

APRIL SPRING MIGRATION!

OUR 38th BIRDATHON! SEE PAGES 6-7



Jim Koelliker



Photos by Dave Rintoul



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

- Apr. 4 - Board meeting - 5:30 Public Library
- Apr. 8 - Sat. morning birding
8:00 am Depart from Sojourner Truth Park
- Apr. 22-23 - Birdathon**
Apr. 29th deadline for reporting species
- May 2 - Board meeting - 5:30 Public Library
- May 13 - Sat. morning birding
8:00 am Depart from Sojourner Truth Park



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

We don't get to mention Mercury very much through the year, for its appearances are so close to the horizon, but The Old Farmer's Almanac tells that this April it will be a brighter and rise higher than usual, albeit gradually losing its brightness as it rises. Still bright and higher on the evening of the 11th it will nonetheless have to compete for attention from below a much brighter Venus. Afterwards it will have some close encounters with a crescent Moon, which will be below Mercury the 20th, between Mercury and Venus the 21st, then pass above Venus by the 23rd; then this guide-on will locate Mercury between Venus and Mars the 24th, and closer to Mars the 25th.

Also as the month grow old, Jupiter will be noticeably getting closer to Venus's lower left in the dawn lights, and the two will appear the thickness of a pencil lead apart on the 30th (and on May 1st). The Lyrid meteor shower is due the 21st, though a waning gibbous Moon will make viewing hindered by an illuminated sky.

But there are other items to look for. During dawns of the 4th and 5th, Saturn and Mars will be vertically close, above and to the right of Venus. The Moon visits Taurus' red eye, Aldebaran the 5th. and El Nath, the tip of one of the Bull's horns, the 6th. Then it's to the left of the Gemini Twins the 9th. Leo's Regulus gets favored the 11th-12th, Virgo's Spica the 15th-16th, next above Scorpius's Antares at the first light of the 19th. Starting the 24th it moves past Saturn and Mars to be in the picture when Venus and Jupiter almost touch the 27th. It will be new the 1st at 1a24 and full the 18th at 1p55.

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By some authority April has been designated **The Poetry Month**, and this month's article will go along with that. So, too, does the annual Enid Stover Poetry Fest, which is scheduled this year for April 29th, open to all who would participate. For further info contact Nancy Stover at 785.341.7759. Meanwhile here are a few poems to muse over. In keeping with this newsletter's bird connection, they are of birds, and because of space some are but partially related.

Peter Zachary Cohen

The Cheery Chewink (chickadee) Amos Russell Wells (1st two stanzas)

A worker's challenge bold and free,
The alto call of industry...
He shouts his slogan clear and strong,

And glorifies his work with song.
Deep in the underbrush is heard
The scratching of the busy bird;
Behold, with energetic heaves,
Both feet at once, he flings the leaves.

The Humming-Bird (first stanza) Jones Very

Like thoughts that flit across the mind,
Leaving no lasting trace behind,
The humming-bird darts to and fro,
Comes, vanishes before we know.

The Duck Ogden Nash

Behold the duck.
It does not cluck.
A cluck it lacks.
It quacks.

It is specially fond
Of a puddle or pond.
When it dines or sups,
It bottoms ups.

The Foolish Flamingo Brian Coppola

The foolish flamingo she looked in the glass.
Ah, foolish flamingo!
She fell in love with herself, alas!
Ah, foolish flamingo!
Her beaux all exclaimed as they left in a huff,
"The bird has one lover and one is enough!"
Ah, foolish flamingo!

A Vision of Summer James Whitcomb Riley

The catbird piped in the hazel,
And the harsh kingfisher screamed,
And the crane, in amber and oozy swirls,
Dozed in the reeds and dreamed.

Here's your Sign (Fauna on the Move) Dru Clarke



Eastern spotted skunk, flying squirrels, red shouldered hawk, armadillos, black bears. Here in Kansas? Not really surprising if one considers the changing climate conditions and the increase in particular ecoregions, namely the eastern mixed deciduous forest. Excepting the armadillo, all the others are associated with trees and thick woody growth, especially those expanses of woodland following streams, farm hedgerows, and ecotones where grassland meets woodland.

The eastern spotted skunk, a shy and elusive creature, marked by broken stripes, is active nocturnally so is seldom seen by humans. An insectivore, it is a welcome addition to the fauna that thrive where we have planted crops and achieved soil (and moisture) conservation by establishing shelter belts or hedgerows which they use for cover. They are the agriculturist's friend for their role in foraging for the bugs that can attack crops. Removing these long established protective bands of trees in order to gain a few more acres to plant destroys the skunk's home: they have no place to retreat then, so they move on or die. Additionally, pesticides used to control the insects they feed on have created a dietary desert: they are starving to death. A visually striking mustelid (the weasel family), the eastern spotted skunk is a population in decline nationally, but is hanging on in ecologically welcoming niches in eastern and some other spots in Kansas.

The southern flying squirrel – a cute and cuddly-looking, big-eyed kewpie doll member of the Sciuridae, the squirrel family of rodents – is another mammal seldom seen as it too is nocturnal. It is also associated with hardwood forests, those rich and deep woodlands found mostly in eastern Kansas, but, surprisingly, in our treed yards. It has a furred membrane (the patagium) that stretches from its forelimbs to hindlimbs that is spread when it attempts to glide from one tree or branch to another. It can glide from 150 feet to 500 feet! (some species have additional membranes from the neck to wrist and from the hindlimb to the tail.) Scientists have recently discovered that it glows hot pink under ultraviolet light! As our local fox (and more eastern grey) squirrels are diurnal and easily observed, the flying squirrel's habits have been difficult to reveal themselves due to their nightly activity. But as deciduous forests expand western into the plains area, stimulated by increasing warmer and wetter conditions, and maybe even the activity of blue jays and other species of squirrels who cache and occasionally forget the acorns of oaks, we can expect their population to expand as well. Little is known about how it intersects with other species, and today it is protected as a species in need of conservation (a SINC species).

The red-shouldered hawk is an arresting looking raptor. With its burnt sienna shoulders, black and white banded tail and wings, and washed-out rusty breast, it is a breathtaking bird of woodland and stream habitat. We have recently 'caught' one on a trail camera set up near an intermittent stream that runs through our south woods. Others have been seen flying

through the trees and hanging about the woodlot near our house. A friend down the road has one that is often found in her lilac bushes under which cottontails she feeds like to hide. We had not seen them until recent years and speculate that undisturbed spreading tree habitat is offering up a good living for them. We have heard them call, and blue jays do an alarmingly accurate imitation of it, so we have to pay close attention to distinguish the real from the imitator. It may be competing with our more often seen Cooper's and sharp-shinned hawks who have found a niche near our bird feeders. I feel gifted when I see this bird and welcome its arrival.

About a decade ago, after a heavy snowfall, I went for a walk on our road and found foot long plus tracks (with claw marks) trekking south. A little to the side of and behind the larger tracks were smaller ones, as if a smaller version of the bigger animal was keeping up. I checked an animal track guide and found that they were black bear tracks. A friend who lives on land adjacent to the north shore of the Kansas River found, around the same time, the same size tracks in his garden and in a deer feeding station. Wildlife folks at the local university were not convinced at the time, but black bears have been documented recently in the state. This may have been a mother and cub who had been hibernating in between stored round bales that were disturbed by a rancher feeding his livestock. Bears love woods (you know that is where they poop, right?) and we have a growing region of welcoming woods, especially in the eastern part of the state. Missouri and Arkansas have stable populations and wildlife doesn't pay attention to borders, especially if good habitat is nearby.

Armadillos are a different story. We've seen dead ones on route 24, east of Manhattan. This road runs parallel to the Kansas River, about a mile north of it. Armadillos can submerge for many minutes – half an hour I've read – and can walk over a river bottom. Why not navigate the Kansas River? One usually associates the armored tanks with the arid regions of our southern plains, but they are here. Why have they decided to come? The 'push' and 'pull' of migration explains human movement: resources and the opportunity to exploit them are the 'pull', the draw, from places where both have been depleted, the 'push'. It's economic, stupid. Or, maybe it's an adventure. That might motivate you and me, but not so much our brethren trying to eke out an existence, to survive under changing conditions.

I won't even mention the jaguarundi I saw. They aren't 'supposed' to be here either. But our fauna is changing, as is our climate. The signs are everywhere. Do we welcome them, or not? As far as I'm concerned, the mat is out and my arms are open.

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(Photos on page 5)

The Poetry Month continued

The Eagle Alfred, Lord Tennyson

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.
The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

When the geese Come Flying North by Douglas Malloch

Their faint "honk-honk" announces them,
The geese when they come flying north;
Above the far horizon's hem
From out the south they issue forth.
They weave their figures in the sky.
They write their name upon its dome.
And, o'er and o'er, we hear them cry
Their cry of gladness and of home.
Now lakes shall loose their icy hold
Upon the banks, and crocus blooms.
The sun shall warm the river's cold
And pierce the Winter's armored gloom;
The vines upon the oaken tree
Shall shake their wavy tresses forth,
The grass shall wake, the rill go free—
For, see! The geese are flying north!

Dust of Snow Robert Frost

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.

A Bird Came Down the Walk Emily Dickinson

A Bird came down the Walk—
He did not know I saw—
He bit an Angleworm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,
And then he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass—
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass—

The Bluebird John B. Tabb

When God had made a host of them
One little flower still lacked a stem
To hold its blossom blue;
So into it He breathed a song,
And suddenly, with petals strong
As wings, away it flew.

The Pelican Dixon Lanier Merritt

"A wonderful bird is the Pelican.
His beak can hold more than his belly can.
He can hold in his beak
enough food for a week
But I'll be darned if I know how the hellican?"

Cardinals John Jackson

She is brown and rose, like pears in October;
He is red as any ribbon on a wreath.
She provides, is practical and sober;
He is ceremony without belief.
Where she stays she vanishes, so when she sings
It comes at once from nowhere and all sides.
He is the source and center of every thing
(The one bird all of us can recognize).

Cygnus the Swan (A metaphorical bird)

Peter Zachary Cohen

Aiming down the Milky Way,
wings out spread in flight,
it can be clearly seen that Cygnus splits the night.
'ween stars to the left and right,
he's steady on his aim
Amid the mist of the Milky Way his stars are all
aflake.
Denebs burning at his tail, Albireo at his beak;
Sadr joins wings to breast, one more spark amid the
streak

The Sky's great Path, the Stars' great Swan
together travel on and on;
Yielding west when autumn's nigh

2023 Peter Zachary Cohen

Blue Bird Trails & Boxes

We have a new volunteer!

Monty R Wedel, AICP, retired Planning & Development Director at Riley County, KS has volunteered to monitor and care for the Blue Bird Boxes at Stagg Hill Golf Course! (This was done for years by Hoogy Hogheem and Kevin Fay.) Monty's golfing partner, Bill Baack helped him inventory and put up new boxes in cooperation with Justin Chandler, Stagg Hill Superintendent.

Monty also built several new bluebird houses for us.

WELCOME and THANK YOU MONTY!

AND our other Bluebox trail monitor, **Greg Wurst**, has been faithfully monitoring the Bluebird boxes at Carnahan Creek Park. (Patricia and Kent Yeager also check on them occasionally)

THANKS TO YOU ALL!



Here's your Sign

Photos by, Dru Clarke



2023 Annual Birdathon

24 hour birding - April 22nd or 23rd

By Jim Koelliker

Way back in 1985, Cecil Best and Clyde Ferguson on a whim during a late April poor fishing outing hatched a plan: to search for as many bird species in a 24-hour period and then send it to their friends to urge them to donate an amount for each species to the North Flint Hills Audubon Society. It worked!

Fast forward to 2023 and I will be managing the 38th annual Birdathon. Cecil pulled me in and I became friends with Clyde and ever since about 1990 I have been hooked in and now it's an annual must for me. Thankfully, many others have joined with me over the years. A group of birders will join me on my chase around to different habitat areas. But you, as just one birder, can go out and count the number of species you see within a 24-hour period of your choice sometime during April 22nd and 23rd this year.

Yes, an important part of the process is to raise donations for the Chapter, so I hope you would send me your list of species you found along with contact information for your friends, family and anyone who you think would like to be a sponsor. I will send them our report so we can ask them to contribute to NFHAS, a certain amount for each species we see this year. From a dime to quarter or more, you would be surprised how much we can raise. Last year we raised nearly \$4,000!

I will include the additional species that you found in the written report of those my group found and then send that report to your contacts and ask them for their contribution with our report. Some sponsors just give a set amount. Those donating \$20 or more may receive a year's subscription to the Prairie Falcon if requested.

Please send the name and address of each potential sponsor to Jim Koelliker, 3500 Mintons Lndg, Manhattan KS 66503. If you don't want to go out alone or don't think you are good enough to ID birds, contact Jim Koelliker (785-776- 4915, voice or text, koellik@sbcglobal.net) and I will help you find someone or a group to search with you. Also, you can contact a board member, or drop a note to NFHAS, PO Box 1932, Manhattan 66502 and we will find someone to count for you. On average we see between 90-110 species this time of year.

PS: Please report your list of species to Jim no later than April 29th to have them included in the master list. Our list will be included in a subsequent edition of the Prairie Falcon.

More information and sponsor form will be in the April Prairie Falcon and on our website nfhas.org.



Photos by Dave Rintoul



Northern Flint Hills
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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.

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WE NEED YOU! PLEASE consider joining our NFHAS Board.

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