt Park, the Rowe Sanctuary on the Platte River in Nebraska, and our El Salvador sister chapter. Many of our ongoing projects and activities, such as wildlife preservation, publication of the PRAIRIE FALCON, and bringing in special speakers for our monthly program meeting are also partly funded with Birdathon funds.

**You can help in several ways.** The best way and most fun for you is to count birds yourself.

To be a counter, collect names and pledges from your friends, relatives, business associates (this includes your dentist, physician, hair dresser or barber, etc.). The pledges do not have to be large; dimes, quarters and dollars add up quickly when many participate. Encourage your sponsors to pledge 15 or 25 cents per species you spot and you'll be surprised how much money you can raise. Sponsors can pledge a set amount if they prefer.

If you can not join in the fun of going out yourself, you can still collect names and pledges and one of the members who will be going out can be your "designated counter". We call this a super-sponsor (not that any of our sponsors aren't super in our eyes). If you have a friend that is going out to count, ask them to be your eyes.

Or contact :

**Clyde Ferguson (539-4856)** or any NFHAS board member (see the back page of your newsletter),

Or just send a note to:

**Birdathon, NFHAS, PO Box 1932, Manhattan KS 66505,**

and we will find someone to count for you.

We'll provide a list of the species counted and you can collect the pledges based on that list. On average, we see between 100 and 120 species on a good trip.

Don't forget you can be a sponsor yourself. Make your pledge to a friend or relative who is going to be a counter or super-sponsor, or contact Clyde and he will add your name to his list of sponsors. OR if you prefer, send a lump sum donation c/o of the Birdathon, P.O. Box 1932, Manhattan, KS 66502-1932. We're easy, we accept donations in almost any form.

Those who pledge a minimum of \$20 will receive a years' subscription to the Prairie Falcon if they wish. (Our normal subscription price is \$15). Donations are a tax deductible contribution.

### NORTH AMERICAN MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

May 10, 2003

The North American Migration Count (NAMC) takes place twice a year, the spring and fall in those states that wish to count. The procedure is similar to the Christmas Bird Count (CBC), except the count takes place on the same day nation-wide. The only area limit is within a County boundary. Call Hoogeey 539-7080 for Riley country, or Doris Burnett 537-2502 for Pott. county.

FYI: The NAMC was founded by one person, Jim Stasz, who resides in Maryland. If you would like additional information on Jim, see the Nov/Dec 1996 issue of "Bird Watcher's Digest" (Vol 19, No 2). Jim, on his own, is the National Coordinator. The NAMC first started in Maryland in 1991.

### Wings N' Wetlands Weekend

April 25-27, Great Bend, Kansas  
Cheyenne Bottoms Area and  
Quivira National Wildlife Refuge

#### For More Information:

Phone (620) 792-2750

E-Mail: [cvb@visitgreatbend.com](mailto:cvb@visitgreatbend.com)

Website: [www.visitgreatbend.com](http://www.visitgreatbend.com)



## THANK YOU Manhattan Community Foundation!

The Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society received a \$1,000 Grant from the Manhattan Community Foundation. This money will be used to buy the 200-300 trees and shrubs to be planted along the eastern edge of Northeast Park (see last month's issue about planting plans).



**John Graham, Boardmember and Trustee of Manhattan Community Foundation, and Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Board member Leann Harrell.**

## Michel-Ross Sanctuary Clean-Up and Dedication

The annual springtime clean-up of the chapter's Michel-Ross Sanctuary on Stagg Hill is scheduled for Saturday, April 19 at 1PM. Please park along Stagg Hill Road, and bring a trash bag and work gloves. We will police litter along the road and in the ravine to make the area spiffy in time for:

The **April 22** (Earth Day) dedication of the recently-donated additional parcel, which completes the transfer of the 25 acres from the Michels and Harold Ross to NFHAS. We will meet at the Ridgewood Drive entrance to the sanctuary at 5:30PM. Local dignitaries have been invited for the unveiling of the trail head sign, and presentation of mementoes. Plan to attend this special event and help us thank our donors for their generosity.

*Paul Weidhaas*



### DID YOU HEAR?

#### Time to elect officers for the NFHAS board.

Would you like to be on the Board? Do you know someone who you think would be a good candidate for the Board? New "Blood" as they say, is needed and greatly appreciated!

**Contact Carla Bishop at 539-5129 or 532-1859 or email [cbishop@ksu.edu](mailto:cbishop@ksu.edu)**



Northern Flint Hills  
Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 1932  
Manhattan, KS  
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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. 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](mailto: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:	Hoogy Hoogheem	(539-7080)
Vice President:	Dave Rintoul	(537-0781)
Secretary:	Eloise Thomas	(456-8519)
Treasurer:	Jan Garton	(539-3004)

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**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/>