

Galapagos & the Birds of Ecuador

Join us for a special program, featuring **Naturalist, Jhover Alvarez**. Jhover is a level-three certified guide with the Galapagos National Park. He holds a MS in biology, speaks four languages, and has more than a decade of experience leading excursions to the Galapagos Islands.



April 25th, 7:00 p.m. Manhattan Public Library Auditorium.
Dinner with Jhover is at 5:15 p.m. at Little Apple Brewery



*Immature
Blue-footed Booby*



*Frigates
(Man-of-War)*

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 40, No. 8 ~April 2012

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Upcoming Events

- Apr 14 - Saturday morning birding 8 a.m.
Meet at Sojourner Truth park
- Apr 25 - "Galapagos Naturalist"
Program - 7:00 p.m.
Manhattan Public Library Auditorium
Dinner - 5:15 p.m. Little Apple Brewery
- April 28-29 - BIRDATHON -
Contact Clyde Ferguson, 539-4856
- May 4 - Board Meeting 6:00 p.m.
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan
- May 12 - Migratory Bird Count



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 Osawatomie (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.

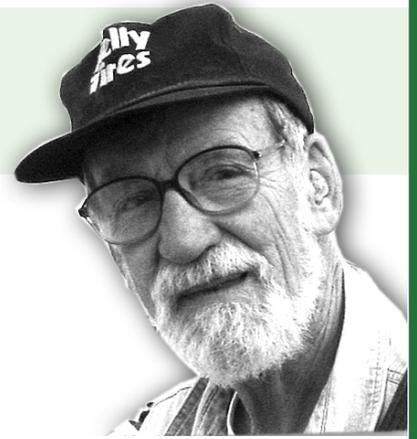
There is a kind of faintly star-marked trail in the sky in March. A little cluster of tiny stars a little west and south of Leo’s bright Regulus is the head of Hydra, the Sea Serpent. In the evening hours, one might trace its zigzag “body” southeast to reach the horizon beneath Corvus, the Crow, a rather 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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Birdathon Clyde Ferguson



It's time for our annual major fund-raising event, the NFHAS Birdathon. Last year we raised \$2,470.20. Hopefully, that ray of light means we are rising out of our depression years. This year's event will be held on April 28-29.

If you love the outdoors, spring weather and enjoy nature, join us in our quest to count as many bird species as possible in one 24-hour period. Funds raised will again be used to help with several local projects in Manhattan. A portion of the funds will go towards the Northeast Community Park (Northview), the butterfly garden at Sojourner Truth Park, and educational activities at Michel-Ross Preserve. In the past, we (you, our sponsors) have donated Birdathon funds to the Washington Marlatt Park, the Rowe Sanctuary on the Platte River in Nebraska, and our El Salvador sister chapter. Many of our ongoing projects and activities, such as wildlife preservation, publication of the *Prairie Falcon*, and bringing in special speakers for our monthly program meeting are also partly funded with Birdathon funds.

HOW DO YOU DO IT?

It's simple. Collect pledges from your friends, contacts, or enemies to pay so much for each bird species that you count within the 24-hour period of April 28-29. The pledges do not have to be large; dimes, quarters and dollars add up quickly when many participate. Encourage your sponsors to pledge 15 or 25 cents per species spotted and you'll be surprised how much money you can raise with five or ten sponsors. If your sponsors want to pledge a set amount, that works great also.

We encourage you to make this a family outing. Go out and bird for 24 hours beginning sometime on April 28th. It's OK, for example, to bird from 10:00 a.m. on April 28th until 10:00 a.m. on April 29th. Report your findings to your sponsor and collect your pledges (often the difficult part). Send the money, names and addresses to **Clyde Ferguson, 2140 College Hts. Rd., Manhattan, KS 66502**. You just might

surprise yourself with how many species you can identify. If you do not want to go out alone, or don't feel you can ID birds well enough, call Clyde and he will put you with a group.

If you cannot join in the fun of going out yourself, you can still collect names and pledges and one of the members who will be going out can be your "designated counter." We call this a super-sponsor (not that any of our sponsors aren't super in our eyes). If you have a friend that is going out to count, ask him or her to be your eyes.

If you do not know anyone going out, contact **Clyde Ferguson (539-4856)**, or any **NFHAS board member** (see the back page of your newsletter for contact information), or just send a note to: **Birdathon NFHAS, PO Box 1932, Manhattan KS 66505**, and we will find someone to count for you. We'll provide a list of the species counted and you can collect the pledges based on that list. On average, we see between 90 and 110 species on a good trip.

Don't forget you can be a sponsor yourself. Make your pledge to a friend or relative who is going to be a counter or super-sponsor. If none of our counters or super-sponsors contacts you, send a note or this form with your pledge and we will add you to our list of sponsors. If you prefer, send a lump sum donation c/o of the Birdathon to the address above. We're easy, we accept donations in almost any form.

Those donating \$15 or more may receive a one year's subscription of the *Prairie Falcon* (if requested on the form). Our normal subscription price is \$15 and the purpose of the Birdathon is to raise additional funds. Your donations and the donations of your sponsors are a tax deductible contribution. Please join us if you can and if you can't, please help us support the preservation of nature.

Clyde Ferguson, Birdathon Chair

Consider the Cedar Dru Clarke



is
by

Flanking our front porch walk are two giant eastern red cedars (*Juniperus virginiana*) that are so old they may have been planted when the original house was built in 1873. Each one is several feet in circumference (I can't get my arms around either trunk) and reaches probably fifty feet tall. Their graceful, flexible branches catch and shed sheaves of snow quickly, and, in summer, provide a perch for the tiny hummingbirds that tire after hovering to sip at nearby feeders on our porch. The grey bark stands out in long vertical plates that sometimes loosens and forms flaps, like worn shingles on a roof.

One is male, the other female (the more "petite" of the two), revealed by the type of "cones" they each sport: the male's is reddish brown and scaly, no bigger than the tip of a ballpoint pen, between 1 and 2 millimeters long, and they cap the tips of thin, green-scaled branches. The female's cones are more like powdered blue berries that contrast strikingly with the dark green of the foliage: The 'powder' is actually a wax that can be rubbed off. If you taste one, you might recognize its distinctive resinous flavor, which is used to give gin its aromatic kick. (I frequently pop one in my mouth when I'm out for a walk.)

In the early spring, the male emits clouds of pollen that yellow the air and cause havoc with those allergic to it. The tree is also host to "cedar apple" rust disease which can affect apple trees, the alternate host for the rust. We've all seen (and probably played with) those rubbery slime balls that dangle disturbingly, grossly, fascinatingly, from cedar limbs.

When I ventured out to gather some "berries" today, they were all gone, having been consumed by assorted creatures, especially birds, like bluebirds and turkey, that use them for forage in the winter. (We haven't noticed cedar waxwings and would expect to see them in huge flocks, as we did once years ago in the cedars near Blood Creek, a tributary of the Kansas River in Pottawatomie County.) Birds, of course, disperse the one or two, and rarely four, seeds per "berry" that germinate and flourish in unburned, ungrazed landscapes.

There are over 50 species of juniper, which are members of the cypress family found all over the northern

hemisphere: The eastern red cedar, our very own member, is found in every state east of the 100th meridian, and rapidly increasing its frequency, due mostly to fragmentation of the landscape urbanization, and (understandable) fear of fire by, mostly, new untutored residents who do not understand and appreciate its role in maintaining the prairie landscape. Changing climate is playing a part too: satellite images of tundra in Siberia (and prairie land here in the plains states) have shown a dramatic increase in shrubby growth in just the last few decades. Unlike the many C4 grasses that fix CO₂ in their bundle sheaths, increasing the efficiency of the enzyme responsible for photosynthesis, cedars benefit

directly from the increased CO₂ levels in the atmosphere and can outpace the growth of the grasses.

The uses of *Juniperus virginiana* are mind-boggling and give us some balanced perspective in viewing this tree. Its aromatic heartwood has been used for pencils and cedar closets and chests. American Indians used the wood for bows and its poles for marking hunting territories. Shelterbelts or windbreaks planted after the Dust Bowl days still exist today: our northwest corner's cedars, probably planted in that time, forms a "natural corral" to protect the horses from northerlies. And, we can't forget the berry's essential oils which flavor gin (its name a shortening of the Dutch word for juniper, *genever*), are a source of other chemical components which may

be effective in treating diabetes, asthma and sciatica and may function as well as a contraceptive and a catalyst for childbirth.

Some range management folks say that the native bison grubbed and rooted out cedars that invaded their "lawns," or favored places to graze. Bison calves, ironically, are the same color as burnt cedars. Maybe this is a reminder that the two – grazers and fire – go together to maintain grasslands. Naturally, we want to control the unmitigated spread of this successful tree, but let's consider its value as well, to wildlife and to humanity. Eastern red cedars have a place here too.

©Dru Clarke, Feb. 15, 2012





Photos by Deb Clark

The Geese picture was taken February 24, 2012 at Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge, northwestern Missouri.

Snow Geese

The owl picture was taken at Quivira Natural Wildlife Refuge, south-central Kansas, on February 16, 2012.

Great Horned Owl



THANK YOU, Safe Travels, and Best Wishes to Susan Pusker.

But we will miss you! Susan has been our loyal Treasurer for several years, and is now moving to California. We wish her the very best, and thank her for all she has done for the NFHAS, *(including bringing baby turtles to one of our meetings)*

So - now we are looking for someone to step up and volunteer to be our treasurer. Please contact one of the Board members, if you are interested, or for more information. **WE NEED YOU.**

Joe Collins



In Memory

Kansas has lost a towering herpetologist and steadfast conservationist. Joe Collins was always speaking for wildlife and habitat protection at Kansas Nongame Wildlife Advisory Council meetings, at legislative hearings when it involved subjects such as reptiles, in defense of protecting prairie dog colonies, and in a thousand other forums. He will be missed, and cannot be replaced. I will continue to think of him whenever they do. - Ron Klatske (AOK)

Mr. Collins founded the Center for North American Herpetology and was a former instructor at the University of Kansas. A mentor to many - young and old.



Immature Albatross



Galapagos Mockingbird

(photos on front page and here by Joye Gordon)





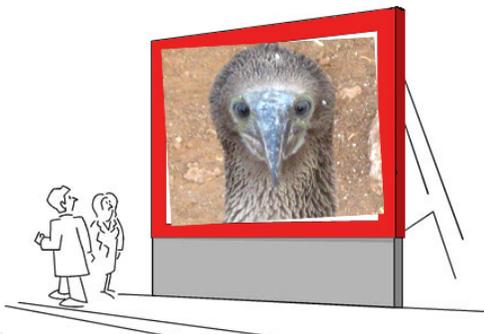
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Membership Information: Introductory memberships - \$20/yr., then basic, renewal membership is \$35/yr. When you join the National Audubon Society, you automatically become a member of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society. You will receive the 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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