

## WHAT'S THE STORY?

When did the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Chapter start?

Who were the first board members?

How many CBCs have there been in Manhattan?

What are some of the memorable NFHAS events?

What was "Burning Bird Questions?"

If you know the "story" and can answer these questions - or any other story about the Northern Flint Hill Audubon Society - please share it with us. Either send it to one of the board members (see back page for e-mail address) or bring it to our September get-together! Photos are encouraged.

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



## prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 40, No. 11 ~July 2012

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### Upcoming Events

**JUL 2 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.**  
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

**JUL 14 - Saturday morning birding**

**No Program or newsletter in August**

**AUG 15 - Deadline for article for  
September Prairie Falcon Newsletter**

**SEPT 3 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.**

**SEPT 16 - START of the YEAR event  
2:30 - Ice cream, Music, NFHAS stories pg. 5**



## Skylight plus Pete Cohen

It looks to be a social summer. For those who might be traveling terrestrially, *StarDate* alone lists eleven star-struck events across the nation. A convention of the

Astronomical League in Chicago July 4-7, and star viewing parties: in July--San Diego, 14; Adin, CA. 18-22; Ellensburg, WA. 19-21; Waupaca, WI 19-22. In August--Bend, OR 8-12; Prineville, OR 15-19; Fox Park, WY 16-18; Springfield, VT 16-19; Julian, CA 16-19; Mansfield, OH 19-27. And looking ahead to September: Kenton, OK 8-16; Bruneau, ID 14-15; Gladwin, MI(chigan) 13-16. Additionally Cherry Springs State Park in Pennsylvania is dedicated year around to offering star-watching opportunities.

It's well to bring red-nosed flashlights for moving around at these events, and if you can't switch off your vehicle's back-up lights, to park where you won't have to move in reverse if you need to motor away early.

Celestially the summer sky show will be literally in full swing as the stars and planets sweep westward, with the expectation of being notably interrupted by the Perseid meteor shower from August 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>, with estimates ranging from one to as many as twenty streaks per hour, all agreeing that a darkened (moonless) sky will highlight whatever comes. Whatever comes is believed to be from the dust trail of the Swift-Tuttle comet, discovered three nights apart by Lewis Swift and Horace P. Tuttle in 1862. From the internet I find it was spied again by Tsuruhiko Kiushi of Japan in 1992, a little before it became visible via binoculars. Some calculations then predicted that it would have a calamitous collision with Earth in 2126, but those have been revised in favor of a great, harmless

appearance. As to the coming shower, unless one is really, really dexterous with a telescope, the naked eyes (with regular glasses as needed) are the best equipment to take in such broad displays.

But before all that, Mercury leads off July with a brief low appearance just before dark the first few days. To celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> the Earth will be at aphelion (its furthest distance from the Sun), about 94.5 million miles away (compared to about 91.5 million miles at perihelion, six months hence). And the society pages will begin reporting a series of three-somes and four-somes.

Bright, brighter, and reddish, Jupiter, Venus, and Taurus' eye, Aldebaran, rise as a group in the early hours, gradually spreading apart. The crescent Moon makes it a quartet on July 14<sup>th</sup>. Red, white, and blueish, Mars, Saturn, and Spica (in Virgo) party till about midnight through the evening hours, growing ever closer together, with the Moon hanging around nearby on July 24<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> and Mars gradually passing between the other two in August.

On August 13<sup>th</sup> a trio of Venus, a crescent Moon, and Betelgeuse (Orion's right shoulder) should greet the dawn, and on the the 21<sup>st</sup> the Moon will try to crowd up from below into a tight bunching of the Saturn-Spica-Mars cabal.

Meantime, Mercury returns for another brief glittering, by itself, in the dawn of the month's two middle weeks. And all the while Scorpio will be leading Sagittarius along the southern horizon. Scorpio's red eye, Antares, will be winking closely at the Moon July 28<sup>th</sup> and August 24<sup>th</sup>. And anyone feeling a bit confused by all the sparkle above, can try to make out the asterism (group of stars) known as the Teapot, in Sagittarius. The pointed spout is to the right, and further right just beyond the width of the Milky Way, exists a dark area that's the center point of our galaxy. Find that and one can then naturally orient to everywhere else. As a back-up consult Polaris, due north.

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### Endangered Species On Track To Recovery Success

Nearly 100 endangered species should be on track to meet federal scientists' recovery goals, according to a new analysis by a national nonprofit organization that seeks to protect the planet's biological diversity.

The Center for Biological Diversity's review examined population trends of 110 endangered plant and animals protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in every state across the USA, including Florida's American crocodile, the gray wolf of the Rockies, and the black-footed ferret, which once existed from southern Canada to Texas. RED ORBIT website: <http://soc.li/CL5AtMR>

## Brush Control, Naturally

Dru Clarke



The expanse of our tall grass prairie is diminishing. Each year, the more competitive shrubs and trees encroach, like a relentless tide overpowering the sea of waving leaves of grass. The shrubs and trees are known collectively as ‘brush’: controlling brush by chewing it up with chain saws and shearing it with brush hogs (specialized mowing devices attached to tractors) was the favorite pastime of a recent past president, known (affectionately, to some) as “Dubya.” Who could forget images of him with beads of sweat on his brow, his hands protected by tough gloves and legs by stylish jeans, emerging from a thorny brush island, wielding a lethal weapon, the Texas terminator, with a satisfied but slightly malevolent grin on his face. Even presidents have to get down and dirty when it comes to dealing with brush.

Physical cutting of brush is morally gratifying but so labor intensive and enervating that one must have a lot of time on one’s hands and a reserve of stamina one is willing to devote to such tedious work. And, cutting it off above ground usually doesn’t kill it permanently: extensive root systems push up new growth when conditions permit: one “island” of smooth sumac, for example, may be just one plant.

Chemical herbicides do work, but must be hand-delivered and applied carefully to avoid personal exposure to their toxic properties. Aerial spraying is an option, but it is non-selective, dependent on the vagaries of the wind and weather, and expensive, not to mention risky to wildlife, domesticated animals and people (not excluding the plane’s pilot).

We’ve taken a more novel approach to brush control on our small spread: Three Scottish Highland cattle—an adult cow and two heifers—and one Jersey cow. The Highlands, originating in their namesake land, are adapted to life on rough terrain and seem to thrive on brush. They can go where no brush hog can, are relatively docile—although their wide, curving horns are menacing-looking—and are large enough to deter predators. (This is why we decided against goats. Our neighbors have a flock of meat goats and every so often we discover a partially eaten carcass: the Pyrenees dogs, who live with them, aren’t always successful in protecting them.)

An additional quality is that they are downright cute. They have a shaggy mane of hair that falls between their horns and down over their eyes, giving them a certain coquettish look. And, they are between waist and breast high, so they aren’t as intimidating as other bovine breeds. (The Jersey, while taller and bulkier, is more of a pet, is



halter-broke, and will be milked after she has her calf this fall. But she, too, likes the tender leaves of shrubs.) They spend as much time in the understory of our woods as they do on our prairie grass, wrapping their soft, grey tongues around branches and stripping the leaves from them. The adult Highland cow rocks her horns back and forth and twists them around cedars, rubbing her face and cheeks with the abraded limbs. (There could be an insect-repelling benefit accruing from this behavior.)

We know we’d need a much larger number to make a permanent impact on our land, as we’ve seen dramatic effects on acreage that seemed to be doomed to be shrub land, be restored by a large fold (the natives’ term for a herd) of Highlands. But, we feel good about giving a recovering breed—they were at one time a breed of concern—a pleasant home with a job to do. And, not kitsch or tacky but animated and natural, our choice of brush control makes for the best kind of yard art.

© Dru Clarke, May 2012

# Alsop UPDATE

Hello everyone,

Last year after the board considered what fair compensation might be for the Alsop property easement being taken by the city, I composed a letter of our requirements on May 25, 2011 and delivered it to SMH consultants. SMH is the company assigned by the city to negotiate the acquisition of the properties needed. I have checked with SMH about every 3 months inquiring about the city's intentions at the intersection but they had no information.

I received a response dated June 5, 2012. The city expects to start on the project spring 2013. The summary of the letter is that the city will remove and replace the sidewalks on the west and south side of the property and create a handicap sized parking stall, including driveway to the street in the place where the parking spot on the property is now, additionally they will supply all the soil needed by our design (which now includes a 4 ft. berm along the west side of the lot that continues east around the SW corner for 6 feet) They will till the lot to prepare it for planting. Also, they will provide 5 bird friendly trees of our choosing and plant them where we request. These construction needs were requested rather than a financial payment. The requests that we did not get were free water from the city and a stone wall separating our property from the street. All in all I think this is a fair settlement and the work will catapult the project along toward our goal of a bird sanctuary. It has been varied kinds of effort to bring this project to this stage. Thank you all for your contributions.

*Patricia*



*SW corner of Alsop property, photo by Tom Morgan on May 23rd.*

## International Migratory Bird Day Results

International Migratory Bird Day Results. Saturday, May 12, started off cool and rainy. The temperature from 6 to 8 a.m. was 50°, but the rain stopped at 8 and it started to warm up a little – it was still only 57° at noon. But, by 3 PM it was 70°, and a sunny, beautiful day.

This year's count was notable for low numbers of species and individuals of warblers and sparrows. I never saw any warblers at all this spring in my yard, which I normally do. During the count Janet and I heard a few parula warblers throughout the day, and had the pleasure of seeing one feeding right near us, but didn't see any other warblers until 8 p.m. when we saw four yellow warblers. We usually see two to three dozen yellow warblers in our area during the count, along with smaller numbers of other species. Overall, participants saw only five species of warblers and 19 individuals. Similarly, we saw only nine species of sparrows, and the counts of individuals were way down. Perhaps the warblers and sparrows migrated through before our count, and perhaps they didn't visit my yard when they did come through.

This is my sixth year compiling the count, and some of this year's counts that were the highest we've had during the last six years were blue-colored birds: 35 great blue herons, 99 blue-winged teal, 109 eastern bluebirds, and 71 indigo buntings. Listening to the indigo buntings singing and watching the bluebirds sitting on a wire looking handsome is always a pleasure. Total number of species counted this year was 120, with a total of 4,281 birds.

Janet and I saw and heard an unusual number of owls this year throughout the day – 2 great-horned and 9 barred owls. We were standing looking at bobolinks in a field, and when we turned around there was a great-horned owl on a telephone pole right behind us that must have flown in while we were standing there. We also saw 2 barred owlets and heard a third. They were sitting about 20 feet apart back in some trees, and they would each in turn do their nest call. It was a real treat to look at them and listen to them.

We had 6 groups participating this year: Frank and Cheryl Arthur; Jim and Leslie Campbell; Clyde Ferguson, Jim Koelliker, Barry Michie, and Michael Strobe; Beth Montelone; Jim and Janet Throne; and Patricia Yeager, Kevin Fay, and Donna Roper. I want to thank everyone who participated this year, and please contact me if you'd like to participate in one of these groups or form your own group next year. It's a great excuse to spend a day outdoors.

Jim Throne, jim.throne@sbcglobal.net



## SAVE THE DATE! SEPT. 16th at 2:30 - Sojourner Truth Park.

Yearly Ice Cream Social - with music and stories by our membership. You can share your “memorable” stories and photos about birding and the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society! We would like to compile as many as possible - and perhaps make a book about the NFHAS. Start remembering now! You may send them ahead of time to MJ Morgan (tom.morgan@juno.com) or bring to the event.

## NEED YOUR HOURS

Our annual audit is coming up, and we would like everyone to submit the number of hours they spent this past year - 1) birding in the area (CBC etc.) and 2) hours of service for the NFHAS (picking up trash at Mitchell Ross, helping with butterfly garden, at board meetings, planning, etc.) Please submit to Patricia pyky@flinthills.com or call 776-9593 and leave a message by July 10.

Jacque Staats - *thank you* for all you do to keep the mowing, signage, and other odds and ends concerning our properties in good stead!

*Thank you* Jim Throne for continuing to do a great job coordinating and compiling the Spring Migratory Bird Count!

Also, *thanks to* Patricia Yeager, Kevin Fay, MJ and Tom Morgan, Eve Parks, Dolly Gudder and Walter Dodds for their “weeding blitzes” this past month, please join us! Jacque Staats has taken over the watering duties and weeds too!



**ONE-hour weeding blitz  
of the Butterfly garden  
every second Friday  
5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.**

Visit us online  
[nfhas.org](http://nfhas.org)

E-Newsletter: If you wish to opt out of the “paper” Prairie Falcon newsletter and get it on-line as a pdf - send your name and email address to Jacque Staats - [staats@wildblue.net](mailto:staats@wildblue.net)





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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](mailto:join@audubon.org). Website is [www.audubon.org](http://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](mailto:list_serve@ksu.edu)> and join in the discussions.

#### NFHAS Board

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Vice Pres. MJ Morgan - [tom.morgan@juno.com](mailto:tom.morgan@juno.com)  
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At-large: Tom Morgan  
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Contacts for Your Elected Representatives ( anytime) Write, call or email:

Governor Sam Brownback: 2nd Floor, State Capital Bldg, Topeka , KS 66612.

KS Senator or Representative: State Capital Bldg, Topeka, KS 66612. Ph# (during session only) Senate - 785-296-7300. House - 785-296-7500. U.S. Senator Roberts <[Roberts@senate.gov](mailto:Roberts@senate.gov)> U.S. Senate, Washington DC 20510. Jerry Moran U.S. Capital Switchboard 202-224-3121.