



MARCH 7TH - TRIP TO QUIVIRA & CHEYENNE BOTTOMS.

The Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society is once again organizing a birdwatching trip to Quivira National Wildlife Refuge and Cheyenne Bottoms. We will try a different route this year and head for Quivira first. The tentative plans are to leave Manhattan at 8:30 a.m., travel to Sterling, Kansas for lunch, tour the Quivira refuge and then to Cheyenne Bottoms for sunset viewing of birds (maybe some sandhill cranes!).

Plans are to stop in Salina for supper and then home, hopefully by 8:30 p.m. If you are planning to join us, contact Carla Bishop at 785-532-1858(w), 785-539-5129(h), or cbishop@ksu.edu by Feb. 27, so appropriate transportation can be arranged.

Don't forget to dress in layers, because the weather is always iffy in March and breezes are cold coming off the water. Bring your binoculars, snacks, and water, too. Last year, we saw lots of pelicans, coots, buffleheads, shovelers, herons, Canada geese, snow geese, and four Tundra swans. No sandhill cranes in view but we did hear them. Hope you can join us this year.

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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Inside

- pg. 2 - SkyLight plus
PETE COHEN
- pg. 3 - WHEN BRANCHES ARE BARE
DRU CLARKE
- pg. 4 - MANHATTAN CBC REPORT
DAVE RINTOUL
- pg. 5-6 - PRAIRIE CHICKEN BOOMING
BIRDSEED SALES REPORT
- pg. 7 - TAKE NOTE

Upcoming Events:

- MAR. 3 - LAST BIRDSEED ORDER DEADLINE
til fall of 2009 - SPECIAL SALE!!
- MAR. 5 - BOARD MEETING 6 p.m.
(TOM & MJ MORGAN HOME)
- MAR. 7 - CHEYENNE BOTTOMS/QUIVIRA TRIP
SEE ABOVE
- MAR. 14 - LAST BIRDSEED PICKUP UFM, 9-12n
til fall of 2009
- APR. 2 - BOARD MEETING 6 p.m.
(TOM & MJ MORGAN HOME)
- APR. 11 - SAT. MORNING BIRDING, 8 A.M.
MEET AT SOJOURNER TRUTH PARK



SKYLIGHT PLUS

PETE COHEN

Throughout geologic time natural forces have rendered numerous life forms extinct, and it likely little mattered to a T.rex that creatures of the earlier ages were gone. What was at hand apparently satisfied both

his/her curiosity and stomach equally. Not so with humans, and two articles appearing separately in the February 2nd Washington Post Weekly Edition, without referring to each other, nonetheless provide in combination, another example of the risks we run if we don't try to preserve all the species now among us.

Well, it might be worth the risk to try to eliminate certain deadly pathogens, but it seems also worth reviewing what the two articles exemplified. One spoke directly to the difficulty of maintaining biodiversity in a warming climate as, for example, rising sea levels change the habitat conditions in existing refuges, making them ill-suited for their original purposes. How are we to plan and allocate funds as the Florida Keys become less accommodating to the Key deer, and whales appear in areas where never before seen? And (for reasons not explained in the article) higher summer temperatures begin to depopulate moose in northern Minnesota, and what of the situation of less noticeable but equally important organisms?

The other article looks more optimistically at future developments. It reports that researchers are learning from the ability of a whale's heart to pump 1000 liters (260 gallons) per beat through 108 miles of veins and arteries how to devise better devices to aid diseased human hearts. Information on how to produce some vaccines that can be kept without refrigeration is being gained from the so-named "resurrection" plants that grow in the

southern hemisphere's deserts, surviving long periods of desiccation without damage to cell structure. Such things are occurring in the realm called biomimicry, where oysters instruct how to convert CO₂ into building material; lotus leaves show how to make materials more water resistant, etc.

Such instructors – the known and yet to be discovered – are irreplaceable, and their habitats are changing.....

Meanwhile Venus seems in no danger of going extinct soon. However, her glorious appearance in the evening skies, with us since autumn, will draw to another close this month, as she loses half her brilliance and departs earlier and earlier. However, *The Old Farmers' Almanac* says that as a parting fillip she can be glimpsed briefly both as an evening star and a morning on the 25th and 26th. And she will begin reappearing steadily as a morning star after going behind the Sun for a few days rest.

Saturn takes up some of her slack, coming closest to Earth on the 8th and riding noticeably through the nights with Leo as host constellation. Despite his nearness and brightness, *StarDate* notes he'll be shining at only a third his possible best because for now his rings will be edge-on toward us. The University of Texas publication adds that Galileo thought the rings were lumps when he first saw them, then arms as his lenses improved, and it was several decades later, in 1659 that Christiaan Huygens, with still better equipment, discovered them to be rings.

Jupiter will be a morning bright spot, rising a little ahead of the Sun with a crescent Moon for company on the 22nd and 23rd. The Moon will have been visiting with Saturn and Leo's Regulus on the 8th-10th and Scorpio's Antares on the 17th. The Sun crosses the equator at 6a44 on the 20th, and the bright star rising in these evenings will be Bootes' Arcturus who's usually on the scene as the northern spring arrives.

Moon full 8a49 on the 9th, new 7p35 the 24th.

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WHEN BRANCHES ARE BARE

DRU CLARKE



When branches are bare of leaves in wintertime, an undressed world poses for us. If we are deliberate and patient, we may see what artists see and begin to appreciate an otherwise forbidding and bleak season.

The grasses are dormant but pleasing to the eye with the colors of pelts – think of deer, coyote, cougar, fox – to remind us that its native fauna are alive and well: hunting and being hunted along distinct, well-worn, winding trails so easy to discern, running through the grass, into the trees, and beyond.

Webworm nets, torn and matted and resistant to decay, have caught late season drifters long after their original residents have fallen to pupate in the soil: a jay comes to feed on the mummified luckless catch, picking motes from the weaving. The nets make me think of ghost nets that drift aimlessly on the ocean's currents, drowning all that they enmesh.

Galls, the growths stimulated into knobs by insect larvae in woody tissue, ornament their hosts like rustic beads. Those on goldenrod add interest to contemporary design bouquets. It is hard for me to resist picking them. Potter wasp nests, tiny but elegant pots of mud, resemble galls, but are entirely the work of the adult wasps. Three in a row are attached to a sedge that curves over the icy stream: they are empty now.

Buds stand out, tightly enfolded by imbricate or overlapping scales, and scars left where leaves attached to twigs resemble gremlin or clown faces. Dangling from one thin branch is a large felt-like cocoon, a woolly bear's shawl inside of which it transforms its delightfully fuzzy black and brown body into an Isabella moth. Oddly, it does this in spring, having spent the winter as a caterpillar snoozing under rocks, leaves or some protective shelter. The cocoon, spun from silk and the hairs from its body, twists in the wind, as if something

were trying to squirm out of it. But, it, too, empty, animated only by moving air upon which the Isabella took flight a warm season before.

The bittersweet fruits have been plucked, leaving the orange calyxes to celebrate the harvest. Its vine adheres to the Law of the Seductive Curve,* a landscape architectural term which prescribes that visual (and actual, built) paths are infinitely more interesting and mysterious and alluring than straight ones. The bittersweet twines around most things that will support it, even its own vines, and your eyes cannot help but follow it. This twining was observed and studied by Charles Darwin whose interests were eclectic to say the least (barnacles come to mind). Certain other plants, especially trees with their ancient limbs, adhere to this law as well: One old chinquapin which had died and fallen had a sinuous limb I wanted to use as a banister, but before I could harvest it, it had rotted away. My brother used to tell me that there is no such thing as a straight line in nature, so if that is true, maybe that is why she is so seductive.

An arctic air mass looms just a few degrees north, and should be upon us by morning. I have my layers set out to wear, and I shiver, wondering about the coping abilities of nature, naked as she seems to be, in winter. Her nuances stand out, like goose bumps, and we see her unpretentiously, stripped and curvaceous, waiting for spring – like the woolly bear – to continue the cycle of living.

© January 2009 Dru Clarke

Photo by Dru Clarke

* Gleaned from a keynote speech by Dennis Lam, Dean of the School of Architecture, Planning and Design, KSU, on Jan. 13, 2009





MANHATTAN CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT REPORT DAVE RINTOUL

The 60th Annual Manhattan Christmas Bird Census (CBC) was held on Dec. 20, 2008. The weather

was unpromising (overcast, bits of snow, ice and packed snow on the roads, stiff north winds and temps in the single digits); it did not seem like a good day to mobilize a lot of counters or count a lot of birds. That prediction turned out to be true.

Fifty-four intrepid observers (plus 5 feeder-watchers) found 32,686 birds (84 species). There were also three species of birds seen during the count-week period (Northern Pintail, Merlin and Townsend's Solitaire). Although the number of observers was higher than our turnout last year, this was the lowest total for party hours and party miles since 1973 (when a total of 36 observers found 81 species of birds.) This was our lowest species total since 1991, when 78 observers found 83 species of birds.

The weather conditions made it difficult to get out and walk, and the road conditions (many back roads were snow-packed and icy) made it difficult to drive to some favorite hot-spots. In addition, the cold weather and snow of the previous week had driven out most of the waterfowl; we missed finding many duck species that are normally still here in small numbers for our CBC.

Nevertheless, some good birds were found by the hardy souls who braved these conditions. A Caspian Tern (who apparently did not watch the Weather Channel) was sighted along the Kansas River; if accepted by the state editor, this would be the first Manhattan CBC sighting for this species, and perhaps a first for the state of Kansas.

A Northern Shrike was seen for the first time since 1978, although we did have a count-week record for this bird in 1999. A near-record number of Horned Larks (989) were found; our high for the previous 59 years was 1070 birds seen in 1983. Black-capped Chickadees and Tufted Titmouses continued their slow recovery from a West Nile-induced population crash in 2003.



And my daughter Ellen and I rescued a very fancy rooster who was apparently abandoned; he was cold, hungry, and headed toward the vehicle as soon as I opened the door. He was grateful for a warm place, food and water, and is now ruling the roost at a farm near Alma. And no, this chicken is not included in the species total above. But he was very handsome!

Thanks to all the intrepid counters and the slightly less-intrepid feeder watchers, the 60th Manhattan CBC was a success. The cooks and organizers for the compilation chili dinner again provided a splendid meal for all those cold and hardy souls who contributed to the count totals.

*report and photo by
Dave Rintoul*

“GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN BOOMING”



NFHAS SPONSORS FIRST 20 MEMBERS!

‘Tis the season for Greater Prairie Chicken to return to their leks and find a mate. The dancing and prancing is a “must see” for any birder and you don’t have to travel far! They are right here in the Flint Hills. The Konza Prairie Biological Station has an observation blind on a lek, and visitors (accompanied by a docent) are invited to watch the courtship display and learn more about research and conservation of this unique tallgrass prairie bird.

For the third year in a row, **NFHAS will pay the reservation fee (\$15/person) for 20 members (including a guest) to view Greater Prairie Chicken booming on Konza Prairie.** Call now to reserve your spot, and enjoy this great opportunity “right in our own backyard!” Guided tours are offered Thursday through Sunday, between March 15 – April 20, 2009. Space each morning is limited. Contact the Konza Prairie Education Office at (785)587-0381 or e-mail keepkonza@ksu.edu. For more information, including a photo gallery and audio clip, visit <http://konza.keep.ksu.edu/visit/blind.htm>

“DON’T FORGET YOUR BIRD SEED!”

Order pick up Saturday March 14, 9-12 noon, at UFM, 1221 Thurston.

LATE orders will be accepted through Tuesday, March 10 (please call Annie Baker at 785-375-4633).

Take advantage of our March sale prices:

\$24.00 Black-oil Sunflower 50lb

\$28.25 Peanut Pick-outs 25lb

\$30.00 Striped Sunflower 50lb

\$31.50 Super Finch Mix 25lb

\$37.50 Thistle Seed 25lb

\$40.00 Safflower Seed 50lb

\$52.00 Sunflower Chips 50lb

\$65.00 Finch Mix 50lb

Find a complete list of products and the order form on-line (in the February 2009 newsletter), <http://www.k-state.edu/audubon/download.html>

A big **Thank You** to this season’s volunteers - Matt Baker, Carla Bishop, Walter Dodds, Kevin Fay, Bob Mohr, Dick Oberst, Leo Schell, Jacque Staats, and Patricia Yeager. Also, **Thanks** to our members for their support during our annual birdseed sale fundraiser. Birdseed sale proceeds go toward our various community projects.

New this season, NFHAS initiated an annual donation of birdseed to local nursing homes. Your comments and suggestions are always welcome, and I look forward to the next round of sales in the Fall of 2009.

Annie Baker, Birdseed coordinator

Check out the reduced prices of some of our most popular seeds!

PICK UP - Sat., Mar. 14, 2009 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at UFM, 1221 Thurston

DESCRIPTION	SIZE		COST EACH	QTY	TOTAL COST
Sunflower chips	10lb		\$14.00		
Sunflower chips	25lb		\$32.00		
Sunflower chips	50lb	(Sale)	\$52.00		
Corn on the cob	10lb		\$6.25		
Corn on the cob	25lb		\$12.00		
Finch Mix	10lb		\$16.25		
Finch Mix	25lb		\$32.50		
Finch Mix	50lb	(Sale)	\$65.00		
Med. corn chop	25lb		\$10.50		
Med. corn chop	50lb		\$19.00		
Peanut pick-outs	10lb		\$15.25		
Peanut pick-outs	25lb	(Sale)	\$28.25		
Red Millet	10lb		\$8.00		
Red Millet	25lb		\$16.25		
Red Millet	50lb		\$29.25		
Safflower seed	10lb		\$11.25		
Safflower seed	25lb		\$26.00		
Safflower seed	50lb	(Sale)	\$40.00		
Suet cakes <small>peanut butter, berry,</small>	11oz		\$1.50		
Suet cakes <small>or regular</small>	11oz		\$1.50		
Sunflower (black)	10lb		\$6.75		
Sunflower (black)	25lb		\$15.75		
Sunflower (black)	50lb	(Sale)	\$24.00		
Sunflower (striped)	10lb		\$7.25		
Sunflower (striped)	25lb		\$18.75		
Sunflower (striped)	50lb	(Sale)	\$30.00		
Thistle seed	10lb		\$21.00		
Thistle seed	25lb	(Sale)	\$37.50		
White millet	10lb		\$4.25		
White millet	25lb		\$10.50		
White millet	50lb		\$19.25		
Cheap cheep mix	10lb		\$5.00		
Cheap cheep mix	25lb		\$11.75		
Cheap cheep mix	50lb		\$21.75		
Flint Hills feast	10lb		\$6.00		
Flint Hills feast	25lb		\$14.50		
Flint Hills feast	50lb		\$27.50		
Super Finch mix	10lb		\$16.25		
Super Finch mix	25lb	(Sale)	\$31.50		

For our customers in Manhattan (IN-TOWN only) we offer a local delivery service — please check the box below and include \$5.00 with your order. Thank you for your order and your support. **We need volunteers to help the day of pickup - if interested - contact Annie Baker - (address & phone on front of form).**

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE # _____

Email _____

DELIVERY (in-town) \$5.00

SUBTOTAL _____

DONATION _____

TOTAL _____

The birdfeeder tour was a blast!



You must plan to go next year if you missed it. We ate breakfast and watched cedar waxwings and goldfinches at the home of Tom and Tami Yeager. We spotted a sparrow in Ted & Diane Cable's yard that remains unidentified (Ted was not present, darn). My (Patricia Yeager) best guess was a first winter white crowned sparrow.

A Northern Harrier put on a good show at Ann Feyerharm's home. We saw bluebirds on the county road to Keats and enjoyed the prairie view. Jacque Staats shared her hidden yard-in-the-woods, where good birds and good conversations were plentiful.

We ended the tour at Marge and Tom Muenzenberger's home for lunch with a view of their lovely yard, where gold finches, house finches and pine siskins were having lunch also.

Thank you to all who shared their homes and feeders, and thank you to Jim Koelliker and Fred Damkroger for helping load and unload rented chairs and tables. This is my short story of the highlights, but if you spoke with the other 27 people that took part, they would have 27 more stories. Several old acquaintances were renewed and new friends made and most everyone left knowing a little more about birds.

Patricia Yeager

SAVE THE DATES:

MAY 9: INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

COUNT, Jim Throne, jim.throne@sbcglobal.net more information in April issue of the Prairie Falcon



E-NEWSLETTER: If you wish to opt out of the "paper" Prairie Falcon newsletter and get it on-line as a pdf - send your name and email address to Jacque Staats - staats@bri.ksu.edu then visit our website - <http://www.k-state.edu/audubon/falcon.html> and click on "Current issue" and see it in color!





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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.

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