

DECEMBER - Christmas Bird Counts!

123rd CBC from Dec 14, 2022 to January 5, 2023

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, hunters engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt." They would choose sides and go afield with their guns—whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won.

In an era when waterfowl and songbirds were losing populations and such species as the Carolina parakeet and passenger pigeon were either extinct or soon would be, the carnage was a big event on Christmas Day.

In 1900, a concerned naturalist named Frank Chapman offered an alternative – see how many species and how many individual birds a team could count – not kill – on Christmas Day.

Thus, the Christmas Bird Count was born and soon the practice spread from coast to coast. Chapman's first effort captured the attention of a total of 27 birders in 25 spots from New England to California, including Toronto and LaGrange, Missouri. It became a major project of the fast-growing National Audubon Society. Chapman called it the "Christmas Bird Census" – and it truly lived up to that title.

To standardize matters, count circles were formed and each had a limitation of a 15-mile diameter around a given point that was chosen with the idea that it would include as many birding hot spots as possible in that circle.

Map of active Bird Counts:

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=ac275eeb01434cedb1c5dcd0fd3fc7b4>

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 51, No. 3, November-December 2022

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Upcoming Events

- Nov. 12 Pick-up Birdseed at UFM 8-12n
- Nov. 12 Sat. morning birding
8:00 Depart from Sojourner Truth Park
- Nov. 24 - Thanksgiving
- Dec. 10 Sat. morning birding
8:00 Depart from Sojourner Truth Park
- Dec. 6 Board Meeting, 5:30 pm Manhattan Public Library
PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING THE NFHAS BOARD
- Jan. 3 Board meeting - 5:30 Public Library
Looking forward to a New Year of birding,
programs, field trips...



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

During last March's discussion here I reported on the then in-progress case of Happy, a 30-year-old elephant who was being confined alone in a 1.15-acre pen at the Bronx Zoo. She had had a companion, but they didn't get along, so now her only contact with other elephants was through holes in a separating fence. An organization, the Non-human Rights Project (NhRP), was trying to obtain a writ of habeas corpus so she could be freed and relocated to have a nearer normal life among other elephants at a sanctuary in Tennessee or California.

The theory was that Happy deserved to have "non-human rights" as much as, say, a corporation. In other background, a Pakistani judge had ordered that an elephant in a failing zoo there be released for transport to a sanctuary in Cambodia. Lower Argentine courts had ordered an orangutan be freed from a zoo in Buenos Aires (a higher court there reversed, but the orang did reach better accommodations). And efforts were ongoing to prevent, via a personhood rationale, the Colombian government from culling a hundred hippos, the progeny of six that had been illegally spirited there by the late drug lord, Pablo Escobar.

To date I haven't been able to find more on the status of the hippos, but in June New York State's highest court, in a 5-2 decision, ruled against Happy. The majority opinion was that while elephants were "intelligent beings deserving of proper care and compassion", habeas corpus was for humans alone, and that to rule otherwise would de-stabilize society, calling into question the ownership of pets, farm animals, and others. The dissenters wrote Happy's captivity was "unjust and inhumane...a spectacle....by which we, too, are diminished."

The NhRP plans to continue its advocacy on behalf of certain species regarded a cognitive. While in June a Google engineer was put on leave for claiming a computer chatbot he was working on had become sentient and was thinking and reasoning like a human being.

Beyond the above there exists broader activity in the service of what is described as the Rights of Nature, a widely put forth approach that considers that certain non-human objects and entities also deserve the kind of respect provided to human persons. They include separate items like rivers, and whole ecosystems, which would be granted a legal status and provided with a human executor(s) who would have legal standing to guard them against willful abuse. Pittsburgh, PA. and Orange County, FL. seem to have given that standing to its residents at large.

One does not have to look far to learn that in other U.S. cities and counties and various countries around the globe there are in force treaties, judicial decisions, legislative action, and just organized proposals holding that natural features have as much an inherent right to healthy existence as do humans, and that human existence depends upon the health of those features. Some are couched as the right of humans to clean air and water.

As I read of them generally stated, they do not seem to represent all or nothing positions. They recognize a need for compromise and accommodation with things as they are, and I found noted one particular wrinkle: if a river has a right to flow unabused, is there any liability if it floods? I've found reference also to too many legal, legislative, and organizational manifestos on the subject to list here, but as yet haven't found any report of a specific on the ground result. They may exist, but with only local effects with little resonance. Perhaps a large change to a widespread regard of nature as a companion and not a chattel needs more time to become broadly prominent, if it can.

Since this is a delayed and combined Nov./Dec. issue I'll begin the sky part by saying that I haven't heard anything about the Leonid meteor shower, which can be exciting every 33 years, if then. In 1966 it was spectacular, in 1999 not as much. November 17th is its best night. In any case, Taurus, the sky's Bull, will again glide up into the eastern sky as darkness falls. And through the month a brightening Mars will move ever closer to another reddish spark: Taurus' eye, Aldebaran. The Moon will locate the Gemini Twins Nov. 13th, Leo the Lion the 16th-17th, Virgo the Maiden the 21st, joining Saturn again the 28th-29th, and Jupiter the 30th. It's special eclipsed full night on the 8th will have passed by now, and now it will be new the 23rd at 4p57.

A couple of particular events in December are 1) Jupiter's bright showing above the Moon the 1st-2nd, which it repeats the 28th-29th, and 2) the full Moon's passing in front of—occulting—a bright reddish Mars for awhile about 8p30 on the night of the 7th. And there's a bit of a washout the 13th as the light of a large gibbous Moon upstages whatever the Gemini meteor shower puts forth. Pollux, the brighter Twin star of Gemini will rise with the Moon the 10th, to its left. Leo's main star, Regulus, will compete with the Moon in the evening of the 7th. Venus, dimly accompanied by Mercury, will be the Evening Star becoming visible for the last week or so of the month. The winter solstice occurs at 3p48 the 21st, and the Moon, having been full the 7th, will be new the 23rd at 4a17.

A Delicious Terror

Dru Clarke



In a recent 'lesson' prepared for a chapter of Family and Community Education women I wanted to showcase the Flint Hills and the native tall grasses that graced its expanse. The women, all chronologically 'enriched', were native as well, having lived in the region most of their lives, many having been born and raised on the farms and ranches. Their rich knowledge of the local history and the stories they shared were impressive and telling, and I wondered what new I could impart that would enrich their understanding of the landscape they so identified with. So, in addition to collecting the four main tall grasses, big bluestem, little bluestem, Indian, and switch, and a host of other, commonly found grasses, I scoured some of the books in our library for quotable impressions to share. And, my main resource for identification was Iralee Barnard's incomparable "Field Guide to the Common Grasses of Oklahoma, Kansas and Nebraska", unrivaled in its comprehensive coverage and ease of use to familiarize oneself with the grass family.

According to Iralee, the tall grass prairie is home to over 3000 species of native plants, and two out of ten are grasses; but, in a prairie, 80 – 90% of the vegetation can be one or two grasses. (p. 3) We see this in the present year, where Big Bluestem and Indian grass seem to outnumber all of the others, the Indian grass seed heads glimmering with what looks like gilded gold as it dances, slowly swaying, in the wind. The Big Bluestem's seed heads resemble frizzy turkey feet scratching at the breeze, hence, its vernacular name, turkey foot. Switch grass, *Panicum virgatum*, has a seed head that looks startled or electrified, indeed, panicked, and is best identified by a tuft of stiff hairs where the blade meets the stem. Their colors as fall approaches cross the spectrum from deep red purple to orange to a quiescent blue, a spectacle that all but makes up for the lack of showy flowers (although, they too, are brightly colored revealed by close examination).

One historical book was Washington Irving's "A Tour on the Prairies," written after a 17 year hiatus in Europe to chronicle his reacquaintance with North America's hinterland. Here was one description: "An immense extent of grassy, undulating...rolling country, with here and there a clump of trees, dimly seen in the distance like a ship at sea; the landscape deriving its sublimity from its vastness and simplicity." It is not unlike our Flint Hills, although he was in northeast Oklahoma when he penned this. Just north of where we live is such a landscape, off a little used dirt road where if you look northwest is Twin Mounds.

In Albert Richardson's journal entitled "Beyond the Mississippi: From the Great River to the Great Ocean, Life and Adventure on the Prairie, the Mountains, and the Pacific Coast" (1857-1867), he writes: "Timber disappearing: only straggling fringes remain along the creek, with an occasional solitary tree on the prairie indicating the whereabouts of water." And, further west, entering the short grass prairie, "Began journeying now among the buffalo grass, two inches high, wiry, nutritious and little injured by frost or drowth (sic). Prairie spangled with wild onions and antelopes bounding over the slopes." (p. 163)

Francis Parkman, in 1846, in "On the Oregon Trail," "every great thoroughfare was white with wagons and by

night ten thousand campfires curled to the astonished clouds." And, "But most emigrants went by private conveyances. Some drew their entire supplies in handcarts to which they harness themselves; others bore their packs on their backs, each a domestic Atlas, his little world upon his shoulders." This happened here, in the Northern Flint Hills where the Oregon Trail passes through prairie, much untouched today and can be seen as they did decades ago.

Reveling in this remnant environment (only 2-4% remains) has been a universal desire. "I recall an almost delicious terror when one day I found myself alone in the midst of tall June grasses that grew as high as my head." Pierre Loti.

Rupert Brooke's, "Breathless, we flung us on a windy hill, laughed in the sun, and kissed the lovely grass." (I had been flung, as it were, almost fifty years ago, onto these hills, as I drove from I-70 north on 177 toward Manhattan, through an unfamiliar heaving of land toward sky, so open and bare, it seemed, to one who grew up in woodland, riding through them on narrow, winding, shaded lanes. An overwhelming feeling of awe gripped me.)

And a favorite that really strikes home with me, is: "I go about looking at horses and cattle. They eat grass, make love, work when they have to, bear their young. I am sick with envy of them." - Sherwood Anderson

"Were we closer to the grass as children, or is the grass emptier now?" Alan Bennett

Reclaim the wealth of the tall grass and not be part of its undoing, as John Madson said.

Go out and fill the grass yourselves, find what you may have lost, hug the air as you might a tree, make a grass hut without breaking the stems, then let them go and watch them take on their original space and place. It is still here: embrace it. Make your own stories, as these women I spoke with had theirs of these hills and its blanket of grass.

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2022 Christmas Bird Counts

Kansas CBC information

<https://ksbirds.org/kos/2022CBC.htm>

It is also linked on the

KSIBIRDS.ORG home page: <https://ksbirds.org>
(2nd link down!)

National Audubon page about Christmas
bird Counts

<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>



Saturday, December 17, 2022

Manhattan

Contact Mark Mayfield
markherb@ksu.edu 785.776.6495

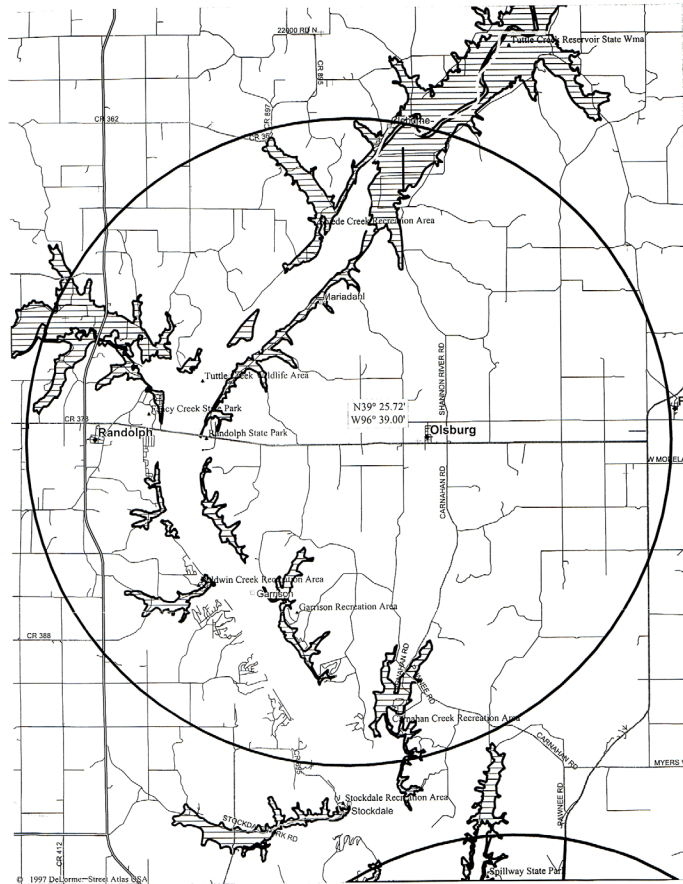


Manhattan Christmas Bird Count - Compilation and Chili Supper

Join the NFHAS and fellow birders after the day of birding for a pot-luck supper at 5 p.m. on December 17th, at the Seniors Service Center, 412 Leavenworth, Manhattan, KS. A few volunteers will prepare chili but please feel free to bring a side dish to share. Free-will donations to NFHAS are also welcome.

We encourage you to bring your own tableware to help us reduce the amount of trash. Enjoy good food, good companionship, and find out how this year's count compares to previous years! If you have any questions on what to bring for the supper or can help with setup, please contact **Patricia Yeager by phone 776-9593 or email pyeagerbirder@gmail.com**.

2022 Christmas Bird Counts



Sunday, December 18, 2022

OLSBURG CBC

7:30 am Greenwook Park (west of Olsburg)

**Contact Cindy Jeffrey,
cinraney@ksu.edu 785-565-3326**

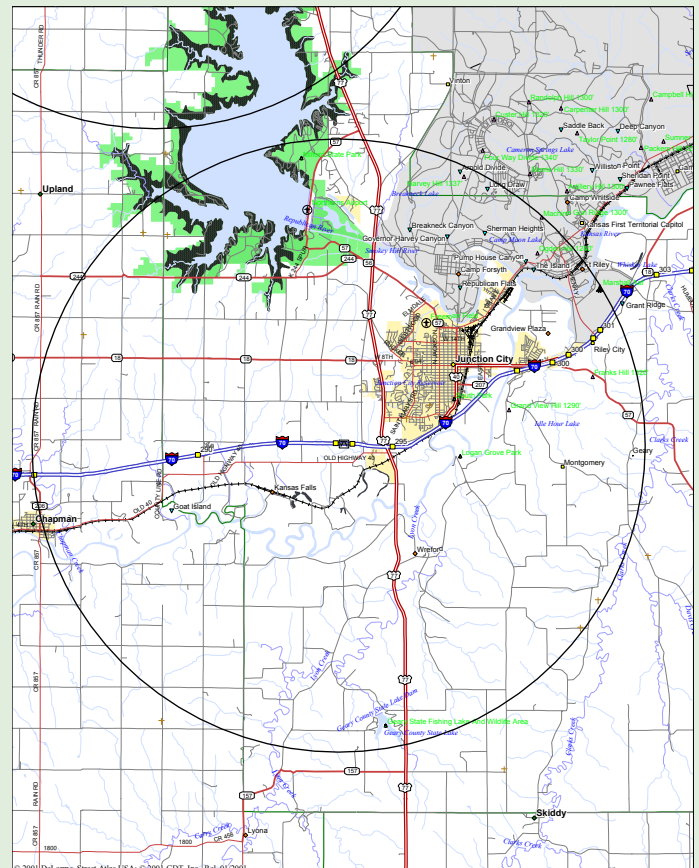
Tuesday, December 27, 2022

Junction City

Contact Chuck Otte

cotte@twinvalley.net

785.463.5485





Northern Flint Hills
Audubon Society
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Manhattan, KS 66502

The purpose of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society is to teach people to enjoy and respect birds and their habitats. NFHAS advocates preservation of prairie ecosystems and urban green spaces thus saving the lives of birds and enriching the lives of people.

Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society.
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Also available online at nfhas.org

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 97194, Washington, D.C. 20090. Make checks payable to the National Audubon Society and include the code C4ZJ040Z.*

Questions about membership Call 1-800-274-4201 or email the National Audubon Society join@audubon.org. Website is www.audubon.org.

NFHAS 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 \$20/yr.*** Make checks payable to the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, and mail to: **Treasurer, NFHAS, P.O. Box 1932, Manhattan, KS, 66505-1932**

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society website: nfhas.org

WE NEED YOU! PLEASE consider joining our NFHAS Board.

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