

May 10, 2014

## International Migratory Bird Count

The spring International Migratory Bird Day count will be held on Saturday, May 10. There are 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 [jf3campbell@att.net](mailto:jf3campbell@att.net).

The expectation is that you identify and count all birds heard or seen in your assigned area, and provide a list to me with some trip information. I will then compile the information for the county, and submit the list to eBird.org. This is a great excuse to spend the day birding, and hopefully it will feel like spring by then, so please consider joining us.

*Jim Campbell*

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



## prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 42, No. 9 ~May 2014

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### Upcoming Events

**May 5 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.**  
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

**May 10 - Spring Migratory Bird  
Count**  
See ABOVE

**Jun 2 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.**

**Jun 18 - SAVE THE DATE**  
**Joel Greenberg**  
**Presentation**  
**Book signing 7 p.m.**



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Who killed Cock Robin?  
I, said the sparrow,  
with my bow and  
arrow...

This folk song/nursery rhyme, centuries old, was still of common knowledge when I was a child, particularly the beginning three lines. And as a child I took the whole story straightforwardly as being about an affair among creatures in the woods. Adults, some of them, speculated whether “Robin” referred to a character in Norse mythology, or to one of the notables in English history, from William the Red (William II, killed by an arrow, perhaps by his brother), to the mercurial Robert (Robin) Walpole, to Robin Hood.

The mystery of it all came back to mind reading a Reuters report on the unsolved reasons for the disappearance of the huge animals that roamed the Earth through the Ice Ages of 50,000 to 10,000 years ago: the woolly mammoths, rhinos and bison much larger than the current species. Some researchers in Denmark, said the report, were overturning the theory that the spear was mightier than the tusk or horn, that humans of the period had hunted their prey to extinction.

Instead, the new research proposed that the glaciers were bordered by beautiful fields of flowering forbs. But as the ice retreated heavier rainfall allowed less nutritious grasses and shrubs to crowd out the sageworts, mums, yarrow, and asters, so that gradually the big beasts starved out; as to the humans: not guilty.

Then an article in Science News quoted others saying “hold on.” The big drop-off in forbs didn’t happen till 5000 years ago, and that was 5000 years after the mammoths, the last of the giant grazers, had disappeared. The fossilized guts and feces analyzed, containing 63% forbs to 27% grasses, came from 12,000 years ago, and from just four mammoths, two rhinos, a bison and a horse. Who knew what momentary conditions might have been responsible for the contents of those last meals.

Also, there’s the possibility of a vicious cycle being involved: as the trappings of heavy feet declined, grasses could have had an increasingly better chance against the forbs. All of which is water long over the dam, but understanding how/why the big guys went broke then, could provide some useful information for today.

Too bad the eye-witness stars cannot be called down to testify. On the other hand, eye-witness testimony in general does not have a stellar reputation.

How about prognostication? In the wake of December’s comet-that-didn’t, we have now the possibility of another comet-related extravaganza. This comet is called 209P/LINEAR –no human name attached because, as StarDate informs, it was discovered by an automated search telescope. It orbits the Sun once every five years, now and then leaving its debris in the orbits of Earth and Jupiter. Such lingering dust becomes meteors as our atmosphere whirls into it, so hopes this time are for hundreds per minute scattered about the sky through the wee hours of May 24<sup>th</sup>, with a waning crescent Moon providing only minor interference. The comet itself will pass about five million miles away on the 29<sup>th</sup>, possibly bright enough for the unaided eye at some time.

Meanwhile Saturn will be making its brightest appearance since 2005, rings in full view for telescopes. It will be the yellowish attraction in the eastern sky at sunset on the 10<sup>th</sup>, beginning an all-night passage, while Mars dallies with the Moon. Saturn shifts from below to above the Moon and nearby Mars the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>, and again close above the Moon the 14<sup>th</sup>.

Jupiter, setting brightly but early, partners with the Moon the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>, both above Procyon, on the 4<sup>th</sup>, and to the left of Mercury as they do it again the 30<sup>th</sup>. Mercury might also be seen setting left of El Nath, a far tip of Taurus’ horns, on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Venus and the Moon are neighbors in the dawn of the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>. Moon full the 14<sup>th</sup> at 2p16, new the 28<sup>th</sup> at 1p40.

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# Spring Break on the Outer Banks

Dru Clarke



"Audubon has cost us millions... and that bird isn't even native to here!" So started a heated, essentially one-sided conversation with a native OBXer – OBX short for Outer Banks (of North Carolina) – who had a very large ax to grind, and, for some reason, selected me to use as his sharpening stone. That bird was the piping plover, a sweet miniature resembling the Killdeer, whose habitat happens to be sandy beaches.

My son and I hadn't taken a trip together since he graduated from high school and he had a few days to spare to escort me from Portsmouth, Virginia, to Nags Head and Hatteras, towns on the barrier islands on North Carolina's coast. It was chilly, windy and drizzling most of the first day, so we spent most of our time in the Graveyard of the Atlantic museum and in some restaurants, an Italian one named Rocco's (great thin crust pizza), and another that evening that lured us in with a SEAFOOD sign emblazoned on its roof. "Dirt" – a nickname for the manager – greeted us with menus and told us the crab cakes were the best on the OBX (which, I discovered, was a gross exaggeration). I had a Marine Biological Laboratory hoodie on, and that may have stimulated his engaging talk about how the government was taking fishermen's homes and worldly possessions for just catching (accidentally) a turtle in their nets: I must have looked skeptical – I may have rolled my eyes – so he embroidered this assertion with a word picture of "feds" coming alongside a fishing boat, taking pictures (of the netted turtle), then confiscating all of the gear on the spot. I'd be angry too, if this were true, and if I hadn't bashed in its head or shot it, I could see how unfair this action was. Fishermen were upset that with the protection of the turtle, populations have escalated and they have moved into the bays, opportunistically feasting on the baited lines and pots, stealing what amounted to the fishers' livelihoods. A thought: If the turtle populations are recovered, why couldn't some be harvested? (The turtle or terrapin soup at Bookbinder's in Philadelphia was delicious!)

The talk moved on to offshore fishing and what was running (the Bluefin tuna were biting like crazy): weren't billfish, like marlin, and the big tuna almost gone?

"Nah, but I don't like Bluefin – give me Yellowfin any day – really tasty," Dirt said. (Bluefin are prime for sashimi, and the big ones are worth a small fortune.) Unconvinced, but willing to listen, Dan and I ate. His scallops were small but good. My crab cake seemed prepackaged and had no lump meat, a discovery that made me even more leery of Dirt's tales.

Brenda, our waitress, a native OBXer, had a brogue to her speech – a sort of Cockney English – and I wondered if she were a descendant of one of the Lost Colony's settlers who may have ended up on Croatoan (Croatan), present day Hatteras Island. She lit up when a short, stocky man with grizzled white hair and beard and twinkling eyes entered and established his alpha male status among the patrons. He gravitated to us – obvious outsiders – and regaled us with his life story – Vietnam Vet, Hawaiian coffee grower (and, I'll bet, assorted other plants), Florida entrepreneur, apparent body builder, and native OBXer come home. Charismatic and gifted with gab, he asked what I did. "Writer," I said. "Oh! And for whom?" he asked. "Audubon" (not saying that I merely write occasional essays for a chapter newsletter, not National).

Hence, the (almost) vitriolic launch into what economic loss Audubon had brought down on the islands by defending the piping plover, a shorebird that nests in the sand (a population nests inland as well and we have them periodically on the sand bars in the Kansas River, along with the least tern, another shorebird). Restrictions on beach access by dune buggies and other recreationists were put in place when it appeared that the plover populations were endangered: Audubon was instrumental in bringing this about, but it had more to do with an activist father whose son was almost run over by a speeding ATV that missed his little towhead by about a foot. Brent, our informant's name, told us that when storms used to wash over the islands, folks would roll up the carpets and pull plugs out of the floor, allowing



*Photo by Dave Rintoul*

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# Inducing a Modesty

Dru Clarke

The Prairie Studies Initiative, KSU's effort to bring together "disciplines in the arts and sciences to explore cultural and ecological dimensions of the prairie, understand challenges to sustaining grassland ecosystems, and envision the future of these important landscapes," kicked off with two separate screenings of "Great Plains: America's Lingering Wild": the first night featured "Water," the second, "Land."

It seemed, initially, that all in attendance were of one mind: that the Great Plains, as portrayed by Nebraska native photographer Michael Forsberg, was critically endangered and worth saving, at least what is left of it. So the film was one of advocacy, admittedly and obviously, that showcased "beauty" – aesthetically pleasing and stirring portraits of rolling prairie with its complement of meandering streams and rivers and distinct wetlands, the playas of the Llano Estacado and the potholes of the Dakotas – juxtaposed with scenes of desolation, drought, and death, induced, mainly, through human misadventures and misguided practices. Strong and persistent advocates, from ranchers to caretakers of conservation interest groups, presented moving testimonials for the psychological and emotional as well as the environmental value of this vast landscape.

Yet, on the second night, there was a disturbing note of dissonance, subtle yet jarring in its implications that what remains *could be* replaced with a synthesis of human-selected plants, most certainly perennial in patterns of growth, that could be harvested for *human use*, with, of course, some milkweeds tossed in, to help the declining numbers of monarch butterflies. !!! Oh, how magnanimous of us to single out one species to assist! Yes, and what of the rest of "wildness?" Or "wilderness" itself?

It is certain that there remain few, if any, true pieces of wilderness on this Earth as even the most remote, seemingly blank places on a map probably have a remnant trail or structure, albeit in an inconspicuous, easily overlooked state. Yet, who has not felt, when venturing into a place where no one human has permanent residence, a tingling of the spine and a nervous wariness that piques all of our senses and forces us to become more primal in our approach to what lies ahead, under that tangle of

branches or beyond that limestone outcrop? Therein lies our remnant of "wildness," in perhaps an urge to climb up on a low hanging mossy limb or perch on the edge of a crumbling precipice, or dip bare feet into a cold-running creek and feel the biofilm of slime on the smooth stones.

Children seek out risk and engage in acts that test their abilities and nerve. With fewer chances to experience the outdoors – through overblown fears that they will be kidnapped or molested, or, heaven forbid, get dirty through play – they find an ersatz substitute through electronic games and toys that tether them to the insides of their homes. Close to handy snacks and the fridge they grow more and more pudgy and disengaged from the larger world. How are they to make it their own and embrace it and care for it if they don't experience it?

While subbing for physical education, a kindergarten class, the last of the day seemed wired. I suggested an outdoor exploration and gave them a few ground rules: stay in pairs or trios, find some object they had a question about, walk, and use their "six inch" voices (so as not to frighten any wildlife). Evelyn, who had been reclusive and sullen, pulled me to a vine that snaked up a tree; all gathered around and "discovered" poison ivy in one of its most remarkable attributes, the ability to climb. She became my "Dora the explorer" of the day! Now, when Evelyn sees me in the school building, she runs up to me and hugs me, remembering volubly that one day we spent outside. How simple a decision it was for me, to exchange the varnished wooden floor of the gym for the wild wood that stood, alive and unvarnished, outside.

How can we "replace" what is wild when we haven't even asked the right questions? Tinkering, we know, reminded by Aldo Leopold, requires that when we disassemble something that we save all the parts so that we might reassemble it. We are just beginning to understand the role of the subsoil and the myriad of living things that inhabit it: Michael Pollan urges us to respect and care for the soil and our plants (lest we disturb or destroy a fine balance there). So arrogant, it seems, that we tinker with the land and its vegetation with regard only for what it can do for us rather than what it does for the whole of life.

(continued top of page 5)

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Do we really think, much less know, we are the be all and end all of evolution and life on Earth? That we are the only species that really matters? That we can cast aside what does not apparently benefit us directly and expect to live well and be at ease with ourselves?

My husband found a possum entangled in baling twine in the barn one morning when he was doing chores. This animal harbors the disease that afflicted one of our mares, turning her into a timid and needy horse that required extraordinary care for the rest of her life. Instead of caving the possum's head in with a shovel, he patiently snipped the twine from her body and she scurried away to live out her life. Possums have been on Earth about 50 million years, twenty times longer than hominids: through one human's charity, this one may give rise to a line that extends far into the future. Or be the next meal for the bobcat that left claw-sharpened shreds on a cedar in the draw. What matters is that its life was minimally interfered with: it induced a modesty that we could all benefit from.

Aldo Leopold used to kill wolves, but one day when he saw the green light dying in the she wolf's eyes, he realized that its prey, the deer, would pull down the mountain by over-browsing the vegetation that kept its soil in place. His epiphany answered one question: "What are the implications of my action?"

My hope lies in the joy of young Evelyn in discovering even the odd and unknown (and not particularly attractive), and sometimes dangerous, aspects of nature, but may be missing in the older boy who ground out with his boot heel the musically repetitive cricket that was "annoying" him. As I scraped its now silent smear off the floor I wondered about how reckless more powerful people with status, prestige and "higher education" credentials might be without having the modesty to recognize and save all the parts, at least until the right questions have been answered.

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## Spring Break on the Outer Banks

*(continued from page 3)*

the sea to come in; then when the storm passed, would let the water drain out, put the plugs back and roll the carpets out on the floors again. He was correct about some of the higher dunes being manmade.

In the 1930s the WPA built up some of the largest dunes in an attempt to stabilize the island, but it is also true that there had always been dunes and vegetation on the barrier islands (Lost Colony's leader John White's 1587 paintings show these clearly). And, historic range maps of the distribution of the piping plover show it on the coast from New England to Florida. That includes the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

Our talk ended surprisingly amicably and Brent gave me his email address so that I could forward to him anything I found out that would illuminate or refine our comments. When he told me his last name, I almost

fell over, as it is also the name of the woman who beachcombed Nags Head for fifty years, her finds stashed in a museum I had come 1500 miles to visit (it was closed due to illness of the custodian). It is also the name on streets and realty companies, grocery stores and restaurants: an old OBX family whose latest incarnation was this fireplug of a man.

As insular and opinionated as we found them to be, these folks were full of gritty character, struggling to maintain a way of life and eke out a living on their beloved banks. We found them engaging and a little bit sad and even more defensive and hoped they would come to some more comfortable equilibrium with outsiders, regulators, and those who had perspectives that differed markedly from theirs. If and when I return, I hope the OBXers – and the bird – are doing well.

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April, 2014

CORRECTION: In last month's article I referred to EPM as "EQUINE PROTOZOAL MENINGITIS." It should have been "EQUINE PROTOZOAL MYELOENCEPHALITIS."



# International Migratory Bird Count

May 10, 2014

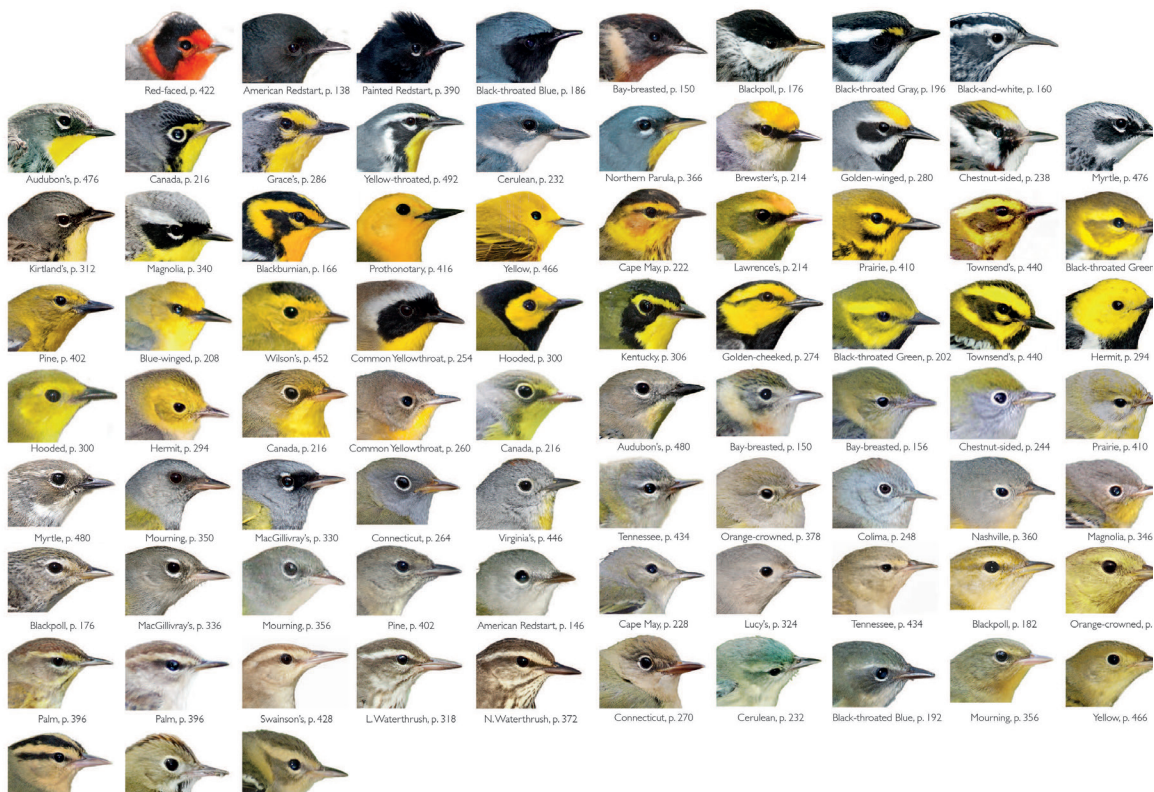
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## International Migratory Bird Count

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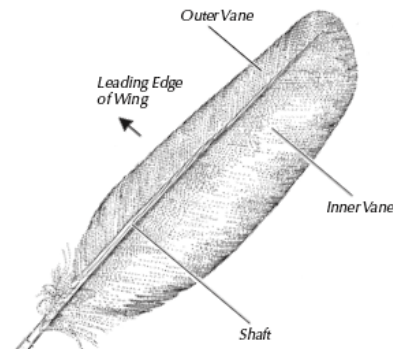
# Take Note



CORNELL LAB of  
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<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/onlineguide/>

BIRDCAM- <http://cams.allaboutbirds.org/>



All about feathers-

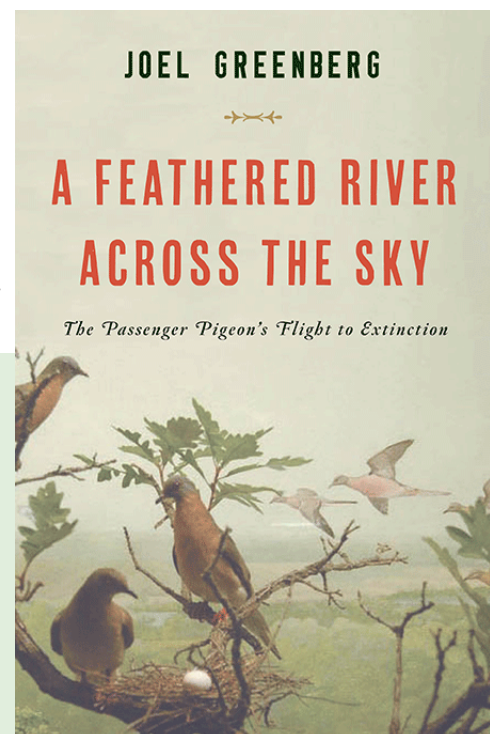
<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/studying/feathers/feathers>

## SAVE THE DATE!

SPECIAL EVENT: June 18th – 7p.m.

Author Joel Greenberg – Presentation & book signing.  
Sunset Zoo Rotunda – right next to parking lot

“Greenberg pulls together a wealth of material from myriad sources to describe the life and death of this species, describing the majesty of millions flying overhead for hours as well as the horror of tens of thousands of birds being slaughtered while they nested. He also examines the larger lessons to be learned from such an ecological catastrophe—brought on by commercial exploitation and deforestation, among other causes—in this “planet’s sixth great episode of mass extinctions.” Greenberg has crafted a fascinating story.”





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Edited by Cindy Jeffrey, 15850 Galilee Rd., Olsburg, KS 66520. (cinraney@ksu.edu)  
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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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Contacts for Your Elected Representatives (anytime) Write, call or email: Governor Sam Brownback: 2nd Floor, State Capital Bldg., Topeka, KS 66612. KS Senator or Representative: State Capital Bldg., Topeka, KS 66612. Ph# (during session only) Senate - 785-296-7300. House - 785-296-7500. U.S. Senator Roberts <[Roberts@senate.gov](mailto:Roberts@senate.gov)> U.S. Senate, Washington DC 20510. Jerry Moran U.S. Capital Switchboard 202-224-3121.