



What's up? (Don't miss our April Program)

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 40, No. 7 ~ March 2012

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Upcoming Events

Mar 5 - Board Meeting 6:00 p.m.
Tom & MJ Morgan home

Mar 10 - Saturday morning birding 8 a.m.
meet at Sojourner Truth park

Apr 2 - Board Meeting 6:00 p.m.
Tom & MJ Morgan home

Apr 14 - Saturday morning birding 8 a.m.
meet at Sojourner Truth park

Apr TBA - "Galapagos Naturalist" program
Manhattan Public Library Auditorium
7:00 p.m.



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

There is no great (or small, for that matter) bicycle in the sky. Of the 88 constellations officially recognized by the International Astronomical Union

in 1930, most were visualized and named long before there were such devices. Apparently the first contraption to be called a “bicycle” didn’t appear till the 1870s, with the dangerously tall front wheel, directly pushed by the pedals, and a puppy-like trailing rear wheel. We call them “high-wheelers,” though they began as “penny-farthings” because the mismatched size of its two wheels vaguely resembled that of those two British coins, set on edge in a row.

By the 1880s there were the “safety bicycles,” with two equal wheels, a seat within leg-reach of the ground, driven by a chain arrangement to the rear wheels. We divide them now into “uprights” and “recumbents,” and generally this winter has been very accommodating to such devices. But I think the opportunities to go a-pedaling in this area, without sharing space with motor vehicles, is not as well-known as might be.

Some towns have local pathways open to bikes and hikers. Some reservoir areas have root-and-rock-decorated routes for the challenge-bent mountain bikers. I’m thinking of the longer trails, most of which are in existence because energetic people have taken advantage of the forward-thinking Rail-Banking legislation to obtain use of former railroad berms, gradually scraping off the ballast, repairing or rebuilding bridges, and laying down firm smoother surfaces.

A single website can provide links to numbers of them. Right now, except for two gaps, one can ride (by bike or horse) or hike on the Flint Hills Nature Trail the nearly 90 miles between Council Grove and Osawatimie (including a stretch of six miles without a road crossing and a bridge over US 75), with a connection at Ottawa on the Prairie Spirit trail 51 miles south to Iola. One can go south from

Topeka on the Landon Trail past Berryton, planned to eventually join the Flint Hills Trail near Pomona – a total of 38 miles then. There’s a trail heading out of Marysville into Nebraska to link up with a trail at Lincoln. Others are in progress in the McPherson and Wichita areas. Some are available to horses under saddle or in traces. The Flint Hills trail is planning to improve westward to Herington, covering then a total of 117 miles.

Putting them in has not been a walk in the park, and all I think would welcome all kinds of assistance. That website is www.kansascyclist.com/trails/RailTrails.html or contact: Kansas Rail-Trail Conservancy, PO Box 3863, Topeka, Kansas 66604-6863.

There is a kind of faintly star-marked trail in the sky in March. A little cluster of tiny stars a little west and south of Leo’s bright Regulus is the head of Hydra, the Sea Serpent. In the evening hours, one might trace its zigzag “body” southeast to reach the horizon beneath Corvus, the Crow, a rather noticeable group of stars resembling a baseball infield with coaches’ boxes off first and third base.

But the planets will be competing hard for attention with Mercury showing briefly in the west at sundown during the first week. Then all month Venus and Jupiter will dominate the western sky as the latter follows the former and passes her between the 11th and 12; they travel offstage by midnight. Meanwhile a sparkling Mars will start an all-night transit in the east at evening. Not at its most possible brightness, being at twice the distance away than it can be, but a notable russet companion to Leo. Saturn and Virgo’s Spica remain a steady two-some rising a little bit later.

The Moon makes a threesome with Mars and Regulus the 6th and 7th, and with Saturn and Spica the 9th and 10th. As a growing crescent it appears near the setting Jupiter and Venus on the 24th-26th. It’s full the 8th at 3a39, new the 22nd at 9a37. The equinox will be reached at 12a14 the 20th. The earliest spring, says *The Old Farmers’ Almanac*, in 116 years.

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Albatross



Front Page -
Immature Blue-footed Booby

My trip to the Galapagos

January found me and 11 bold travelers in the Galapagos Islands off the coast of Ecuador as participants in a K-State travel course. The Galapagos Islands offered a unique opportunity to directly learn about scientific issues and the dynamic process of the social construction of knowledge.

But on the side, I was, of course, spending my time enjoying the incredible bird life of the islands, fiddling with the camera, and trying my best to capture our feathered friends on film. Perhaps no other locale in the world sports such a variety of animals totally unafraid of humans.

From Darwin's early observations to Peter and Rosemary Grant's continuing research, the Galapagos Islands remain a wealth of opportunity to learn about our earth.

We are expecting a Galapagos National Park Certified Guide to visit Kansas in April. As he learns about Konza and grassland habitats, he has agreed to share his knowledge with us about the Islands. More details about presentations will be available later..

Joye Gordon

photos by Joye Gordon



NAZCA BOOBIES

On the Web

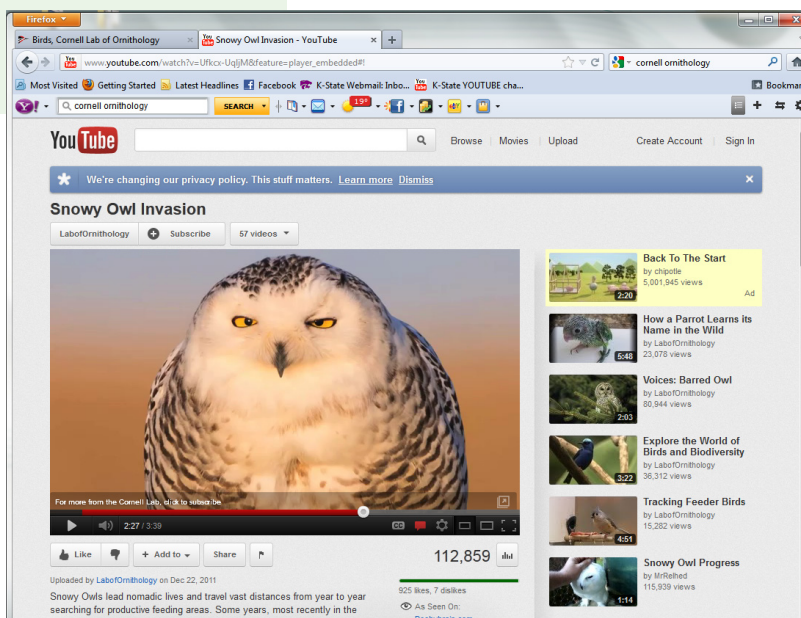
The Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Exploring and Conserving Nature

Great videos by Cornell Ornithology – on YouTube - especially good one on Snowy Owls coming south.

<http://www.youtube.com/user/LabofOrnithology?feature=watch>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ufkcx-UqljM&feature=player_embedded#



<http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/wildlife/guides/migration/sandhill.asp>

If you can't make it to Nebraska or Cheyenne Bottoms to see the Sandhill Cranes, try this website - where there are several videos, and information about these incredible birds.

Cranes are among the oldest living birds on the planet. Fossil records place Sandhill Cranes in Nebraska more than nine million years ago, long before there was a Platte River, which, by comparison, is only a youthful 10,000 years of age. The landscape then was savanna-like and its inhabitants were more like that of modern East Africa; varieties of rhinos, camels, and elephants long since extinct. Yet cranes survived and watched as American bison, pronghorn, and wapiti evolved on the prairies. Humans now dominate the landscape having replaced the bison with cattle and the prairie with corn and concrete. This startling transition occurred in less than 150 years, a mere blink of an eye in geologic time!



About Sandhill Cranes

[Nebraska's Rainwater Basin](#) | [Rainwater Basin Facts](#) | [Sandhill Cranes](#) | [Whooping Cranes](#) | [Crane Facts](#) | [Migration Timetable](#) | [Prairie Chicken Viewing](#) | [Eagle Viewing](#) | [Etiquette for Crane Watchers](#) | [Q & A](#) | [More Information](#) | [Home](#)

Witnessing the gathering of half a million cranes under a blazon Nebraska sunset stirs our senses and sparks our imagination like few experiences can. What better way to rejuvenate your spirit than with the sights and sounds of such a spectacle with a cold March wind slapping your cheeks? "Why do they stage here along the Platte?", "Where are they going", and "Where do they come from?" are but a few of the many questions visitors ask.



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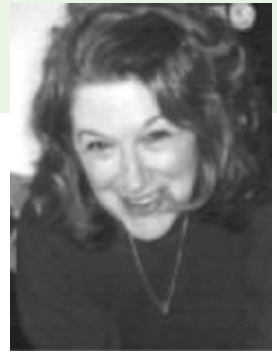
like that of modern East Africa; varieties of rhinos, camels, and elephants long since extinct. Yet cranes survived and watched as American bison, pronghorn, and wapiti evolved on the prairies. Humans now dominate the landscape having replaced the bison with cattle and the prairie with corn and concrete. This startling transition occurred in less than 150 years, a mere blink of an eye in geologic time!

Cranes are Back 2011



Seeking Softness

Dru Clarke



Winter is a brittle (and hard) season. Tree leaves and grass blades – crisp from moisture loss – crunch beneath footfalls, twigs snap, and limbs in the wind abrade one another in the chill air, groaning as if grieving the loss of warm breezes. The thin skiff of snow has melted and refrozen on the lawn and pasture and it cracks like glass when the dogs lope over it. After each foray outside, the leather of my boots and gloves stiffens and becomes hard and unyielding until I massage it into becoming pliant again. The dogs are impatient and anxious for me to hurry up and get going. Softness, like the color blue, is elusive now, in this season, so I am searching for it. Here is what I have found.

Wintering birds plump out their feathers, creating a thermal layer I envy as I dress, putting on three or more tops and leggings under my jeans. The birds are light and soft, but surprisingly tough. Right now, two dozen juncos – like animated grey velvet buttons – hop warmly about under our feeders. They explode as the dogs round the corner of the house, feathered shrapnel that hit and hurt nothing in their flight. I admire them a lot.



photo by Dave Rintoul

Banks of soil, protected from the wind, slough off on the steep slopes adjacent to the creek, creating pockets of dry, loose alluvium, soft to the touch. Several of these deposits are cave-sized, perfect for larger, winter-active mammals to curl up in to sleep. I check them often for shed hair, but find none. But the surface looked pressed, so something may have bedded there. I'll keep checking them.

An empty bird's nest in a dogwood fork is lined with thistle down, soft as satin threads, the color of ivory. Some lucky little nestlings got off to a comfortable start.

Pale green and furry mullein leaves, thick like flannel, hug the ground in flower-like rosettes in wait for summer to wreath a burgeoning stalk of wand-like yellow inflorescence that appears every second year. This plant, native to Europe, has a host of other



common names, my favorite being “big taper.” And, indeed, folks with asthma smoked a combination of dried flowers and its roots to gain relief. Europeans made a sedative tea from the leaves, and must have had a way to strain out the woolly “fur” covering them.

On some fallen tree trunks and exposed stones is luminous green moss, luxuriously dense like a finely woven tapestry. The mossy stones could be mistaken for pillows in a Victorian drawing room, so stately and rich they appear. So, I sit for a while on one and think how elegant I must look.

Of course, the dogs (and one cat) who accompany me on these searches are innately soft, given their fur coats, and their joyful bumps and hugs are a welcome warming when out on a long walk. They nudge me off my mossy seat, and we head for home.

Back in the warmth of the house, I settle in, and the animals stretch out and nap. So, softness is there, if you look for it.

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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 Listserve. Send this message <subscribe KSBIRD-L> to <list_serve@ksu.edu> and join in the discussions.

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