



the prairie falcon

VOL. 32, No.2
OCTOBER 2003

October 15, 2003
Organic Agriculture
Dan Nagengast
7:30 p.m.
1014 Throckmorton
KSU

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

“Whither Organic Agriculture: Market Growth, Research Agenda, Threats”

Dan Nagengast of the Kansas Rural Center will speak about the surge in organically produced foods here and abroad, the state of research at American universities concerning organic systems and finally, threats to organic systems and markets.

Before each program, we invite our speakers to join us for an informal dinner and discussion. Feel free to join us this month at El Cazador 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

JEFFREY ENERGY CENTER on Sun. Oct. 19th. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the river access/linear trail parking area that is along Hyw 24 just before the Big Blue River bridge. More information pg. 5

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

BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK

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

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CONTRIBUTORS:

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UPCOMING DATES:

- Oct 11 **Beginning Birding, 8 a.m.**
Ackert/Durland Parking Lot
- Oct 11 **Bird Feed ORDER deadline**
- Oct 15 **ORGANIC GARDENING**
Dinner 5:45-Program 7:30
1014 Throckmorton, KSU
Corner of Claflin & Dennison
- Oct 19 **Jeffrey Energy Center**
Field Trip: See pg. 5
- Oct 25 **Bird Feed PICKUP**
9a.m. -1p.m.
UFM, 1221 Thurston
- Oct 24 **Fundraiser CONCERT**
8 p.m. Manhattan Arts Ctr
- Nov 1 **OWL PROWL Field Trip**
See pg. 5

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MANHATTAN, KS



After we moved to the country, our guests dwindled to a fearless few willing to brave the drive, the dusty gravel, and the inconvenience of no close shops. Although fewer, they did tend to stay longer, which made conversations lively and deep. In the place of former drop-ins, our most common guests have become less tall and more, well, long. And my husband would be just as happy if I kept their identity anonymous, for fear of driving away those who remain faithful friends.

Let me explain. Each morning, my husband gets up to make coffee, then brings me, still snug in bed, a cup of stimulus to rout myself. While waiting for the brewing, he sits at his desk to read the latest horse journal or catalogue filled with clever items we would never have dreamed of buying, or for that matter, existing. The other morning as he quietly delivered the warm mug, he flatly stated, "I just picked up a shed snake skin under my desk." I casually replied, after hinging myself bolt upright against the pillows, "How long WAS it?" "Oh," he muttered as he turned toward the door, "about eighteen-inches." I spread my hands about that far apart, and hmmm'ed.

Now, this was not the first time a snake had been in the house; only, the first two times each one had been IN its old skin. The first, a youngish red-sided garter, was on the stair landing and was really quite small as far as snakes go. But its attitude needed adjusting: it coiled and flapped its white-lined jaws like a fire-breathing dragon. An empty waste paper can was transformed into instant "snake carrier." All the way to the nearest door - maybe fifteen seconds of travel time - it struck the walls with its head and jaws, creating an echoing thumping that was terrifying to hear.

The second was discovered while my mother-in-law was visiting. Luckily, it was in MY half bath, and not the one she was using. As I was

relieving myself, it betrayed its presence by sounding like paper being brushed along the floor. Now, our dogs often follow us into the bathroom, but...? As I heard the sound, I was holding some folded toilet paper in my hand. I looked at the paper in my hand, puzzled, then saw the voyeur under the table where I store towels. The stand is next to, and nearly touching, my left knee. This one - another youngster, but a black rat, marked strikingly like a rattler - prompted my flight, pants down, out of there. It left reluctantly, flipping itself upside down, wrapping its skinny body around the leg of the towel stand. A broom handle finally did the trick, and the then loose, writhing contortionist was "freed" in the yard. I think I know why snakes like our house. We have an eighteen-year old cat whom we took in after the mares led me to it, treed as an abandoned kitten. He has never been very good at mousing, so we have our share of rodent residents. The snakes, sensing a steady diet without much effort, have probably come down the chimney where swifts build a nest every summer. Usually, after the chimney goes silent, we see or find evidence of one. Occasional rapid scurrying in the walls followed by abrupt quiet makes me wonder if one might be a more permanent guest.

Have we found the owner of the shed skin? Not yet. (We think it may be the one who napped under our grill cover a few seasons ago.) We open doors a bit more gingerly now, and look around before plunging hands into closets. This time, however, when we find it, we just might let it stay. While our conversations with it might be high-pitched, it won't wear out its welcome if it keeps the mice from nesting in my coat pocket. But, then again, maybe we won't.

© 2003 Aug.15, Dru Clarke



Black haw (*Viburnum prunifolium*) is native to the eastern and central United States. Its presence has been documented in thirteen counties of Kansas. And I was pleasantly surprised to learn that Riley County is one of those counties.

In 2003, this viburnum was named shrub of the year by the GreatPlants program, which promotes the use of hardy ornamentals in landscaping. The GreatPlants program is jointly conducted by the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum and the Nebraska Nursery & Landscape Association, and its website is <http://arboretum.unl.edu/greatplants.html>

Ripe berries are available in October. They have been used to make excellent jams and jellies. Although berries are sweet and worth tasting, their flesh is too dry and thin to be a desirable wild food. The one-half inch long, green berries acquire a blush that gradually deepens to dark purple as they ripen. As the attractively plump berries dry out, they become flattened due to the large, flat seed within. The berries are consumed by many animals, including songbirds, deer, and gray fox.

I saw the beautiful, large, flat clusters of white flowers this spring. The production of flowers appears to be limited by the plant's energy reserves when it grows in shade, so it is probably best to plant this shrub in full sunlight. This shrub tolerates shade and can be grown in many types of soil, including dry soil. It prefers moist, well-drained soil. It is commercially available, and can be grown from seed and can be easily transplanted.

On September 4th, I examined a few specimens of black haw (*V. prunifolium*) and rusty black haw (*V. rufidulum*) at Bennett Springs State Park in Missouri. The specimens of the rusty black haw were in uplands, and the specimens of black haw were near the water of the spring branch. The berries of these viburnums were still green or had a slight red blush on a portion of their surface. One of the berries had dried and

turned blue-black. Its flesh had a pleasant, distinctive flavor, but I'll have to wait until October to sample the true taste.

Rusty black haw is native to about two-thirds of the state of Missouri, while black haw occurs throughout the state. Rusty black haw has been reported from fifteen counties of Kansas (but not Riley County). It can be difficult to distinguish from black haw. Its leaves have an attractive, glossy sheen, and have a rusty pubescence on the undersurface of the midrib. Sometimes the pubescence is quite dramatic on the sides of each leaf's petiole. I hope to see the coloration of the leaves of both viburnums this fall. The coloration of the leaves can vary from maroon purple to wine red.

The typical height of these shrubs is about 12 feet. No viburnum has been designated as a state champion in Kansas. In Missouri, the champion black haw is 19 feet high and is located in Swope Park in Kansas City. On September 15th, I visited this park. No one at Swope Park Zoo knew the location of this specimen (but it might be located in another area of the park). One of the employees was kind enough to tell me that he would investigate and give me a call when he found out. The park has four other kinds of state champion trees, although their locations are not known by the zoo staff.

None of the plants that I saw in Swope Park Zoo was labeled, except for bamboo and cottonwood in the "browse garden" that the staff can use to cut browse for a few of the animals. Each zoo has an opportunity to also serve as a labeled garden. This would be a challenging objective, but if a zoo made an effort towards achieving this objective, it would attract more visitors.

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Correction: In last month's article "Deerberry" -- should have read "The lack of sucrose in thrushes may be a selection pressure that helps keep sucrose levels low in berries that are dispersed by thrushes, according to one group of scientists." (Sucrose is an enzyme, sucrose is a sugar)



Mars will still be brightly with us during the mid-October-mid-November period, but we don't have to turn blasé about it to look at other things: comets and shadows in particular. As to shadows, the full Moon should arise above the Flint Hills red-faced on November 8th with a full eclipse already in progress. By *StarDate's* timing the event should begin with penumbral shadow, at 5 p.m. CST; the partial phase starting at 5p32, totality lasting from 7p06 to 7p31, with it all being over at 9p05. Though "totaled", the Moon remains modestly rosy rather than going dark, because sunlight that misses the Earth leaks into the Earth's shadow beyond.

Now there are two different things to remark about comets. One is a comet in the whole, Comet Encke. Jean Louis Pons (apparently no relation to Lily) discovered 37 comets in his career, including one in 1818 that Johann Encke later that century figured out would return every 3.3 years. Edmond Halley achieved lasting fame when he predicted a certain comet would be back in 1758. Encke's prediction, though it proved just as accurate, but coming a hundred years later, apparently has not seemed so wondrous (except to those of us who are mathematically challenged). Timing, as they say, is everything. Yet we can call to mind both Jean Louis and Johann this autumn. By *Astronomy's* prediction, Comet Encke will be best in view with moonless skies November 10th - 17th at 6th or 7th magnitude, which, alas, is not all that bright. The best easily findable match for that magnitude that I've been able to locate, are the stars to be seen between Taurus' red eye, Aldebaran, and the star, El Nath, at the tip of the Bull's left horn.

It could be useful to have a star map to follow the path *Astronomy* says Comet Encke will trace as it draws closer to the Sun and becomes brighter: starting about 11th mag. on October 1st in the constellation Triangulum, moving through Andromeda from the 12th to 21st, and arcing to be just behind Cygnus on November 10th, passing close

beside the first bright star out on the Swan's right wing on the 14th, proceeding along the Swan's neck till about the 20th, past the upper stars of Aquila on the 25th, and entering Ophiuchus' head about December 1st. In mid-November a NASA spacecraft, CONTOUR (Comet Nuclear Tour), will be taking a look at Comet Encke from as close as 60 miles, on its itinerary to other comets.

Meanwhile on the night of October 21-22, some dust from Halley's Comet should spark through the sky. Halley's last came this way in 1986, and we will be colliding with its remnants at about 41 miles per second, with the Moon only as a brief witness, I'm told the sparks could be quick and bright. Best in the early morning hours.

And not to ignore the rest of the sky, try to spy Venus setting in the twilight hours. Mars goes down about midnight, with Jupiter rising soon after to be the brightest spot above (for verification, look upper right of the Moon in that meteorized dawn of October 22nd). Saturn, up at midnight early in October, will gradually begin showing up as early as 9 p.m. at month's end. For Mercury, wait for the twilights at the end of November.

StarDate suggests that those geometrically inclined might like to note the lopsided upside down triangle on October 15th with Saturn at the point, Capella to the upper left, Aldebaran to the upper right, and the Moon in the middle. Then on November 11th there should be a funhouse kind of square, again with Capella and Aldebaran at the upper left and right, yellow Saturn to the lower right, orange Betelgeuse, lower left, and the Moon again in the middle. Those preferring straight lines could start at the lower right corner of Pegasus' square, proceed to bright Mars, and continue to Fomalhaut, the Mouth of the Southern Fish, and the only 1st mag. star in that part of the sky.

Daylight Savings ends 2 a.m. October 26th.
New Moon October 25th, Full November 8th.

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OK - THE ANSWER WAS NOT ON pg.3
AS STATED! - BUT THIS IS A
dickcissel.



Don Yockey will escort a group around the **Jeffrey Energy Center** on Sun. Oct. 19th. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the river access/linear trail parking area that is along Hyw 24 just before the Big Blue River bridge. We will carpool from there to the energy center. Bring a sack lunch and water. We will return by 1:00 p.m.

FIELD TRIPS

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

Help your local Audubon Society and the ENVIRONMENT AT THE SAME TIME!

Do you recycle? Do you go to Howies? Did you know you can help our local Audubon Chapter!! The next time you take a load of aluminum in, just tell them the money goes to the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society. **THANKS.**

Newly designed Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society T-shirts are now available - ON SALE AT THE BIRD SEED Pickup, Oct. 25



EXHIBIT COMING TO MANHATTAN

K-State's Manhattan campus will receive a special treat later this fall, when the Smithsonian traveling exhibit "Listening to the Prairie: Farming in Nature's Image" comes to Hale Library.

Currently scheduled for an October 31 opening (which may change), the exhibit will be housed in Hale's second floor and will be free. The exhibit was organized by the Smithsonian's Forces of Change program, coordinated by the American Library Association, and supported by the USDA and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

"Listening to the Prairie" explores the history of the North American prairie and the forces of change that turned these vast grasslands into one of the most productive agricultural lands on earth. It highlights the prairie as a complex, fragile, and dynamic ecosystem, and has an interactive approach to learning that has something for the whole family. According to the exhibit's brochure,

"A stunning mural and accompanying audio program provide a sensory tour of the prairie ecosystem at the Konza Prairie Biological Station in Kansas."

Mark your calendars – be sure to visit before the exhibit leaves K-State in late December. And check it out beforehand on the Smithsonian's web site: <http://www.mnh.si.edu/exhibits/forces/ltop/ltop.htm>



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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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