



the prairie falcon

VOL. 30, No. 4
DECEMBER 2001

DECEMBER
PROGRAM
Dec. 15

Manhattan Christmas
Bird Count &
Compilation Dinner

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

The 53rd consecutive Manhattan KS Christmas Bird Census (CBC) will be held on Saturday, December 15, 2001.

Mark your calendars and make plans to join us in our annual contribution to "citizen science."

Last year, even though we again had the most CBC participants of any count in Kansas (63), we came in second to the Udall-Winfield count in total species (96 species vs. the 98 found on the Udall-Winfield circle). This is the second year in a row that we have failed to lead the state in both participants AND species count, and I certainly hope that it never happens again. In order to assure that, you need to get involved, get your friends involved, and help us regain our rightful position at the top of the Kansas CBC list.

There are six quasi-independent groups covering our CBC circle (centered at Anderson Hall, see map on page 5 of this newsletter); if you wish to join one of these groups, please call the group leader at the numbers listed below. One of our group leaders has "retired" this year; Duane Kerr's slice of our CBC pie will be taken over by me, while Brett Sandercock, our new avian ecologist at KSU, will take charge of my former section. If you can't make up your mind about who to go with or where to go, 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. More information on the chili dinner on page 5.

Field Trips

BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK

Join us Saturday, Dec. 8th 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.

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UPCOMING DATES:

- Dec 1 Bird Feed PICKUP
9AM - 1PM
UFM, 1221 Thurston
- Dec 8 Beginning Birding 8 AM
Ackert Parking Lot
- Dec 15 Manhattan CBC &
Compilation Dinner
539-5129
- Dec17 Olsburg CBC 468-3587
- Jan 5 Eagle Day - 9:00AM
Tuttle Creek Corps of
Engineers Office

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MANHATTAN, KS



NOVEMBER BIRDING

DAVE RINTOUL

It is not the cold of far northern lands that drives the human animal to despair; cold is tingling, exciting, healthful, and, it can, in a limited way, be overcome. It is the darkness that conquers the spirit, when the northern sun does not rise until late, only to skim low upon the horizon for an hour or two, and set. Now indeed is Balder slain of the mistletoe. Now life is at its lowest ebb, and the mind conceives a little what it will be like when the sun has burned to a red ember, its immense volume dissipated by constant radiation...

Donald Culross Peattie, *An Almanac for Moderns*,
1935, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York



Darkness is indeed the maddening part of winter, and the arrival of the solstice in late December is a cause for rejoicing for both ancient and modern denizens of this planet. As the days shrink toward the minimum, it is still possible to console oneself with the certainty that soon they will be getting longer, and you will have turned one more corner on life's track, heading toward another spring.

But the short days and the spare landscape do have some advantages for the birdwatcher. If ever there was a good time to take up the hobby/passion that is birdwatching, midwinter is it. Fewer types of birds are around to test your cold-numbed fingers as you flip through the pages of the field guide. Fewer leaves are on the trees to block your view of that little brown flutterer that just flew up from the snowdrift. And the cold, coupled with the long nights, ensures that all the birds stay active, feeding as much as possible in order to get through another night, another week, another winter. Many birds in these latitudes feed all day to put on a few grams of fat (up to 20% of their total body weight) and then shiver all night, burning off all those calories in order to survive until it is light enough to start eating again. Imagine putting on and taking off 20% of your weight on a daily basis for the next month or so, and you might rapidly conclude that being a bird is not such a good deal after all...

Some of those daytime gluttons include the dark-eyed juncos, or snowbirds as they are known to many Kansans. Juncos come in a variety of plumages, but the "slate-colored" variety is the most common in Kansas. But there will also be a smattering of "Oregon" juncos, with black heads and rusty sides, and "pink-sided" juncos, with gray heads and, yes, pinkish flanks. We also have had sporadic appearances of the Rocky Mountain race known as the "gray-headed" junco in recent years; one has already put in an appearance in Wichita this fall. Even "white-winged" juncos, which breed in the Black Hills of South Dakota, occasionally show up, primarily in western Kansas. All of these birds, despite the variety in their plumages, have distinctive white outer tail feathers, and the sight of a flock of tail-flicking juncos scattering before you as you hike through the fields is one of the best things about this time of year. All of the winter-resident accipiters, such as the sharp-shinned and the Cooper's hawk, like to see flocks of juncos too. More than one junco might be needed to help a Cooper's hawk make it through the night!

Other typical winter seed-eating birds include the American goldfinch (which is not so gold at this time of year but is instead a more subtle toasty-brown), American tree sparrows (who don't like trees at all, and really prefer brushy fields), and

the regional specialty, the Harris' sparrows, plump emperors (and empresses) of the sparrow clan who are abundant here but nearly nonexistent east or west of Kansas. Some of these can find their way to your feeders in December, and all will visit a well-stocked feeder later in the season when the wild seed crop is depleted. But the best sparrow viewing is in the brushy fields and hedgerows, on a clear cold day after a snow storm, when you will find these birds bustling about, feeding and chattering, and usually ignoring irrelevant objects like bundled-up birdwatchers. With luck you might find a less abundant species, such as a Lincoln's sparrow, a field sparrow, or even a rare flock of common redpolls or snow buntings. But you have to get out there in order to see them; it looks likely that only a few of these will visit your feeder anytime soon.

So take advantage of the short days, sparse landscape, and short cold days to get out and look for these seasonal visitors. Help us with our annual Christmas Bird Census (information is available elsewhere in this newsletter); everyone is welcome to participate, and, as noted above, this is a great time of the year to start learning more about birds. Winter birds are easy, and fun to watch. Besides, spring is just around the corner, and then they will be gone again!

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“That was when my friend asked me who or what did God give his unending blessings? He expected me to say the innocent but I replied that God gives his blessings and miracles to what rots and is broken and is crumbling – that which is decomposing, blessings in the rot, in the dark matter that is breaking apart like a fractured wall, ...”

Healing Earthquakes, A Love Story in Poems,
by Jimmy Santiago Baca, 2001,

Eastern cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) has often provided a place where those of us who are hot, tired, and weary may become rested. The fluttering of cottonwood leaves dissolves the tightly wound tension from within those who have sat in front of a desk too long. And it also drives away the water that has evaporated from those leaves, cooling them. One morning, as I listened to the fluttering, I sat on a quartzite rock. When I had become rested, I looked at that beautiful, red quartzite and wondered what was underneath it. There was a pupa underneath in an earthen cell. Two days later, I admired the moth

(*Pachysphinx modesta*) when it emerged. Its four inch wingspan had pale red smudges as well as grayish blue coloration that allowed me to rest my eyes while I gazed upon its beauty. Cottonwood leaves had sustained it, when the immature stages had an appetite for leaves, and it had been transformed into beauty which was pleasingly restful. I heard again the rustling.

In an attempt to write about cottonwoods, I failed to write about restfulness. I wrote about trees that had died after people had taken all of the water in the watershed. Then I listened to Jimmy Santiago Baca reading a

poem about healing. Later, as I read one of this poet’s books, I found passages such as “... we’ve never forgotten the voice of the land, the texture of lives lived that glowed each dawn like a healing balm we’d later use on our sore hearts ...”

Like many of us, I am convinced that most of what I treasure will be destroyed. None the less, an optimism seems to have been hardwired into the most fundamental part of me, and I believe that the potential for wildness will always survive. As I walk beneath old monstrous cottonwood trees, scuffing golden leaves, the balm has touched my heart. All forms of life eventually decay, and wildness survives. © 2001 T.D. Morgan

Birds Can’t Vote, but You Can.
Dusty Becker

National Audubon has produced a new video and package of materials about the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The collection is very informative and includes fact sheets, beautiful photographs, an update on Senate activities, and sample letters for taking a position on this issue.

The coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge is being targeted for drilling by the oil industries.

The coastal plain is an important calving ground for the Porcupine River Caribou herd.

The coastal plain is the staging ground for thousands of snow geese and provides denning sites for polar bears.

The U.S. Geological Survey (1998) estimates that 3.2 billion barrels of oil can be recovered economically. The oil industry claims that three times that amount is recoverable for a price of \$58 per barrel (about double the current price).

No matter which estimate prevails, that oil will only provide 6 months to 1.5 years of oil, given our current consumption rates.

Here’s what you can do:

1. Contact your senators and urge them to oppose opening the Arctic National Wildlife to oil and gas drilling.
2. Spread the word - borrow the 10 minute video (Dusty Becker has a copy) and show it to friends and family and have a letter writing party.

If you would like your own set of materials for your school or organization, contact: Desiree Sorenson-Groves
dgroves@Audubon.org



Last month I talked about meteors that come in showers, comet debris from comet trails (the Geminids due Dec. 13-14). Now I speak of meteors that are independent, from other parts of the cosmos and generally composed of heavier materials. But they too become emotionally incandescent, encountering the friction jam in the atmosphere, and they are also the ones most likely to go bump on the ground.

Astronomer Bob Berman has fun telling that a meteorite fell on Wethersfield, Connecticut, in 1971, and another landed a mile away in 1982, damaging only property but shaking up the probability tables of all the insurance company actuaries living in the Hartford area. To soothe them he claimed (in 1992) that an Alabama woman, hit in the leg by a ricochet in 1954, is the only verified person ever damaged by a meteor. However our vintage encyclopedia tells of a Chinese report of ten men killed and chariots smashed on January 14, 616 BC. it says another one in 1510 broke up aloft and rained more than 1000 pieces on Padua, Italy, without reported

injuries. On August 18, 1783, one of them lit up the sky from Shetland to Rome “brighter than the full moon” without coming down. French astronomer, Dominique Arago, in the early 1800s reported he’d found 813 such notable events in the historical record. I can add another:

In a recent June, my wife and I were walking, following the dim outline of our country road by starlight. Suddenly headlights seemed to glow behind us. In the next instant the full moon was illuminating the surrounding countryside in grey. Next instant everywhere was becoming day-bright, colors and all. My thoughts being what they are, I thought Meteor – without time for an exclamation point – and turned my head as a crackling bang came, and I got just a glimpse of a fiery-white ball before it quickly faded, leaving a kind of wavy caterpillar of smoke hanging against the starry darkness restored. That caterpillar let the moment linger a little even for my outer senses. Now and then my inner senses briefly call it back, and add the !

If there are no other such

distractions, here’s something to notice as the year ends: On Dec. 20thm the waxing Moon will be consoling Mars, who’ll be fading from his summer’s intensity. Then on the evening of the 27th, Old Man Moon comes creeping up on Saturn again, to occult him in the pre-dawn of the 28th, (as he did on Nov. 30th). In response, Mother Earth gives Moon a penumbral dimming on the 30th, with the eclipse’s maximum shading at 4a29 (4:29 AM). The penumbra is the area of partial darkness surrounding the dark part of the Earth’s shadow, the umbra. On the 31st, the Moon will be big, Jupiter will be brilliant, with Sirius at its yearly highest to the south. Resilient Saturn, third brightest these nights, after the other two, will be to the right of Jupiter, with Procyon gleaming between Sirius and the Moon.

Meanwhile, the winter solstice will come at 1p21 (1:21PM) CST. Full moon, Dec. 30th, New moon Dec. 14th.

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(December and November’s columns were prepared before Sept. 11th.)

Peony Sale a Big Success

Thanks

Nearly \$600 was raised last month with the sale of heritage peony bulbs dug from the Michel-Ross Audubon Preserve on Stagg Hill. The preserve contains the Hook peony farm, which was active in the 1940s and 1950s. Hundreds of heirloom peonies still dot the land, but are being shaded out by the trees. Member Irene Johnson labeled dozens of flowering plants last spring in anticipation of the harvest, and is due a big thank you, as is Dr. Karen Gast, horticulturalist and peony specialist at KSU, who provided expert advice.

Thanks, too, for volunteers Dusty Becker, Ann Feyerharm, Jan Garton, Leann Harrell, Hoogy Hoogheem, Kay Hummels, Irene Johnson, Judy Roe, Madonna Stallmann, and Paul Weidhaas, who devoted a Saturday morning in mid-October digging, sorting, and preparing the bulbs. Irene, Madonna, and Paul also spent time a week later retrieving more bulbs and making deliveries.

Lastly, all those who donated money for the bulbs deserve a round of Audubon applause. We plan to make this an annual event. The peony sale should pay the tax bill on the property, and combined with the previous benefit concerts, will greatly help in the long term management of the preserve.

Paul Weidbass



Readers who live within the Manhattan CBC area can also contribute by counting 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 KS 66502-2716) and I will send you some brief instructions and a checklist. Or, even better, check the NFHAS website at <http://www.ksu.edu/audubon> for downloadable 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

c o u n t

results.

**Group Leaders; Phone (day); Eve****Dave Rintoul; 532-6663; 537-0781****Brett Sandercock, 532-0120****Clyde Ferguson; 532-6730; 539-4856****Chris Smith; 532-6656; 539-6918****Hoogy Hoogheem; 539-7080****Doris Burnett; 537-2502**

NFHAS Christmas Bird Count Supper, December 15, 2001

After spending the day tramping through the wilds of the Manhattan countryside counting birds, come on over to the **53rd Annual Christmas Bird Count Supper** at the Senior's Service Center, located at Fourth & Leavenworth in Manhattan. The doors will open at 5:30 PM and the meal will begin at 6:00 PM (or whenever you arrive) through 9:00 PM (or when the food runs out). During the course of the evening, we will eat, drink, swap stories, and compile the bird numbers. The meal will consist of chili, crackers, relishes, desserts, & drinks. Free will donations for the meal are accepted.

If you wish to contribute to the meal with your special version of chili or some other dish, please contact Carla Bishop, the supper coordinator, at 539-5129 (h), 532-1859 (w), or cbishop@ksu.edu

Now is your chance introduce friends and neighbors to the fascinating birds we have right here in Kansas, by inviting them to a **Beginning Birdwatching Walk**. The second Saturday of each month the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society hosts a walk for beginning birders. The walks are led by Dave Rintoul, a biologist at K-State, who knows a lot about our feathered friends.

To encourage children to come out and meet the birds, for the next year we have a special offer for children in grades three through eight. By participating in three beginning birding walks, which may include one of the Eagle Days at Tuttle Creek, they can enter a drawing for copies of *Smithsonian Kid's Field Guides: Birds of North America* (for younger kids) or *Kaufman Focus Guides: Birds of North America*. Children have until the end of May 2003 to complete all three walks. (Children must be accompanied by a parent or other responsible adult).

Beginning Birders meet at 8:00 AM at Ackert Hall parking lot on the KSU campus. Ackert Hall is the biology building on the southeast corner of Denison and Claflin. The parking lot is south of the building. If you plan to come or have any questions, please e-mail or call either Jan McNeil or Dave Rintoul, to confirm the walk is still scheduled. The walk usually ends around 10:30-11:00 AM. Dress for the weather, bring binoculars if you have them, and a drink if you like.

Jan McNeil - manxcat@kscable.com 785-776-3894

Dave Rintoul - drintoul@ksu.edu 785-532-6663

(Eagle Day, 2002 is January 5th. Meet at 9:00 AM at Tuttle Creek Corps of Engineers Office.)

FYI: Submit Newsletter articles by 15th of month to Cindy Jeffrey, 128 Dole Hall, KSU, or 15850 Galilee Rd, Olsburg, KS 66520, or email to cinraney@ksu.edu MAILING: contact Carla Bishop 539-5129



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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 the National Audubon Society join@audubon.org.

Nonmembers 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

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Kansas City area (incl. W. MO): 785-342-2473
Nebraska (statewide): 402-292-5325

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Addresses & Phone numbers of Your Elected Representatives (anytime)

Write - or call

Governor Bill Graves: 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/>