



And I thought I was a
glutton over the Holidays?

Great Blue Heron with
steelhead, Lake Bennington,
Walla Walla, WA.

He did finally manage to get
it down!

*Photo taken by Jay Jeffrey while
on a bike ride around the lake.*

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

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Upcoming Events

Jan 7 - BIRD SEED PICKUP UFM 8-11:30 a.m.

Jan 7 - Eagle Days, Tuttle Creek Lake 9-12n

Jan 9 - Board Meeting 6:00 p.m.
Tom & MJ Morgan home

Jan 14 - Eagle Days, Milford Lake
Nature Center 9-5 p.m.

Feb 6 - Board Meeting 6:00 p.m.
Tom & MJ Morgan home

Feb 11 - FEEDER TOUR

Mar 5 - Board Meeting



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

No matter what day may be titled “New Year’s” it is an arbitrary milepost on the Earth’s roughly 585 million mile orbit, which it moves along at 66,500 miles per hour. So, even terrestrial stay-at-homes travel through a lot of space in a year’s time. It may seem a whizzing speed, but there’s another viewpoint. In answer to a reader’s question, *StarDate* did the math and responded that if the Earth’s orbit were scaled down to the 2.5 mile ring of an auto race track, an observer in the stands (I presume with some magnifying apparatus) would be able to watch a similarly scaled Earth streaking along at 18 inches per hour.

This reminded me of Gertrude Stein’s expression: “There is no there there.” This appeared in her 1937 book, *Everybody’s Autobiography*, and was a long backward look toward her changed home area of Oakland, California. By comparison, if one looks outward into space, what seems to emerge is that: “there’s a whole lot of there there.” So much that we use as measuring sticks, Astronomical Units (the mean distance from Earth to Sun, roughly 92,955,807.3 miles) and Light Years (the distance light, moving at approx. 186,282 miles per second, travels during one Earth year).

And some astronomers are devoted to looking out “There” for “exo-planets” each of whose relationship to their stars corresponds to that of the Earth-to-Sun. That is to say planets that exist in an area termed the “Goldilocks zone” where the porridge heated by their star would be neither too hot nor too cold for the existence of something we would recognize as “life.” The latest candidate I’ve read about (termed Kepler-22b, for the discovering

telescope) has the potential for the right temperature, but it’s 2 1/2 times the size of the Earth, and if it’s made of the same stuff—still a question—the gravity would be that much stronger. And we’re seeing it as it existed 600 years ago, the time required for light to bridge the gap between us. Anyone spying on Earth from Kepler-22b, unless they have control of something faster than light, is watching the Ming dynasty building their Forbidden City in China and the millions of bison grazing the plains around here. So unless someone solves that disconnect in intra-universe communication, that situation will be one of the few things that won’t change as we spin past our mileposts, wherever we put them.

At the same time our Moon and neighboring planets keep wandering. Jupiter will begin each night brightly high up where the small bent-line constellation of Aries the Ram meets the widespread twin fishes of Pisces. Hamal (Arabic for lamb, I’m told), at the bend of Ares will be Jupiter’s brightest neighbor. Brighter than Jupiter, but less enduring, Venus shines about 20 degrees up from western horizon at nightfall, and sinks from there. Mars, steadily brightening night-to-night in Leo, should be in the east at mid-evening, while Saturn, traveling in Virgo a little behind and below Leo, should show up there about an hour after midnight. Leo remains pretty clearly a backward question mark pulling a triangle, while Virgo still prefers being rather ill-defined.

By *The Old Farmer’s Almanac* the unmistakable Moon will be near Jupiter on the 2nd, Saturn on the 16th, Venus the 25th and 26th, and Jupiter again the 29th. Full the 9th at 1a30; new the 23rd at 1a39.

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Quest for Sweet Everlasting

Dru Clarke



On winter mornings, a warm kitchen, brimming with the sizzle of smoky bacon frying, the humid air fragrantly saturated with maple syrup as it oozes into the pique'd texture of a crisp waffle, is a creature comfort not many of us can resist. Imagine a wildflower whose fragrance is reminiscent of the sugar maple tree's sap and this memory of a sensory-satisfying breakfast and you will understand our recent quest for sweet everlasting.

No, we aren't seeking eternal life or heaven, but this plant – also known as fragrant cudweed, old-field balsam or fragrant everlasting– is well named for its subtle but persistent corymb of papery florets and surprising scent. I first found it quite accidentally when I crushed its stem with my boot and I was enveloped by a cloud of unmistakable sweetness, wrapped in the memory of my mother's batter-spattered apron as she fixed a winter's breakfast long, long ago.

My husband has recently caught the fever of locating this wildflower. Every Saturday, he and a loyal, convivial group meet on the prairie and walk long distances over rough ground, identifying significant and interesting plants (and other assorted phenomena), and he had 'fallen for' sweet everlasting, not just for its fragrance but for its sheer elusiveness.

After one long weekend walk, he and a friend drove clear to the Randolph-Olsburg region to locate just two stems. On this same day, the dogs and I walked down our woodland lane to an acre-sized parcel of ungrazed prairie and found, on the edge, five plants. So much for long, arduous walks.

From a distance, it can be confused with goldenrod or bush clover gone to seed, but sweet

everlasting's flowers are more like minutely carved ivory, somehow cleaner, more sculpted and less fuzzy.

Evidently, it is foraged first by herbivores, so I felt lucky that this piece of ground was fenced off from our horses. With smug satisfaction, I snapped off three stems and brought them back to my kitchen and placed them in a newly acquired blue Redwing vase (it needed something special to hold) which I put in a prominent place on the butcher block, a recycled bowling alley lane, we use as a table. When my husband strode in and *straight* by my find, I "ahemmed" loudly. "What?" Ahem, again. "WHERE did you find IT?" Much excitement,

admiration, and hugs ensued. You'd think I had found the Holy Grail. The vase was moved to a shelf next to his easy chair, for about an hour. He began to fill up, wheeze, and got a scratchy throat, so the sweet everlasting has been relegated to the guest bedroom upstairs.

We have not found the flower anywhere else on our land (we have 127 acres). The seeds had already been dispersed when I picked the three stems, so it should appear somewhere near

where I found it this year. While it will not make us immortal, it has been used by American Indians to treat coughs, colds, muscle cramps, and sore throats.

If I were a wild animal – a bird or a pack rat – I'd use it to line my nest and go to sleep with a whiff of its therapeutic aroma. As it is, now I climb the stairs to the guest room and take deep comforting memory-laden breaths.

© Dru Clarke Nov. 2011



TAKE NOTE

The 62 annual Manhattan Christmas Bird Census was conducted on Saturday Dec. 17, 2011.

Forty-nine field observers and 6 feeder-watchers found over 53,000 individual birds, representing 100 different species. Three additional species (Pileated Woodpecker, Wilson's Snipe, and Short-eared Owl) were seen during the three day period before and after the count, but not on the count day itself. The most abundant bird was Snow Goose, which accounted for about half of all birds counted that day. Rarities seen included 20 Blue-winged Teal, 1 Thayer's Gull, 1 Northern Goshawk, and both Loggerhead and Northern Shrikes (one of each species). One new species, American Pipit, was added to the count checklist, bringing the all-time total to 171 species seen over the years from 1949 to 2011. The lack of severe cold weather and/or snow prior to the count seemed to help some species to linger here past their usual departure date (e.g. American Pipit, Blue-winged Teal, Wood Duck, Redhead). Some species were more abundant than usual (e.g., Red-headed Woodpecker, Blue Jay), and others were conspicuous by their absence (e.g. we missed Brown-headed Cowbird, which had been seen on 76% of our previous counts). Other wish-list birds that were being reported around the state in recent weeks (Common Redpoll, Snowy Owl) also failed to appear on our count this year.

Dave Rintoul, Compiler

Save the Date 42nd Annual
Rivers & Wildlife Celebration
March 15-18, 2012

Gather with wildlife enthusiasts from around the world to celebrate the annual migration of 500,000 sandhill cranes and millions of waterfowl through the heart of the Central Flyway. The Rivers and Wildlife Celebration is Nebraska's crane festival and the nation's longest running wildlife festival. Check our website nebraskacranefestival.org often for updates, because the agenda is still shaping up. Here are a few highlights of what we have planned for the 2012 Celebration:

- Saturday night keynote address by award-winning wildlife photographer Michael Forsberg
- Saturday lunch keynote address by humorist and storyteller Al Batt
- Family-friendly "Wild Experience Room", with live raptor and snake shows, and a special show for kids of all ages from Al Batt
- A variety of field trips to choose from to see cranes, waterfowl, prairie chickens, and other birds and wildlife

REGISTRATION OPENS IN JANUARY

Any other questions about the Celebration? Email us or call 402-797-2301.

For crane viewing information, contact Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary, 308-468-5282 or rowesanctuary.org.

Looking for other things to do during your stay? Visit nebraskaflyway.com for help planning your visit to central Nebraska during spring migration.



SAVE THE DATE:

NFHAS: FEEDER TOUR Feb. 11th, 2012

CREATING YOUR LEGACY...

From One Generation for the Next

Protecting and nurturing— young children or young birds—are characteristics of many species. Protecting habitat for the future generations of all species is our responsibility.

Parents cannot do it by themselves, and neither can Audubon. Each requires a community of support.

You can create your legacy for conservation through an estate gift to Audubon, and become a member of Audubon's Grinnell Society.



Photos by Dave Rintoul

Thanks to dedicated members like you, Audubon has been protecting birds, other wildlife and their habitats for more than a century – through science, education and advocacy.

Please invest in our conservation work for future generations by including a bequest to Audubon.

Suggested Language: *I bequeath _____% of my residuary estate (or \$_____)* to the National Audubon Society, Inc., a not-for-profit environmental conservation organization, with its principal offices located at 225 Varick Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10014 for its ongoing programs in environmental conservation and education.

For more information, please contact: Jan Hesbon, Gift Planning, Audubon, 225 Varick Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10014, or call 212-979-3033.





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Edited by Cindy Jeffrey, 15850 Galilee Rd., Olsburg, KS 66520. (cinraney@ksu.edu)
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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, 66505-1932

RARE BIRD HOTLINE: For information on Kansas Birds, subscribe to the Kansas Bird Listserv. Send this message <subscribe KSBIRD-L> to <list_serve@ksu.edu> and join in the discussions.

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