



Last spring Patricia Yeager asked for a volunteer to watch over a new bluebird trail **Kevin Fay** built in Carnahan Creek Park. I was planning on retiring as Park Manager for the Tuttle Creek Corps of Engineers on May 30th and improving my birding skills was one of my goals in retirement. I answered the call.

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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

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

Nov 14 - Saturday Birding
Sojourner Truth Park 8 a.m.

Nov 25 - BIRDSEED SALE ORDER
DEADLINE

Dec 3 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

Dec 5 - BIRDSEED SALE PICKUP
UFM Parking Lot



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

This being turkey month I'm moved to recite a fresh memory. The small silo that houses our rural water district meter is sunken about 50 feet from the township road,

surrounded in July by tall grasses. From inattention a small copse of dogwoods had grown up around it, which I had eventually cut down, leaving wooden stalks about 16 inches high, which was a lot easier than trying to cut them level with the ground, and short stubs would've been unseen puncture traps for any vehicle that might have needed to be steered by.

To read the meter in July I stepped carefully among the stalks and knelt down beside the silo's manhole cover. As I pried up the heavy lid there was a sudden explosion beside me. There was an instant of startled uncertainty, until I saw the wild turkey swiftly leaving me with strong wing beats. I had to part only a few grasses to see her clutch of six eggs.

I likely would never have known she was there, in that nest hidden in the grasses and guarded by an array of pickets, if she had stayed still. Only when I raised that round metal cover, whose weathered surface might have made it look like a medieval warrior's shield, did she bolt. Why then? Why wasn't I attacked as an interloping predator? Would a coyote have been attacked, or a smaller skunk? Would it have been different if the chicks had been hatched, and not as easily replaced as the eggs?

Though tempted to various experiments I didn't return to the meter till August, to discover only a couple pieces of shell. Why? Did my near interruption cause her to abandon the nest? Did for real predators make off with the rest in spite of her? Perhaps they all hatched right after my moment and moved on successfully – it seems we've had since then enough strong winds to lift fragile almost weightless eggshell pieces out of the grass and away.

There being no answer to what transpired there, those dogwood stalks have now become a haunted forest.

November is going to be another of those months during which the transitory games played in the sky will favor the early risers. In the pre-dawn hours of the first week, the brightest planet, Venus, and second brightest Jupiter, and the currently pinpoint red of Mars, along with the Moon, will be displaying at once, visible in various positions from each other. The star Spica in Virgo will be to the lower left of the Moon the 9th. Saturn, currently an evening glow in the area of Scorpio, will disappear behind the Sun on the 29th.

Among the more regimented constellations, those of winter will begin sneaking up ahead of the season with Taurus the Bull beginning to rise in mid-month evenings, followed routinely by Orion, Gemini, the star Procyon in Canis Minor (the Little Dog) that provides rather a solo brightness under the long rectangle of the Gemini Twins, and then comes Canis Major with the sky's brightest star, Sirius. Lepus the Rabbit will appear in a six-star mid-leap below Orion, while Monoceros, the Unicorn, will be faintly glimmering between the two Dogs.

The Leonid meteor shower, not at its every 33 years best, but possibly active, should be at its current best the 17th.

Then sometime, depending on where you are, in the wee hours of the 25th the full Moon will briefly replace Taurus' small red eye with a great big white eye. This relatively common kind of upstaging is called an occultation, and they are something to see for their own sake, and such are useful for those who can measure how long it takes the Moon to obscure the star, and put those results with other information already on hand to verify or extend that knowledge, such as to star's size and distance.

Then something for evening viewers as the Moon rises with Taurus the 26th, next with Betelgeuse (Orion's orange shoulder) the 27th, and with Procyon the 28th. It's full at 4p44 the 25th after being new the 11th at 11a47.

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Found Treasure

Dru Clarke



The 6th grade kids stood on the high cutbank, well away from the edge, and looked expectantly at the meandering stream below. Another group was exploring the stream edge and seemed totally engaged in their task. I did my Socratic best to elicit responses to my probing questions, but I could tell that the group I was leading just wanted to get INTO the water. I wanted them to think about how the stream got to be shaped the way it was, why rubble was in certain places and what it did to the flowing water and what might live there. It was a warm and bright day, an enticing one to be outside, to be enjoying the air and light and what living things they nurtured. It was a day to walk slowly and look, really look, at everything, even things one would usually pass by.

An orb weaver spider had spun a web on the leg of a stand used to position a camera to photograph the stream bed: the white band of the zigzag stabilimentum sparked intense interest in most. No one really knows what its function is, but it is thought to be a deterrent to birds and other flying creatures to avoid the web. One fearful boy scooted to the back of the group, terrified of the resident arachnid. I understand this as an atavistic response in many, and tried to reassure him that it meant him no harm. He took a tentative step forward and seemed to (almost) believe me.

We discussed how times of heavy rains and times of drought affect streams and the life within, the age of this and other streams, and how the last glacier, when it melted, may have led to the birth of this creek. From below, a thick layer of rubble was visible in the cutbank about a dozen feet beneath the surface where we were standing, evidence of a mighty flow in the distant past, perhaps from the meltwater of that very glacier.

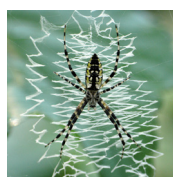
We moved down the path and around a wide, looping bend to another site where an oxbow had formed a decade ago. Along the way, I picked some prickly ash leaves for them to smell – it is a member of the citrus family and exudes a fragrance akin to sour oranges – and one boy said it smelled like Fruit Loops! (It is the plant upon which is found the larvae of the giant swallowtail butterfly.) Looking upstream, plants grew to the water's edge, and a gravel bar formed a teardrop-shaped island where water cress

grew along its edges. Water cress is not a native plant but was brought here by settlers who longed for some tangy bite to brighten their bland diet.

The stream had once meandered eastward and emerged at our feet, but a particularly torrential rain had carried debris to a point where the water sought to escape in a new direction. The old channel, cut off, became the oxbow. It was barely discernible behind the lush growth of shrubs and trees, but we could see the eroded slope of its old cutbank. The odd name “oxbow” comes from the wooden yoke shaped to fit under an ox's neck, across its shoulders, to which a harness was attached to pull heavily loaded wagons and implements. The Kansas River, seen from satellite images, has many of these oxbows and its channel today is far different from past beds. Eureka Lake, once a thriving resort and now the home of the Job Corps, was an oxbow of the Kansas River.

As we stood there, a white-tailed doe emerged from the brush on the east bank of the creek. She glanced in our direction and did not seem startled by the wide-eyed kids who lined the bank twenty feet away. An immediate silence fell over the group: 6th graders have never been so quiet. The doe began to browse on the tender leaves of the brush, and occasionally dipped her head to touch her sensitive nostrils to the water. We were mesmerized. Time seemed to stand still, just as we did. I whispered that we need to go as another group was heading our way, and reluctantly the kids backed off the bank and up the path, unable to take their eyes off the doe.

We stopped near the bridge across the creek and the kids gathered around, having found their voices again, eager to share their sighting of the doe with the others. The little boy who was afraid of the spider stood close in front of me and looked up into my face with his brown eyes shining and said passionately, “THAT was a treasure!” Indeed it was, and one he and the others will never forget.



© 2015 Dru Clarke

Carnahan Creek Park - Bluebird Trail

Greg Wurst

I discussed the duty with Patricia and Kevin during a Saturday morning birding session and was assured I could go at my own pace and that the birds were very resilient. I felt better.

I did not know what to expect on my first trip afield on April 25. I took a screwdriver and a camera.

Once I got them figured out I was pleased to see for the most part that the doors on Kevin's bluebird houses were fastened with golf tees. Ingenious, quick and eliminated the need for screwdrivers.

The first box was empty (as it was all summer). The second box had four hatchlings. Out came the camera. The third and fourth boxes were empty, and the fifth was not even there, just a metal fence post. When Pottawatomie County burned Carnahan Park last spring the brush had been higher around this nesting box and the fire got the birdhouse. It was miraculously replaced before my next visit.

The next box held four more hatchlings. The tenth bluebird box on the twelve-box trail held a mother bluebird on five eggs. Carrot-leaf lomatium or wild parsley stood out on the hillsides.

Two weeks later I gathered some golf tees, a pair of pliers to remove recalcitrant tees

and a prairie wildflower identification booklet. As I started checking the nests I was dive-bombed by birds protective their nests. Some of the nests had eggs of a different color which were determined to be tree swallows. The lomatium had given way to wild indigo, spiderwort and daisy fleabane. The thing I will remember most about this trip was the yellow-bellied racer (a plains snake) that I almost stepped on, which scared the bejeebers out of me. There were thirteen chicks and five houses showed nesting.

Three weeks later salsify and spider milkweed abounded. It was the most fruitful inspection of the summer. Only the first and last boxes showed no activity. I counted 32 swallow eggs, eight bluebird eggs and four big bluebird hatchlings.

By the middle of July only two boxes were being used. They contained twelve bluebird eggs. I cleaned nests out of those boxes not being used. On August 20th I cleaned the remaining nests out. The year was over.

I look forward to next spring already. I want to keep better records, look for patterns and understand the botanical calendar better. I hold no illusions about the importance of this project. I just know it is fun.

Greg Wurst

"Old World grasses, New World problems"

"The spread of the Old World bluestems has some of the Midwest's top grassland and conservation experts equally worried." "...robbing his cattle of nutritious grasses and leaving the meadowlarks, box turtles, bobwhite quail and other wildlife in the same native prairies without suitable habitat. The bad thing about (Old World bluestems) is that they release a chemical that is toxic to other plants. That means we could end up with prairies that are largely dominated by one species of plant that offers little to livestock and almost nothing to wildlife

Oct. 18th, Sunday edition of Wichita Eagle. Go to their website for this great article:

<http://www.kansas.com/sports/outdoors/article39664398.html>

Note: Old world bluestems are a group of grasses from the southeast Soviet Union, Turkey and surrounding areas that were introduced in the 1930s as 'improved' grasses. They are called bluestems, but they are not closely related to big bluestem and little bluestem.

Take Note

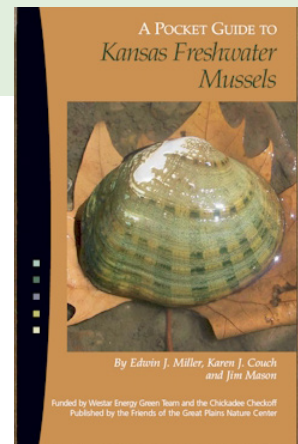


Thanks for a great (September) program about “pollinators” Carla! We just might have to have you do another one in the Spring!

Carla Bishop, used photos of some of her many Daylilies.

Thanks to Dru Clarke for a very enlightening presentation about Freshwater Mussels. There was a whole guncase full of shells, and a short video that showed how these amazing creatures reproduce.

Natural Fish Lure | Lampsilis Mussel and Bass
<https://youtu.be/IOYTBjOWHkU>





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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

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