



the prairie falcon

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JUNE 2003

JUNE PROGRAM:

Natural History of
the Grassland
Grouse

Paul Johnsgard

June 18, 2003
1014 Throckmorton,
KSU

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

Natural History of the Grassland Grouse Paul Johnsgard

Paul Johnsgard is a prolific and entertaining writer on topics of natural history. He has written more than 40 books such as his latest books "The Great Wildlife of the Great Plains" and "Grassland Grouse and Their Conservation," and many others including "Prairie Birds: Fragile Splendor of the Great Plains," "North American Owls: Biology and Natural History," and "Crane Music: A Natural History of American Cranes."

Come join us for an evening with the author, and hear about his latest work. Paul comes to us from the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. We will also have a book signing event; check our website <http://www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html> for details.

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 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, June 14th 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.

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UPCOMING DATES:

JUN 14 Beginning Birding, 8AM
Ackert/Durland Parking Lot
JUN 18 JOHNSGARD, presenter
Dinner 5:45 -Program 7:30
1014 Throckmorton, KSU
Corner of Claflin & Dennison

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Round in the Woods Dru Clarke

It was June, and we'd had some rain that had turned the ground to brown jelly. Of course, I got the truck stuck on the way to the pond and was walking back to the house when I heard a remarkable addition to the soundscape. The trees by the creek provided a loft for a choir of cicadas who must have emerged recently. Their singing rose to a crescendo, then faded, like an audible wave rising and cresting, ebbing and troughing. The wave moved through the trees and a sound, like wind, followed it. Unsure that the sound wave was actually moving, I stopped and stood in place. The sound moved from upstream to downstream, paused, then began, again, upstream. The cicadas were singing in round.

The mechanism for sound production on these chubby, big-eyed insects is a file-like plate on the thorax/abdomen against which prominently veined but transparent wings are rubbed.

The function of the sound is thought to be related to mating, but to a non-cicadan, it is a free concert of the natural kind. (I can just see them sitting poised in front of their music stands, ready to 'draw their bows.')

The many (2000) species of cicadas can be found throughout the temperate and tropical world, and each makes an entirely different sound from other "Tzitzzi" (an onomatopoeic term for them in Greek).

Barred owls sometimes call in round, too. We've heard them innumerable times, more often in late winter, outdoing each other with their raucous, exuberant voices. Our chorus frogs and toads seem to enjoy a round or two, when the temperature is just right, and when certain hormones are in synchrony.

Cetaceans - whales and dolphins - whom you naturally wouldn't hear in the prairie soundscape - often engage in asynchronous, repeating melodies. I first heard a humpback through a dentist's headphones, a welcome diversion to the repetitive buzzing of the cavity-ridding drill. Humpback males, in particular, sometimes create variations on a theme which was dominant the previous year on their mating grounds. Why they do this no one human knows, although it may be to distinguish themselves from last year's suitors, to dazzle prospective cycling females with their rich, new voices. (If it works, other males take up the theme. No copyright exists in that society.)

A certain species of deep sea shrimp has been recorded with hydrophones in a snapping, crackling, and popping cacaphony, as if they were being stir-fried in hot oil. And fish, sporting a profusion of sound-generating mechanisms from balloon-like swim bladders to teeth in their throats, gurgle, bellow, and grind in response to each other. But much of this we never hear, here on the earth's surface.

Composers have found inspiration in nature's soundscape, the fugue being one creative form reminiscent of cicadas, barred owls, and chorus frogs. Certain poetic forms may have arisen from these same expressions. I remember lying awake at night at our summer place in the New Jersey highlands, listening to the singing-sawing of katydids, and waking in the morning to try my untutored young hand at a poem. It never seemed to capture the cadence.

Today, leaving the creative impulse to nature, I sit quietly in the 'balcony' overlooking the woodland and listen. It's 4:30 in the afternoon, and, with no program in hand, I hear the birds begin an impromptu chorus: red-winged blackbirds, joined in turn by mourning doves, a northern oriole, a titmouse, a bluebird. And other sweet sounds I can't place, lyrics coming from distant crowns of trees. The audience is thin, but appreciative: just me; the dogs, politely lying with heads on paws; a stamping horse.

Come June, the cicadas, in tune with the rhythm of the season and their peculiar specific life cycle, may emerge from their secret places and erupt in persistent round from the wood lot. And, this time, I will stand and applaud.

© 2003 Dru Clarke,
(original 1998, rewrite 2003)



While visiting Bennett Springs State Park in Missouri, I noticed the clusters of dangling, white blossoms of deerberry (*Vaccinium stamineum*). Some of these clusters were visited by a large bee. I think it was a carpenter bee, but since I didn't get a close look, it might have been a bumble bee. The bell-like flowers of hillside blueberry (*Vaccinium pallidum*) were being pollinated by a medium-sized, dark-colored bee. This bee was superficially similar to the non-native honey bee, but I'd wager that it was a native species with a close relationship with the blueberry.

On May 3rd, I had driven 65 miles from my parent's house to Bennett Springs State Park. The spring has a flow of about 10 million gallons, dissolving 60 tons of dolomite per day while carrying it to the Niangua River. My enjoyment of the nearby plants was intensified by the fact that many of the shrubs and trees were new to me. A few of the flowering dogwoods had all of their petals, but as I walked beneath a typical specimen, I walked on a carpet of fallen petals, a reminder that beauty often only lasts a moment.

The fruits of serviceberry (*Amelanchier arborea*), were unripe. I nibbled on a stale sandwich that I had brought along for lunch, and tried not to think about ripe

berries. I feasted my eyes on the spectacular blooms of columbine that was growing from the face of a cliff. The flower buds of Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*) showed just a hint of white, a promise of things to come. I danced a few steps down the trail, following the flight of a zebra swallowtail, whose narrow wings were adapted for dancing in crowded forests.

I glanced at my worn, stone-washed jeans and saw fifteen ticks, some of them pin-head sized and some of them already super-sized into monsters. My dancing slowed down as I picked off all those ticks. I walked a few steps. I noticed more monsters. I staggered while glancing down and picking off ticks. Then I stared at the trail up ahead. I saw dark spots on the top of the grass blades which proved to be ticks with legs outstretched in anticipation of, well, of me.

The buckeye trees (*Aesculus glabra*) distracted me from my personal concerns. On most of the buckeye trees, the flower petals were dried up or missing. Bright red or reddish brown nectar guides were present on the few petals that remained on the flowers. Suddenly, I noticed a flowering tree off of a side trail and a large butterfly swooping from one cluster of flowers to another. I

ran. Then I slowed down to stalk the flying critter which proved to be a pipevine swallowtail on a buckeye flower. A hairstreak butterfly and a silver-spotted skipper were also sipping nectar.

I had been in a quiet portion of this cathedral in which my ears had become adapted to silence. Now I heard the loud roar of bumblebees as they flew from one blossom to another. Each blossom had yellow nectar guides. I was unable to test the hypothesis that the bees would avoid the blossoms with red nectar guides. But I wasn't really trying to accomplish anything now. Despite the presence of non-native species in this state park, the roar of native bees confirmed that the relationships between native species were still strong. The bumblebees greatly outnumbered all of the other critters that were imbibing nectar, and they were the important pollinator. I gazed at the bees and was tempted to kneel. This returned me to my senses, as I remembered that ticks were thirsting for my blood. Then I noticed a black carpenter ant that was stealing nectar, but the nectar might conceivably have mildly toxic compounds which would eventually discourage its thieving ways. The late afternoon sky was overcast, but at this moment, I knew peace.



Northeast Park Update

Leann Harrell

The Spring has been full of activities with the NFHAS' Northeast Park Project. I appreciate, as always, those who have donated and continue to donate their time. Tim Keane, with the Landscape Architecture Department at K-State, designed a plan for stabilizing the drainage channel created in the park.

This plan was approved by Manhattan Parks and Rec Department and the first step, seeding the channel with Prairie Cord Grass, has been completed. Once again, I am grateful to Al Alspach with Master Landscape for donating his time in a busy season to operate the necessary equipment. Irene Johnson, with Riley County Conservation District, informed me that the District Board approved the donation of no charge on using the no-till grass drill that the District makes available to rent for seeding native grass.

The necessary approval has been obtained for building the ninety foot bridge which will connect the southern end of the park with the Linear Trail. This bridge is going to be donated by Westar Energy's Green Team with coordination by the Team's director, Brad Loveless. This Team does many good projects throughout the area and they hope to be able to schedule our bridge for this summer. This same Team donated money at an earlier time for helping to plant the Prairie Restoration in the southern third of the park.

I have been working over the last year with Brian Wyatt who offered to make his Eagle Scout Project benefit the park. This Spring he constructed two signs and located them on the east and west side of the Restored Prairie where they can be used to explain and teach about the restored prairie and woodland that is

being established by our chapter in the park.

And speaking of the restored woodland, I am very grateful to Jacque Staats and Dick Oberst who took responsibility for planting trees in the park this Spring and have done a wonderful job. Jacque rented a truck and drove to Lindsborg to pick up trees that are grown out in their nursery and donated for use in public areas. Donna Schenk-Hamlin recruited volunteers for the two Saturday workdays when the donated trees and others purchased from Kansas Forest Service were planted. A big thanks to volunteers who helped plant around 300 trees and shrubs and watered and mulched them. In addition to Jacque and Dick, thanks to Paul Weidhaas, Madonna Stallmann, Tom Morgan, Terri Branden, Donna and Bill Schenk-Hamlin, JoAnn Hablutzel, Helen Hayes and Anna Marie.

Leann Harrell

"CONTEO DE NAVIDAD" 2003

Join Dr. Dusty Becker in ECUADOR for **"The First Annual Christmas Bird Count"** at LOMA ALTA. December 19-22, 2003 Other bird watching or nature trips (Galapagos, Andes, Amazon, etc.) may be organized for after the count.

AND/OR

You can join Dr. Becker's Earthwatch Team to help with the long-term bird monitoring project at Loma Alta Ecological Reserve. December 28, 2003 - January 10, 2004

For more information:

Contact Dr. Becker - 532-3031 or dbecker@ksu.edu

visit: www.Earthwatch.org

Ecuador Cloud Forest Birds Project

To book a place on an Earthwatch team call: 1-800-776-0188 (ext. 189 - Vanitha)



Leopold Education Project
Leann Harrell



**Dru Clarke & Amanda Behnke
dancing like Prairie Chickens
(that's an orange under their necks)**



**Alice Belcha
(participant)**



Some of you may remember that Leann Harrell and Dru Clarke attended a Leopold Education Project “facilitator” training workshop last year. We are reaping the benefits of that training this year. The first Leopold Education Project “Educator” Workshop was held on May 3rd by Leann, Dru and Amanda Behnke.

“Contemplative discussions and fun-filled activities were both in good measure,” said Leann. “Thanks to all the participants for making it a great day. Another workshop may be offered in the fall.”

**Submit your “caption” for this photo and
it will be in the next Praire Falcon!
(email cinraney@ksu.edu or mail to
Cindy Jeffrey, 15850 Galilee Rd.
Olsburg, KS 66520)**



Patricia Yaeger



If you've had a yen to work up a circus act, you can follow through right now by going, or being, under open sky. You need do nothing more. This suggestion is contained in a book titled *Heaven's Breath—A Natural History of the Wind* by Lyall Watson (1984, Morrow). He began by noting that once air was thought to have no weight. Then with Democritus, c. 400 BC, came the idea that matter, including air, was made up of indivisible (atomic) particles so small that we could not perceive them; what our senses felt was actually the result of their activity. (This engendered, other sources tell me, numerous discussions over what control the gods might or might not have over the mechanistics of the world.)

Then Lucretius, c. 50 BC, proposed that the various properties observed of air might not be all due to air itself, but also to other things within it. Then in Holland in 1677 Anton van Leeuwenhoek discovered tiny organisms, likely bacteria, beneath one of the microscope lenses he ground, and the idea of "spontaneous generation" gained prominence: apparently aging meat begat mold and maggots, which therefore didn't have to arrive from another source. Louis Pasteur, with some difficulty, proved otherwise by demonstrating the affects of sterilization around 1854. Thus we moved to discovering that in the air there are myriad particles and organisms suspended, spending much of their time aloft, some creatures shaped to drift about as jellyfish do in the

oceans, some with special protection against the UV of high altitude. That's why out there, under the sky, with no roofs or trees to share the burden, Lyall Watson indicated, at any moment you will be balancing a column of 10,000 microscopic entities above every square centimeter of your head and shoulder tops. Quite an act.

And talk about not seeing the forest for the trees! We look up and see the wonders of clouds and rainbows, sunbeams and stars, all the while blind to the jillion of other wonders in between. Do you suppose there are analogous situations in other things that we look at, or toward? Sherlock Holmes was right, wasn't he: there is looking and there is seeing.

Meanwhile, in the April 21-27 issue of the Washington Post's national edition, was an article using Orion as an example of how what our eyes see of that constellation is largely dark space punctuated by a highly recognizable pattern of a few separated bright pinheads of stars, because we see only the wavelengths we've come to call "visible light." While infrared receivers can show us a great flaring montage of orange and yellow there. So there is also a difference between seeing (with the naked eye) and seeing (with a machine), and that difference, too, can be significant.

Here are some things to see in the period ahead. Sky & Telescope calculates that Mars, growing ever brighter toward its

very special August, will be the equal of Sirius (the brightest star we see) by late June. However, Sirius will be on the day shift then, so that comparison will require a feat of memory. Plainly orange Mars will be rising next to the Moon soon after midnight June 18th. Sky & Telescope adds that even small telescopes should be able to see surface features. Real time comparisons can also be made with bright blue Vega, who will be well up in the NE after dark. Sky & Telescope mentions, too, that sharp eyes will see, just to the left of Vega, a slight blur that is a double star. View westward from Vega, about a third of the sky, and you'll see yellow Arcturus, and on the way should see the fairly dim four-star keystone of Hercules and then the tiara-shaped Corona Borealis constellation, which the Sioux saw as a campfire ring.

Meanwhile an evening glance along the south to southwest should see Antares, the red heart of Scorpio, who by name and fame is Mars' opposite and arch rival. Saturn will duck out just before dusk and reappear just after dawn — a no-show. Jupiter will be setting in the late evening. Venus and Mercury will have a conjunction party June 21st just before dawn ENE, with Mercury very close below. A little later, at 2p10 CDT, the summer solstice occurs. July 4th we will be at aphelion, 3.3% further from the Sun than we were in January. Moon: new June 29th, full July 13th.



Michel Ross Sign Unveiling



Bill Michel

Harold Ross





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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.

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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