



Boreal chorus frog,
Pseudacris maculata



female *photos by Eva Horne*

The song I associate with spring on the prairie is not a meadowlark, prairie chicken, or even a bird. I hear thousands (seems like that many) of them in the evening, all around me in the prairie grass. Yet, I've never seen one. It is the boreal chorus frog, tiny, (about an inch in length), nocturnal and secretive. Our prairie has many ephemeral wetlands, you don't know they are there, unless you walk it at the right time.

We hear many different species of frogs throughout the spring and summer, but the chorus frog is always the first.

I know it is spring now.

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 39, No. 8 ~ April 2011

Inside

pg. 2 - Skylight Plus
Pete Cohen

pg. 3 -4 Birdathon
Clyde Ferguson

pg. 5 - Take note
Alsop Property Update

Upcoming Events

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

Apr. 9 - Sat. Morning Birding 8 a.m.
Meet at Sojourner Truth Park

May 9 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

May 14 - Spring Migratory Bird Count
Sat. Morning Birding 8 a.m.
Meet at Sojourner Truth Park



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Every year can claim to be noticed as the bicentennial of something(s), but the claim of our present solar go-round is an especially strong one. Even before the

dawn of January 1, 1812, people of the times were referring to 1811 in their letters and articles as the *annus mirabilis* (literate folks then being more familiar with Latin than is likely the case today). What made that twelve-month so amazing/extraordinary were activities in the heavens, in the Earth, and by squirrels as well as by certain humans, and if certain of the humans had been missing, our post offices today might be flying flags of a different color.

The year's winter brought much larger than normal melt-water floods down the Ohio-Mississippi system, closely followed that spring by the unexpected appearance of a bright, long-tailed comet that remained visible, when the atmosphere was willing, for the rest of the year – the Comet of 1811. As autumn approached, an odd sultry miasmatic quality to the atmosphere along the lower Ohio was reported and in September masses of squirrels were seen in a pell-mell lemming-like stampede, leaving Indiana and doing their best to swim to Kentucky, great numbers of them drowning in the process.

Then on October 20th from Pittsburgh, a steamboat newly built for \$38,000 under the supervision of a Fulton associate, and named the *New Orleans*, began its effort to be the first of its kind ever to tread the waters before it, aiming to reach its namesake city, 2000 miles away. In many places the waters ahead in those days more resembled half-sunken forests, dense with tumbled-in trees (as artists of the day, particularly Karl Bodmer, made clear), and in other places were funneled into churning chutes by the shifting sandbars. There was also to be somehow passed the rapids – the Falls of the Ohio – at Louisville.

On the boat Nicholas Roosevelt had under his command a boat's captain, an engineer, pilot, six crewmen, cook, plus a maid and man servant to assist his two-year-old daughter Rosetta, and his 20-year-old wife, Lydia, 24 years his junior, who was going along, to the horror of some of the friends they'd made at Pittsburgh, despite being eight months pregnant. Also present: a large Newfoundland dog.

The boat was 148'x32 with a 12' draft, or

116'x20' with a 7' draft, depending on sources, but either way much bigger than the biggest known barges, and few others thought that mere steam could control such a burden on such rivers. Low water at the Falls forced a delay that enabled Lydia to deliver young Henry at Louisville. Then when the water rose just enough to give a few inches clearance, and with the children and the household staff ashore to portage the rapids, she made the daring ride over them with her husband.

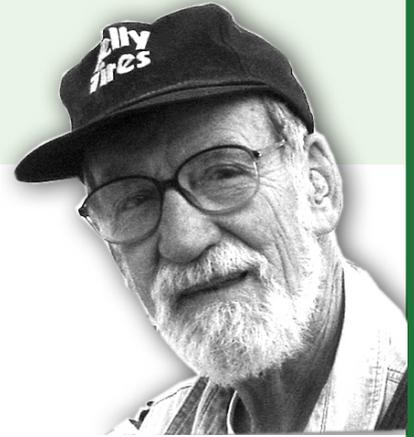
So far so good, and their timing was critical, for in December they were just far enough upstream to avoid being engulfed in the first turmoil of the 1811 New Madrid earthquake, said to be the strongest known to have hit this continent, estimated to have registered about 8 on the Richter scale. It shook houses in the Deep South and rather quietly, I imagine, vibrated the ledges of these Flint Hills while causing church bells to ring in Boston. And it seems that those bells were unwittingly announcing one of those tiny but eventually important turns of history, for as the New Orleans was forced to continue, battling the aftershocks' disturbances of the river, and more threateningly, of its banks, a different sort of vibrations were in progress across all the country west of the Appalachians, and threatening to separate that area from the seaboard states politically if not geologically. A web-like story difficult to condense. (The miasma may have been from gases escaping through unnoticed fissures; mass squirrel migrations have been noted at other times in other places, though the reasons remain obscure.) More to come.

Absent any surprising comets this month, the most prominent players on the stage above will be the constellations of Leo and Virgo. The more recognizable Lion, with its backward question-mark head and shoulders and trailing triangular hindquarters will lead the Maiden across the evening sky, with her bright star, Spica, and brighter Saturn, signaling her presence. The Moon will join the star and planet for a lively display on the 16th-17th. All the other planets will be off on other business, but for extra variety you might look at Leo again, and turn the mighty Lion into a mouse. Consider the triangular hindquarters as instead the pointed face of an eastward facing rodent; then the backward question mark becomes the mouse's hunched body with its slender tail curved upward. Either way, the usually modest Lyrid meteor shower is due the night of the 21st-22nd. The Moon is new at 9a32 the 3rd, and full at 8p44 the 17th.

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Birdathon

Clyde Ferguson



It's time for our annual major fund-raising event, the NFHAS Birdathon. Last year we raised \$2,101.80, not bad for a depression year. This year's event will be held on April 30-May 1. If you love the outdoors, spring weather and enjoy nature, join us in our quest to count as many bird species as possible in one 24-hour period. Funds raised by the event year will again be used to help with several local projects in Manhattan. A portion of the funds will go towards the Northeast Community Park (Northview), the butterfly garden at Sojourner Truth Park, and educational activities at Michel-Ross Preserve. In the past, we (you, our sponsors) have donated Birdathon funds to the Washington Marlatt Park, the Rowe Sanctuary on the Platte River in Nebraska, and our El Salvador sister chapter. Many of our ongoing projects and activities, such as wildlife preservation, publication of the Prairie Falcon, and bringing in special speakers for our monthly program meeting are also partly funded with Birdathon funds.

HOW DO YOU DO IT?

It's simple. Collect pledges from your friends, contacts, or enemies to pay so much for each bird species that you count within the 24-hour period of April 30-May 1. The pledges do not have to be large; dimes, quarters and dollars add up quickly when many participate. Encourage your sponsors to pledge 15 or 25 cents per species spotted and you'll be surprised how much money you can raise with five or ten sponsors. If your sponsors want to pledge a set amount, that works great also.

We encourage you to make this a family outing. Go out and bird for 24 hours beginning sometime on April 30th. It's OK, for example, to bird from 10:00 a.m. on April 30th until 10:00 a.m. on May 1st. Report your findings to your sponsor and collect your pledges (often the difficult part). Send the money, names and addresses to Clyde Ferguson, 2140 College Hts. Rd., Manhattan, KS 66502. You just might surprise yourself with how many species you can identify. If you do not want to go out alone, or don't feel you can ID birds well enough, call Clyde and he will put you with a group.

If you cannot join in the fun of going out yourself, you can still collect names and pledges and one of the members who will be going out can be your "designated counter." We call this a super-sponsor (not that any of our sponsors aren't super in our eyes). If you have a friend that is going out to count, ask him or her to be your eyes.

If you do not know anyone going out, contact **Clyde Ferguson (539-4856)**, or any **NFHAS board member** (see the back page of your newsletter for contact information), or just send a note to:

Birdathon NFHAS,
PO Box 1932,
Manhattan KS 66505,

and we will find someone to count for you. We'll provide a list of the species counted and you can collect the pledges based on that list. On average, we see between 90 and 110 species on a good trip.

Don't forget you can be a sponsor yourself. Make your pledge to a friend or relative who is going to be a counter or super-sponsor. If none of our counters or super-sponsors contacts you, send a note or this form with your pledge and we will add you to our list of sponsors. If you prefer, send a lump sum donation c/o of the Birdathon to the address above. We're easy, we accept donations in almost any form.

Those donating \$15 or more may receive a one year's subscription of the Prairie Falcon (if requested on the form). Our normal subscription price is \$15 and the purpose of the Birdathon is to raise additional funds. Your donations and the donations of your sponsors are a tax deductible contribution. Please join us if you can and if you can't, please help us support the preservation of nature.

Clyde Ferguson, Birdathon Chair

Take note

Alsop Property Update

The design stage of the Alsop Bird Sanctuary is underway. Duane Kerr, our member plant specialist; Tom Morgan, our member tree enthusiast; Jim Koelliker, our member engineer; and I met to brainstorm our ideas. Then we met with Colin Noble and his partner, Bridget McComb, who manage the hotel. Bridget stated that she does the gardening for the hotel and she shares our respect for using native plants (meaning to the eastern part of the U.S.) for the project. Mr. Noble has committed to maintaining the property as it will be viewed by the casual viewer as an extension of his own property. He is allowing Northern Flint Hills Audubon to use the hotel's water supply which saves our chapter a bunch. However, should we need to hook up in the future all utilities are available at this location.

Another development has occurred. The city plans to make a left hand turn lane at the corner of 17th St. and Anderson Ave., and is taking a part of our property. The city does not know when they will be able to start the construction project. The earliest would be fall of 2011, or perhaps next year. Carla Bishop has generously offered to plant day lilies as ground cover until our plan is more developed. The good news is that the repair of the sidewalk would have been the NFHAS's responsibility, but since the city is going to tear it out, they will be putting in a new one at no charge to us. Further negotiations in that regard are pending the city's official notification.

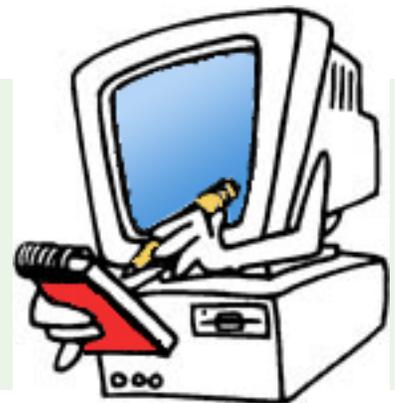
The money for this project is from a gift Inez Alsop willed to NFHAS years ago. As soon as we have a drawing of the design for the sanctuary we will let the membership know where it will be available for review.

President, Patricia Yeager



Start thinking **NOW** about being on the NFHAS board. We meet once a month. Planning for the new year is at the **JUNE** meeting. So if you have ideas **BRING THEM** to the June meeting or contact a board member.

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@wildblue.net





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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. Website is 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, 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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