



the prairie falcon

VOL. 32, No.4
DECEMBER 2003

DECEMBER 20
Manhattan CBC

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

Christmas Bird Census "Tradition"

In December it's a tree, lights, presents, giving, family and for many of us the Annual Christmas Bird Census.

The Manhattan area CBC is Dec. 20 - for more information see page 6 for the map of the Manhattan CBC area and the leaders/contact person for each and the Compilation "Chilli Supper."

This is a great opportunity for the "new" birdwatcher, to introduce someone to birdwatching, or improve your skills as a birdwatcher!

Check other area CBC dates by contacting Chuck Otte at otte@nqks.com or 785-238-8800 or visit KSBIRDS website at <http://ksbirds.org> for the most complete list for Kansas.

Join in the "Tradition."

Field Trips

BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK

Join us Saturday, Dec. 13th 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.

INSIDE

- 2 ARACHNOPHILIA
- 3 FALL FOILAGE TOUR
- 4 SKYLIGHT
- 5 TAKE NOTE

CONTRIBUTORS:

DRU CLARKE
PETE COHEN
THOMAS MORGAN
DAVE RINTOUL
PATRICIA YEAGER

UPCOMING DATES:

- Dec 6 Bird Feed PICKUP
9a.m. - 1p.m. UFM
1221 Thurston
- Dec 13 Beginning Birding, 8 a.m.
Ackert/Durland Parking Lot
- Dec 20 Manhattan CBC
- Jan 3 Eagle Day 9a.m.
Tuttle Creek Corps of
Engineers Office

PRINTED BY
CLAFLIN BOOKS & COPIES
MANHATTAN, KS



ARACHNOPHILIA

dru clarke

*"The itsy bitsy spider climbed up the water spout,
Down came the rain and washed the spider out,
Out came the sun and dried up all the rain,
And the itsy bitsy spider climbed up the spout again."*
- children's rhyme

The Field Museum of Natural History showcased an exhibit on spiders a few years ago, and in viewing it, I learned that we are never more than three feet away from one of their kind. (I assumed that this meant habitable earth where both human and spider coexist.)

After reading Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* I learned something else about spiders and humans: that not all of us fear or despise them. Rather, some of us are almost fond of them, enough so to considerately lay a towel over the edge of the bathtub to allow trapped spiders to crawl out, presumably to find a suitable place where their scabbling legs can find purchase. Tubs and sinks are lethal traps, and sometimes, unwittingly, I have turned on the tap only to find a wetted, leggy mote whirling in the water. Rescue is often successful, with the bewildered animal clinging for dear life to a proffered dish cloth or back brush. Sometimes I let it crawl off, back to a slim hiding place, but frequently I remove it to the outdoors, to close vines or bushes bordering the porch. How it fares then I haven't taken time to investigate, but it probably isn't in the spider's best interests for survival. If it had wanted to live outside, it would have been there in the first place.

One stout, black spider has lived under the baseboard in the bathroom all summer. I see it often, and wonder what it feeds on. I've touched it, briefly, before it scooted back to cover. Others hang out in the ceiling corners, behind the dish drainer, and in the potted plants. I occasionally whisk away old webs, groaning with dust and the husks of spent bugs (who have been siphoned dry), to give the resident spiders some exercise in building new ones. Their population is at the carrying capacity of our house, and they are welcome to forage within, as

long as they know their place. Besides, we have plenty of room.

One morning, in Project W.O.L.F., the outdoor lab of Manhattan High School, I had descended the steep slope bordering Wildcat Creek. The morning sun was just seeping over the ridge and its rays illuminated dozens of spider webs in the woodland: all were constructed about a foot or two (I didn't actually measure, but less than knee-high) from the ground and each glistened with a satiny glow. This particular range of height must have some adaptive value for the spiders. Were they all made by the same species, or had the various species agreed on the chosen altitude? Someone may know the answer; someday I'd like to find out.

Other woodland spiders have a penchant for slinging webs across favored paths, again, stringing them at a predetermined height of about four to six feet, with five feet seeming to be the optimum. (This is about my mouth height, and I've brushed many a web with my lips, having learned to keep my mouth shut as I walk.) These arachnid architects have the most glorious and enviable abdomens, jeweled boxes resembling elaborate bustles. While I try to avoid ruining their webs, I often return from these walks with pale, steel-strong threads decorating my shirt. The next day, the webs are back. Who could not admire and smile at their industry?

Fear of spiders (and snakes) seems to be hard-wired in many of us, but usually if one is afraid of one group, that same person tolerates the other. I shudder at snakes, but am awed by spiders. Should we be able to trace these responses back in time, we will find, no doubt, that they aided us in survival once. But for now, I am content to muse on their lifestyles, and will keep a towel hung on the bathtub's edge.

© 2003 Oct. 27 Dru Clarke

**NEWLY DESIGNED NORTHERN FLINT HILLS
AUDUBON SOCIETY
T-SHIRTS ARE NOW
AVAILABLE - ON
SALE AT THE BIRD
SEED PICKUP,
DEC. 6, 2003**





On October 16th, I drove to Bur Oak Nature Center in Blue Springs, Missouri, and walked under the black haw trees at the side of the building. Several of the ripe berries made a snack with caloric value, but their odd taste was not interesting enough to hold my attention for long. As I ambled along the trails, I enjoyed the fall foliage as well as the informative signs that had been provided by the center. A sign claimed that some calls of blue jays sounded like "Thief! Thief! She did it, she did it." I wondered whether those rascals were burying acorns, and whether they ever woke up in the middle of the night, worrying about losing an acorn. Not likely. Their intellect is too well adjusted for that. At any rate, the day I see a jay laying on a psychiatrist's couch is the day I hang up my backpack.

After visiting with my parents for a day, I drove to Bennett Springs State Park near Lebanon, MO. At the nature center, I joined ten people who had signed up for a hike to a natural tunnel, a 300 foot section of a collapsed cave that a creek runs through. Dana, our guide, set a fast pace, since the 8 mile hike would take more than 6 hours. The oldest person, a gray-haired woman, saw a red milk snake and chased it down and caught it. Dana was overjoyed. After we had a chance to touch the red, black, and white snake, Dana regretfully let it go. I hadn't realized that the most colorful object that I would see would be a snake.

When we walked into the natural tunnel, Dana shone his flashlight onto old nests of phoebes and onto a lonely, big brown bat that flinched when the light struck it. After leisurely munching on our lunches, we left the cool confines of the tunnel. Dana noticed the edges of a sassafras leaf that were folded together and tied with a bit of silk, enclosing a spicebush swallowtail caterpillar which still sported a bird-dropping disguise. This critter is only capable of entering dormancy as a pupa. And there's no way it's going to make it through the winter. Oh well, others must have surely made it to the pupal stage, and I'm glad I saw it. We descended into an area that had pawpaw trees with ripe fruit. As I ate my share, I spat the seeds into a sack, after cleaning each brown seed thoroughly with my tongue and teeth.

When our leader picked up the pace, trying to finish the hike on time, I appreciated the aerobic nature of hiking. After we finished and said our goodbyes, I evaluated the amount of stress my ankles had absorbed on the rocky ground, and I decided to go for it. While hiking into the uplands above the nature center, I found a rusty black haw. I ate one berry; then another; and then another. Before I knew it, I had eaten 80. I don't know why the taste intrigued me so. Perhaps it was sweeter than the taste of the black haw berries, or perhaps I didn't want the experience to end. The day had been filled

with wonderful sights and equally wonderful conversation.

After visiting my parents for a couple of days, I drove to Maple Woods Natural History Area in Gladstone, a suburb of Kansas City. In a way I was coming home, because I had spent my childhood near Parkville to the southwest. I watched a jay fly down to the leaf litter with a small, white oak acorn and search for a secure hiding place. I let the peace sink into me. This was as much my home as the leaf litter under a walnut tree beside the back door of my childhood home. With its interplay of light and shadow, it reminded me of our Michel-Ross Nature Preserve in Manhattan, KS, except for the old growth sugar maples and the pawpaws. As I write this, I recall a beacon of light that pierced the canopy of maples to fall on the yellow leaves of a pawpaw, a yellow so vividly saturated that I remember it still, a color so vivid that it's almost an emotion.

A local resident informed me that the largest of the old growth maples had been lost when a development had gone in, and only the least valuable part of the woods had been saved. He said that Renaissance North, a development on neighboring acreage that is controlled by Kansas City, will eventually push flood water into the edge of the natural area. Oh well, it's a done deal. And I remember standing on the western edge of the woods, hearing the roar of cars on highway 1, ... and then stepping a few yards back under the trees and clearly hearing the impact of a falling white oak acorn as it hit the ground. There's a peace here that can never be taken away, ... that must not be taken away. No matter how insane the rest of the world is, this part of it is sane. One only has to see the light filtering through the canopy to know there is a progression of logical rules governing the events here in a beautiful way.

As I was nearing the end of my return drive, I got the desire to plant seeds. I stopped west of Wamego, KS, and walked into the acreage that I own. As I walked down a wooded ravine on the north side of the far hill, I startled a doe that was drinking at a shallow pond. I began to plant seeds. As the doe waited on higher ground, screened by wide leaves of bur oak and northern red oak, I whispered, "Just wait, a few years from now there will be ripe pawpaws, and in this community of life that we share, perhaps you or one of your offspring will taste a pawpaw and enjoy it as much as I have." Yes, I was home.



It's a November day, the sixth or perhaps seventh in a row in which one homogenous cloud fills the sky (with a break one night for a clear-eyed Moon). Today again the sky seems made of minutely-ground old grey clam shells, held together by a satin-finish varnish very thinly applied, leaving not a wrinkle. Below it the wind has nothing to add, so the trees, and volunteer wheat that surged up from a spasm of rainfall past, are unmoving and mute. On the nearby country road no traffic passes. For awhile there was a lone coyote in the wheat practicing its traditional ballet: the angled dance forward on hindlegs, then the vertical plunge of forelegs and snout, now making the most of a time when no shadow will forewarn the mice. Once at least he/she came up successful; now he/she's gone without a pencil mark through the field or a trace upon the sky, which remains very present, like a blank page, and one can feel urged to give forth some expression.

But indolence is upon me and I am content to call for the expressions of another. Thomas Hood, by name, who made his brand of meteorological observations in England from sometime after 1798 to 1845. 'Twas he who penned: "No warmth, no cheerfulness, no healthful ease/No comfortable feel in any member/No shade, no shine, no butterflies, no bees/ No fruits, no flowers, no leaves, no birds/ November!" Of a different kind of day he wrote in *The Season*: "Boughs are gaily rifled/By the gusty thieves/And the Book of Nature/Getteth short of leaves." And in *Love and Lunacy* he wrote of a young man who made use of his astronomical knowledge to unmask an insincere young woman who wrote to him, "The moon's at full love, and I think of thee" three times in one month. To which he comments: "Indeed I'm very much her debtor/But not the moon-calf she would have me be/Zounds! does she fancy that I know no better?/O woman! woman! that no vows can fetter/A moon to stay for three weeks at the full!/By Jove! a very pretty cock-and-bull!..."The moon at full'...so she wrote me upon the first – The twelfth, and now upon the twenty-second/Full! – yes – it must be full enough to burst!/But let her go – of all vile jilts the worst..." Now back more tranquilly

to the kind day at hand. Thomas Hood began an ode to Autumn: "I saw old autumn in the misty morn/
Stand shadowless like silence, listening/To silence...."

Left undisturbed, the cloud resident above me this past week will be as blank and silent again tonight as the stars it displaces. Yet really there is no need to respond. Relax, it begins to say after awhile, and listen to the silence.

Left undisturbed from mid-December to mid-January, the silent movie in the night sky should feature: Saturn at opposition at midnight New Year's Eve, with its rings (that have been turning to face us since 1995) now fully displayed. Its brightest in 30 years, *Astronomy* tells us. It performs that night in a diamond-shaped quartet, a silent alto at the peak of the diamond. Procyon (in the Little Dog) and Betelgeuse (Orion's right shoulder) are the baritones further down the sky at the diamond's side points, Procyon to stage right (our left). And Sirius sings bass at the lower point. Though Sirius is nearly twice as big as the Sun, and 23 times brighter, and is the fifth nearest star, the 51 trillion miles separating us will translate its voice also into frequencies only the imagination can access.

These Sirius statistics are cheerfully provided by Jeff Kanipe in *A Skywatcher's Year*, where he is enthusiastic, too, about the Quadrantid meteor shower due in the wee hours of January 3rd - 4th. Up to 250 swift pale blue streaks per hour with an average of 95, by his anticipation. *The Old Farmer's Almanac* says 80; 40 grumbles another source. But he calls to mind the saying that "You may see a few, you may see many, but stay in your bed and you won't see any." He adds that the name comes from a constellation, Quadrans Muralis, depicting a mariner's quadrant, which has been erased by the official sky artists, and its meteors now emerge from Bootes, a little ways out from the handle end of the Big Dipper.

Meanwhile, Venus will be relatively high to westward in the evening sky. High and low tides with the Moon new December 23rd, full January 7th.



Jeffrey Energy Center Field Trip

Nine people participated in our field trip to the Jeffrey Energy Center. We saw 6 bald eagles, thousands of snow geese, hooded mergansers, common golden eye, bufflehead, several red tail hawks and northern harriers, ruby crowned kinglets and juncos just to name a few. So we learned about energy production and birded and a good time was had by all. THANK YOU to our noble and informed leader Don Yockey.

Patricia Yeager



What is this turkey doing in my garage?

Yes, this bird seemed to bond with our garage - big bird droppings!

If you have interesting encounters like this, send it in!

Cindy Jeffrey





Group Leaders; Phone (day); evenings

Dave Rintoul; 532-0104; 537-0781

Clyde Ferguson; 539-4856

Chris Smith; 539-6918

Hoogy Hoogheem; 539-7080

Doris Burnett; 537-2502

Brett Sandercock; 532-0120

The Christmas Bird Count supper will begin at 6:00 pm on 12/20 at the Seniors Service Center, 412 Leavenworth, Manhattan. Chili, drinks, and table ware will be provided. Everyone is welcome and may bring a dish to share with the group. If you would like to help with the chili supper - call Carla Bishop, 539-5129



Red-breasted Nuthatch
Dave Rintoul

"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)



Last month's guest is thought to be a young rat snake according to reserach in Collins book by Patricia Yeager



**Northern Flint Hills
Audubon Society**
P.O. Box 1932
Manhattan, KS
66505-1932



Printed on 100% post-
consumer recycled
paper

Non-profit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 662
Manhattan, KS 66502

Return Service Requested

Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society
Edited by Cindy Jeffrey, 15850 Galilee Rd., Olsburg, KS 66520 (cinraney@ksu.edu)
Also available on the World Wide Web at the URL <http://www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html>

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!

NFHAS Board

President:	Carla Bishop	539-5129
Vice President:	Dave Rintoul	537-0781
Secretary:	Eloise Thomas	456-8519
Treasurer:	Jan Garton	539-3004

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Conservation:	JoAnn Hablutzel	776-7649
Education:		
Program:	Judy Roe	539-5519
Fieldtrips:	Dave Rintoul	537-0781
	Patricia Yeager	776-9593
Membership:	Carla Bishop	539-5129
Finance:	Ann Feyerharm	539-0483
Public Outreach:	Dolly Gudder	537-4102
Land Preservation:	Paul Weidhaas	539-4805
Newsletter:	Cindy Jeffrey	468-3587
At-Large Board Members:	Dusty Becker, John Tatarko, Ingrid Neitfeld, Jacque Staats	
Audubon of Kansas Trustee:	Hoogy Hoogheem	

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 G.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/>