



photo by Dave Rintoul

International Migratory Bird Day

count will be held on Saturday, **May 8**. We have several parts of Riley County that were not covered last year, so if anyone wants an area or wants to join an existing group, please e-mail me at jim.throne@sbcglobal.net.

The expectation is that you count all birds heard or seen in your assigned area, and provide a list to me with some trip information. I then compile the information for the county, and submit the list to eBird.org.

Zealots like myself will be birding from dawn to dusk, and will also spend some time owling; but others spend just part of the day birding. This is a great excuse to spend the day birding during a beautiful time of the year, so please consider joining us.

Jim Throne

NORTHERN Flint Hills Audubon Society,
P.O. Box 1972, MANHATTAN, KS 66505-1972



PRAIRIE FALCON

NORTHERN FLINT HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Upcoming Events:

May 3 - BOARD MEETING 6:00 P.M.
(TOM & MJ MORGAN HOME)

May 8 - MIGRATORY BIRD DAY
(SEE ABOVE)

JUNE -- YEARLY PLANNING MEETING
WE NEED YOU!!



NFHAS is still on the lookout for a new treasurer. Carla Bishop is resigning as treasurer. She says that the position requires approximately one hour per week for bookkeeping the Society's accounts and one hour a month as a member of the board. Carla will work with the new treasurer for the next three months before they take over the duties in June, 2010.

NFHAS is also looking for someone to coordinate the care the Butterfly Garden. Susan Blackford must give up the position. You may contact her for more information on the time and work involved.



SKYLIGHT PLUS

PETE COHEN

This is the time of year when the white petals of the “sail flowers” begin reappearing on northern waters (those of the water lilies will come later),

stirring some random thoughts about winds. For one thing while I’m sure that many sailors happily feel they have resumed a partnership with the winds, to me watching—while marveling at anyone’s ability to understand and manipulate the riggings—it tends to seem as much like duels as partnerships.

Perhaps that’s just my bias as a cyclist, who typically cannot really veer here and there to get where I’m heading. Unless I can find a sheltered pathway, I take the wind as it comes from whatever quarter and the only variation being in the effort required. As to how much effort, modern sources want first to know everything about me and my surrounds (my density, my coefficient of drag, etc.) before venturing an opinion, though our 19th century encyclopedia unhesitatingly claims a 20 mph breeze exerts only 2 pounds of pressure per square foot, with 30 mph going up to 4 1/2 pounds, and 40 to 8 pounds. I think the hardest I’ve fought has been well into the 30s, and I don’t know my square footage, but I’d just as soon have been dragging a potato sack in a calm wind. Of course, unlike the sails, I can keep going in a calm, and when the wind’s to aft, even two pounds per are well received.

To my experience, wind can be created (by pasture fires, for example), re-directed, made to be a delivery agent, and to do some heavy lifting or pushing, but it will not cooperate on its own in any way, as say horses will adopt to an activity and contribute useful action without immediate direction.

It can produce a wide variety of sounds that touch human emotions, but unless one can attribute them to metaphysical spirits they are expressions lacking of any intent behind them, and that in its way is wonderfully surreal. I recently read a North Dakota historian telling how his immigrant forebears told

their children that the reason the plains did not resemble their native Norway was because the incessant winds had blown all the hills away.

There is, I believe, a great deal of geological evidence to the contrary, nonetheless winds in tornadic action can perform tricks that seem as magical. And it seems that whether skiers receive the light fluff they desire or soggy snowball material, can depend on how winds aloft batter the descending flakes, and when such winds allow the fluff to precede the soggy stuff, avalanches are more likely.

The winds we feel are but a small part of a global commotion of air, mention of whose activities would require more than a word or two—sometime later. The winds of outer space are literally a different matter. Such as they are this month for us, they will be sailing past Venus, resuming her Siren role, glowing tantalizingly higher every evening, starting with a flirt close to Aldebaran on the 1st. Mars and Saturn will steadily be glowing less. According to the *Old Farmer’s Almanac’s* reckoning, they will do so achieving “precisely” the same fading brightnesses. Saturn in Virgo where it’ll still be noticeable near the Maiden’s bright star Spica, and Mars moving from Cancer into Leo to do the same near the Lion’s brightest, Regulus.

Jupiter will be the light in Aquarius’ window, rising in the dawn till daylight takes over. Later in the month *StarDate* says Mercury will be also in the eastern dawn, like a bright star for about a half hour.

Remnants of Halley’s comet’s tail will provide a meteor shower emanating from Aquarius on the 4th. *StarDate* also tells that poisonous gas was detected in the tail during its brilliant 1910 passage and lots of anti-comet pills went on the market before the matter proved too diffuse to matter.

The Moon’s social calendar includes a confab with Jupiter the 8th and 9th, a rendezvous with Venus the 15th and 16th, a swing below Saturn the 22nd and below Spica the 24th. Thus as it waxes from the 19th through the 22nd it will be moving alongside a diagonal arrangement of Saturn (topside) Regulus and Mars. New the 13th, 8p04; Full the 27th, 6p07.

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HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

MICHEL-ROSS AUDUBON PRESERVE

MJ MORGAN

For new members to NFHAS, this is an invitation to explore our Michel-Ross Preserve on Stagg Hill Road. Earlier columns by Paul Weidhaas (2000, 2001, and 2003) have linked the history of eight acres to the Zadok Hook Peony Farm, started in the 1930s and active at least through the 1960s. “Four generations of the Hook family farmed the acreage,” running uphill and southwest along Stagg Hill Road toward Sunrise Cemetery on the crest. The 80-acre cemetery, established in 1966, had a memorable relationship with the peony farm; on what used to be called Decoration Day, May 30, Paul describes the red and white peonies purchased by hundreds of people coming to the cemetery from Fort Riley.

According to board member Kevin Fay, whose father grew up on Stagg Hill Road, the Hooks owned land on both sides of the road. The farmhouse sat on the west side and the barn on the east side. Peonies were sold for \$1 a dozen. These were the days when businesses in Manhattan were interspersed with farms; Kevin’s father was paid 75 cents a week to milk the Hook cow. In 1998, Bill and Joann Michel and Harold Ross donated twenty acres of this land to Audubon, followed by an additional donation in 2000. The property was dedicated in a ceremony and a sign erected November 8, 1998. In 2001, Audubon volunteers collected and hauled away 565 pounds of debris, an effort led by Jan Garton.

The long rows of peony bushes gradually disappeared into woodlands when the flower business ended. Some of the peony rows were subsumed under the Woodland Ridge housing addition. Yet scattered among the slender saplings of hop hornbeam, redbud, and basswood, hiding in the thick, viney underbrush, heritage peony bulbs were still easily located in 2001 and 2003, when NFHAS raised first, \$600, and then \$330 from their sale. These monies became part of

the matching funds drive to acquire the property. Members volunteered one afternoon to search and dig these bulbs. People living near Stagg Hill Road still comb the woods of Michel-Ross to find peonies. In early spring, emerging peony shoot spears, unmistakably dark red, can be found competing for the dappled light with white and purple violets, greenbrier, moonseed vine, fragrant sumac and Virginia creeper.

One long “strip of level land” borders Stagg Hill Road; the second parcel includes the ravine. Along the edge of the ravine runs a cool, moss-covered trail on a limestone outcropping. One member has called this trail and its view “magical.” Yet the proximity of Michel-Ross land to some homes as well as its location inside the developing city make it vulnerable: bush honeysuckle has become rampant, and recently, volunteers working to remove trash found domestic vinca vines spreading over the banks of a dry streambed. They also saw small campsites and “forts,” where young campers may have spent the night. Yet spending time in these woods is what we want to encourage. These quiet natural areas, filled with native trees and wildflowers, home to many bird species who need treed habitats, are not so available any more, so close to home. In April, 2008, Kevin Fay noted the following species in Michel-Ross: red-breasted nuthatch, eastern phoebe, yellow-rumped warbler, ruby-crowned kinglet as well as red-bellied woodpecker, downy woodpecker, blue jay, cardinal, turkey vulture, and not to be omitted, robin.

This spring, take your children to Michel-Ross, or walk by yourself on the narrow paths striped by sun. Catch a glimpse of a heritage peony, an early lost landscape that itself replaced the tallgrass prairies on which Manhattan was built.

MJ Morgan

On April 10, Patricia Yeager, Kevin Fay, Jacque Staats, and Tom and MJ Morgan worked along the highway border of Michel-Ross Preserve to remove trash and broken glass. On April 17, Tom Morgan planted paw-paw and hazelnut seedlings along the old stream bed deep inside the preserve. He and MJ also hauled out lengths of iron pipe and more trash. Any member visiting Michel Ross -- if you see trash, please take it away. If you see tires or any larger items cast into the ravine, contact Patricia Yeager or Tom Morgan.



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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/yr. Make checks payable to the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, and mail to: Treasurer, NFHAS, P.O. Box 1932, Manhattan, KS, 66502-1932.

RARE BIRD HOTLINE: For information on Kansas Birds, subscribe to the Kansas Bird Listserve. Send this message <subscribe KSBIRD-L> to <list_serve@ksu.edu> and join in the discussions.

Contacts for Your Elected Representatives (anytime) Write, call or email:

Governor Mark Parkinson: 2nd Floor, State Capital Bldg, Topeka , KS 66612.

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