

## February 16th 8:30-12n Backyard Feeder Tour

**Reservations:** Call Patricia Yeager 776-9593,  
or [pyky@flinthills.com](mailto:pyky@flinthills.com)

A few members have invited us to their warm homes to look at their feeder birds. Join the feeder tour to see what species are visiting their feeders Saturday morning of Feb.16. We are likely to see: American gold finch, house finch, pine siskin, both red-breasted and white-breasted nuthatches, perhaps a brown creeper, yellow-shafted flicker, red-bellied woodpecker, red-headed woodpecker, downy woodpecker - maybe a Hairy woodpecker at the same feeder for comparison. We might also see a sharp-shinned hawk, yellow-bellied sapsucker, titmouse, assorted sparrow species, perhaps some ducks, bald eagles, and large hawks along the route. We can also expect cardinals, blue jays, chickadees and juncos. And then we hope a few surprises.

Doris Burnett has graciously volunteered to host the early soup lunch for the tour attendees at her house this year. Her southern hospitality is almost as famous as her feeder birds! Good birds, good food and good company will be present. Will you?

The tour and lunch are free for our members and volunteers but you need to make a reservation. Make reservations with Patricia 785-776-9593 or send e-mail to [pyky@flinthills.com](mailto:pyky@flinthills.com) and find out where to start the tour. We will carpool from the starting location at 8:30 a.m. If you would prefer to drive a group let Patricia know when you make your reservation. You will be returned to the starting location about 12 noon. Join us for a special morning.



*photo by Dave Rintoul*

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



## prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 41, No. 6 ~ February 2013

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Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

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**Mar 4 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.**  
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

February seems a proper month to celebrate the 80<sup>th</sup> year since the coming of pykrete, developed within a secret project that was code-named (and misspelled) Habbakuk, because of a phrase in the book of an ancient Hebrew prophet in which is promised the appearance of something as wondrous as unexpected.

In 1942 there was a desperate need to get war supplies from the U.S. across the Atlantic to Britain. German U-boats were formidable perils to ships and there existed a “mid-Atlantic gap”- an area then beyond the reach of air patrols, and it seems much of the U.S. carrier fleet was engaged in the Pacific.

On the basis of some research into strengthening plastics that he’d read about, a science journalist, Geoffrey Pyke, suggested that ships made of ice might provide an alternative. The idea caught the attention of Lord Mountbatten and Prime Minister Churchill and British and American scientists began hidden experiments in an underground meat-packing plant in England, and on several lakes in Alberta.

It was found that by mixing freezing water with 14% by weight of wood pulp the resulting product, which they named Pykrete, would in cubes of 6 inches or so deflect bullets, and melt very slowly, as the pulp provided both re-enforcement and insulation. It was figured that a thickness of 35’ would be required to resist torpedoes, but on the open ocean size itself was not a limitation. Carriers 600’ wide, 2000’ long, and 150’ deep were envisioned. They would have engines, and refrigerating tubes to maintain frigidity. Such behemoths moving from Alaska could obviate the need to capture all those Pacific islands in order to provide bases for the eventual invasion of Japan. Some much smaller prototypes were launched in Canada.

However, while the ice would be inexpensive, the other equipment would not. And by 1943, improved in-hand technologies and ever-increasing U.S. industrial production were bolstering a turn in the War’s tide. Enthusiasm for investment in pykrete squadrons lost momentum, and the Canadian prototypes were left to slowly melt away while the War continued more conventionally until the atom bomb fulfilled the promise of Habbakuk (this being the original spelling).

Pykrete still exists, though, and on the internet can be found accounts of various experiments therewith – some with newspapers (the product of wood pulp) or sawdust standing in. I froze three ice-cube trays: one with just tap water, one with the juice from boiled newspaper shreds, and a third with a by guess amount of the shreds. The first two samples shattered under the hammer; the cubes with shreds did indeed resist. The first two melted at about the same rate, but each cube of the extract left a little pink glutinous blob. The outsides of the shred-cubes began melting just a quickly, though it did take longer for the inner parts to melt.

This month, while some folks contemplate the possibilities of ice in space, and sunlight lasts three to four minutes longer each day, Mars and Mercury will be going down about an hour behind the dipping Sun. Saturn will be rising in Libra a little after midnight for starters, gradually making it up by a little after ten by month’s end. Jupiter, well up by dark in Taurus, will be setting in the wee hours. The Moon will track behind Saturn on the third, and ahead of Jupiter on the 17<sup>th</sup> but behind it on the 18<sup>th</sup>, and then keep close company with Virgo’s bright star, Spica, on the 28<sup>th</sup>. It will be new at 1a20 on the 10<sup>th</sup> and full at 2p26 on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

*2013 Peter Zachary Cohen*

## The Dormant Season

Dru Clarke



“I wonder if the snow loves the trees and fields, that it kisses them so gently? And then it covers them up snug, you know, with a white quilt; and perhaps it says “Go to sleep, darlings, till the summer comes again.”

— Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*

My husband gave me an “infinity scarf” of fake fur for Christmas: it is an acrylic rendition of what appears to be blended mink, serval, beaver and fox, sheared to a uniform length and soft as a cloud. I feel especially virtuous when wearing it, knowing that the animals it’s imitating are still swimming and scampering about in their world, fully furred. The calf likes to nuzzle it while I’m milking her mother and it already has a dried residue of her spit on its tender folds.

Out for a walk with the dogs, wearing, of course, my scarf, I began to think about warmth and dormancy, the latter, nature’s way of dealing with adverse conditions. Some animals, like bears and bats, truly hibernate, sleep without food or drink with a dramatically lower, as much as 90% lower, heart rate than when awake. Diapause, common among the insects, suspends development until more favorable conditions prevail. Some animals, like certain species of seals and roe deer of the Old World, delay embryonic implantation to assure that offspring are born in the spring. And, reptiles undergo brumation, a level of lowered activity, similar to hibernation, but still necessitating drinking water. (I wonder if that is why the local population of rat snakes collects in the old well shaft for the winter.) Estivation, on the other hand, is a response to hot and dry conditions, not a process in evidence on this brisk day.

Several species of birds were active: a nuthatch, hitching down a tree trunk; two large woodpeckers – northern flickers – flushed from the pond edge to nearby treetops, calling “wik-a – wik-a – wik”; a thrush-like bird – a robin? – hopping through the lower branches of woody shrubs at the pasture’s edge. All were warmly coated, their outer feathers shaped and constructed to shed and repel water so that the finer down beneath stays dry and fluffy, while my companions, the dogs, and I were finely “furred” –

they, from the follicles in their skin, and me, by choice of clothing.

Fur and hair, scientifically speaking, are the same, both made of keratin, but aesthetically, differ in our response to their appellation. A fur muff conjures up a decidedly different tactile sensation from a hair shirt. Fur has a double composition – longer guard hairs and shorter, downier underfur – while a hair strand is thicker and singular, and grows in a less dense fashion. Fur grows uniformly over the body of the animal while hair is unevenly distributed. Our Scottish Highlands are both hairy and furry, genetically fit for blustery, wet and cold conditions (like their namesake). The Jersey’s coat is bristly and sparse and she shivers when the temperature dips.

Headed for a concrete bench on a wooded rise half way home, I spied the animal that had kept the dogs up and anxious most of the night: a striking black and white, gloriously tricked out and decidedly furry, striped skunk. It was foraging about in the dead leaves, making small telltale scoops in the soil, and it didn’t notice me right away. Luckily, the dogs were occupied with a leg bone of a deer, and they didn’t notice it. We changed course and skirted the rise, and when I looked back, it had disappeared.

I absentmindedly broke off a rough-leaved dogwood twig, then one from smooth sumac, both with winter buds, and stuck them in my pocket, thinking to examine them with the stereoscope at home. To the unaided eye, the dogwood bud was like the tip of a wetted fine paintbrush, the palest of green. The sumac bud was a tiny, grey button. But, under the stereoscope, lo and behold! both buds were hairy! Or at least, they *looked* hairy. Of course, they weren’t covered with hair in the scientific sense (the thin fibers were not made of keratin, but probably cellulose) but how cool was it that they had evolved a way to trap heat in winter. And, how cool it is to have a nice, warm fake fur scarf to wear so that I can venture out and find neat stuff to write about.

©Dru Clarke Jan. 2013

# How I started Birding

I started birding about 1967 while a Peace Corps volunteer in Rajasthan, India. It began on a hot dusty weekend trip by bus with a fellow volunteer who was a birder. At one of the village stops under a banyan tree, he began pointing out and identifying the many mynah species scavenging and begging around the buses - using Salim Ali's "Common Birds of India." This was the spark that has continued to today. Bird watching was a cheap hobby for a poor volunteer. I'd jump on my bicycle and ride out into the countryside and try to sneak up on and identify things - but without binoculars and only Salim Ali's book in hand that only had several hundred of the thousand plus species in South Asia.

Thankfully an excellent comprehensive field guide has come out in recent years by Grimmett & Inskipp from Oxford Press - "Pocket Guide to Birds of the Indian Subcontinent." January 2012, Ted Cable and I co-led a trip to India where I picked up at least 40 new species, Ted about 60 and Doris Burnett, a first timer, about 245+.

"Curiously my wife, Aruna, has never picked up the interest - when she's out for a jaunt she likes to talk, swing her arms about and doesn't like to stand quietly for minutes on end in one spot."

I always pack my binoculars and guides whenever I travel - particularly to new environments that have included Europe, India/Pakistan, Paraguay, Ecuador/Galapagos and new places in the US.

*Barry Michie - Manhattan, KS*

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## A Tribute to Dr. Robert Robel By Ron Klataske

It is with considerable sadness that we learned this morning that Bob Robel died yesterday. As we featured in the recent edition of PRAIRIE WINGS, Dr. Robel was a "Great Wildlife Research Scientist, Conservationist and Sportsman." We only touched the tip of the iceberg in terms of his leadership involvement in wildlife conservation and his influence on many, many people in that article, but it is a nice glimpse of his career and interests.

You can share that article with others by forwarding this link on our website:

<http://audubonofkansas.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/4-6-Profile-of-a-Great-Scientist-Robel.pdf>

Among his many other contributions to wildlife, Bob has been a member of the Audubon of Kansas Board of Trustees for a number of years. We will miss him, his knowledge and wisdom, and counsel. In my case, I knew Bob for almost exactly 60 years; he was my undergraduate advisor, I took his classes, conducted research under him, hosted him for upland game bird and Wild Turkey hunting. We will all miss him.

We hope that Anice, an outdoor education leader in her own right, will be able to continue to participate in Audubon of Kansas Trustee meetings.

<http://audubonofkansas.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/4-6-Profile-of-a-Great-Scientist-Robel.pdf>



# 2012 Manhattan Christmas Bird Count

## Dave Rintoul

Manhattan Christmas Bird Count – December 15, 2012

On a mild but cloudy December morning, 59 bird counters tallied 147,858 individual birds, and 99 species (plus six forms or subspecies). The mild weather preceding the count seemed to help some birds, who might usually be further south in December, to linger in the Northern Flint Hills. The count has been done every year since 1949, and this year found record numbers of Snow Geese (85,429), Horned Grebe (3), American White Pelican (5), Double-crested Cormorant (2099), Bonaparte's Gulls (303), and Yellow-rumped Warblers (130).

Observers found a Marsh Wren for only the second time ever, a Sedge Wren for only the second time ever, an Orange-crowned Warbler for only the third time ever, and Red-shouldered Hawks (total of 3) for only the third time ever. Four Pileated Woodpeckers and 29 Red-breasted Nuthatches were found by keen-eyed

observers, and for the first time ever, Ruby-crowned Kinglets (12) outnumbered Golden-crowned Kinglets (11).

Inexplicable misses included Ring-necked Pheasant, which had been seen in 73% of the previous counts, and Rough-legged Hawk, which made an appearance in 83% of the previous years. Loggerhead Shrikes continued to be absent, although one Northern Shrike was

seen. Birds seen in the three days prior to and after the count (but not on the count day), included Red-breasted Mergansers, White-winged Doves, and Red Crossbills.

Please make your plans now to join us next year for the 65th annual Manhattan CBC, on Saturday Dec. 21, 2013.

59 Bird Counters

147,858 Individual Birds

99 Species



*photos by Debbie Clark*

Predators! ... and what's in their talons?



**How did you start birding?** Please send me your story! [cinraney@k-state.edu](mailto:cinraney@k-state.edu) or 15850 Galilee Rd. Olsburg, KS 66520



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

Printed on 100% post-consum-  
er 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-line at [www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html](http://www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html)

Membership Information: Introductory memberships - \$20/yr., then basic, renewal membership is \$35/yr. When you join the National Audubon Society, you automatically become a member of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society. You will receive the bimonthly Audubon magazine in addition to the Prairie Falcon newsletter. New membership applications should be sent to National Audubon Society, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Make checks payable to the National Audubon Society. Membership renewals are also handled by the National Audubon Society. Questions about membership? Call 1-800-274-4201 or email the National Audubon Society [join@audubon.org](mailto:join@audubon.org). Website is [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org).

Subscription Information: If you do not want to receive the national magazine, but still want to be involved in NFHAS 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, 66505-1932

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](mailto:list_serve@ksu.edu)> and join in the discussions.

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