

# A murder of CROWS

Join us on May 1st, at 7 p.m. at the Manhattan Public Library Groesbeck Room, for a program about Crows by K-State Wildlife specialist Charlie Lee.

Charlie has been employed by K-State Research and Extension for 22 Years; first as an extension assistant and for the last 19 years as an Extension Wildlife Specialist. Responsibilities include: conducting a statewide program in wildlife damage control, wildlife enhancement on private lands, youth outdoor environmental programs, and aquaculture. Current areas of interest include prairie dog and cattle interactions, bird damage control at feedlots and rodent damage in conservation tillage systems. He spends most of his time helping others solve problems caused by wildlife. Charlie previously worked for Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks directing private land wildlife management programs and Farm Bill conservation issues.

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



## prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 41, No. 8 ~ April 2013

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### Upcoming Events

- Apr 1 - **Board Meeting 6 p.m.**  
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan
- Apr 7 - **1-3 p.m. BUTTERFLY GARDEN Cleanup**  
Sojourner Truth Park
- Apr 13- **Saturday Birding 8 a.m.**  
Meet Sojourner Truth Park  
(Cancelled if raining)
- Apr 27-28 **Annual Birdathon** see pg. 3-4
- May 1 - **Program: 7:00 - CROW Management**  
See Above
- May 11 - **International Migratory Bird Day**  
(see page 8)





## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

It is not an April Fool's Day; in fact it's the last of a February when the Pirate Captain and the nursemaid, Ruth, sing: "How quaint the ways of paradox; At common sense it gaily mocks." in Gilbert & Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance*. They have just realized that when she had mistakenly apprenticed her young charge, Frederick, to the pirate gang until he reached his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, she had not noted that he was born on a February 29<sup>th</sup>. And therefore, although he was now 21 years of age, going by birthdays he had to be considered still bound as a little boy of five.

Another paradox: though a signal be sent from here at noon at the speed of light, it will not arrive in London till 6 pm.

Furthermore, when the bedraggled carrack, *Victoria*, returned alone up the Guadalquivir River in September, 1521, it carried about 20 survivors (out of about 270 men on five ships) who had set sail under Ferdinand Magellan two years earlier to find a Spanish route westward to the Indies. (The Portuguese had pioneered and commandeered the way eastward around the tip of Africa). After reaching the Indies and securing a load of cloves, by travel-worn necessity and braving Portuguese interference, *Victoria* had been sailed on westward around that tip of Africa, to complete the first known circumnavigation of the Earth. Despite terrible difficulties the ship's log had been well kept, and showed that it had returned on a Sunday. But the welcomers in Spain insisted it was Monday. So at least some of the crew, as I've read, had their celebration of return interrupted by a need to go to church to atone for having missed so many Sunday observances. They had encountered the Circumnavigators' Paradox.

In the mid 1800s Edgar Allen Poe made use of this phenomenon by telling what happened after Bobby's grumpy Great-uncle Rumgudgeon said: Sure, he'll let him marry Kate--any time there were three Sundays in one week.

Kate finds two relatives, both seamen, who having each departed just a year ago, have just

returned from around-the-world sailings, one having gone eastward, the other westward. She introduces them together to Great-uncle and invites them to a next day game of whist. Whereupon one seaman, who had gone westward, objects that tomorrow will be Sunday and he couldn't come on such a day. But the other salt, who'd gone eastward, says: No, today is Monday; Sunday was yesterday. At the same time Great-uncle's calendar shows plainly that today is Sunday. Yet the testimony of the seamen, by their logs, is unassailable. Thus is the avuncular barrier overcome, and "Three Sundays in a Week" has a happy ending.

In 1872, inspired by Poe's story, and ads for Cook's World Tours that were coming to prominence, Jules Verne serialized *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingts jours* (Around the World in Eighty Days) using the same phenomenon to provide a last day, if not last minute, way of having things turn out well.

It's all based on the fact than when sailing westward with the Sun around the Earth, one daily has later sunsets that add up to a traveler experiencing one day less than someone staying home. Similarly an eastward sailor experiences earlier than normal sunsets, and thus has an extra day of them.

Nor can jet aircraft, outracing the sun, avoid an effect. A 1971 test showed that clocks flown eastbound lost time in nanoseconds, and clocks flown westbound gained nanoseconds, though the testers were more interested in testing relativity than counting sunsets. (See *Round About the Earth*, Joyce E. Chaplin, Simon & Schuster, 2012, p.403)

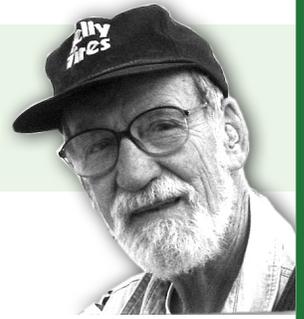
April has only 30 days in which to do its show. This includes sending Jupiter brightly offstage earlier each evening while turning Saturn's rings broadly and thus brightest toward us, and starting it upward earlier each evening in Libra, and across the sky with the Moon the 25<sup>th</sup>. The Moon also visits Aldebaran (in Taurus) the 13<sup>th</sup>, Regulus (Leo) the 20<sup>th</sup>, Spica (Virgo) the 24<sup>th</sup>, and Antares (Scorpio) the 28<sup>th</sup> while simultaneously Saturn at its very brightest chaperones Spica. The Lyrid meteor shower should peak the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Moon is new the 10<sup>th</sup> at 4a35; full the 25<sup>th</sup> at 2p57.

©2013 Peter Zachary Cohen

# Birdathon

## Clyde Ferguson



It's time for our annual major fund-raising event, the NFHAS Birdathon. Last year we raised \$2,648. We are gradually improving from our depression years. This year's event will be held on April 27-28.

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 can count within the 24-hour period of April 27-28. The pledges do not have to be large; dimes, quarters and dollars add up quickly when many participate. Encourage your sponsors to pledge 20 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 27th. It's OK, for example, to bird from 10:00 a.m. on April 27th until 10:00 a.m. on April 28th. 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 me (Clyde) and I 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



## Winter's Thrush: Harbinger of Spring?

Dru Clarke



Once I thought the sight of a robin in March or early April meant spring was finally here. That they winged south on skirling autumn winds, plumping up on more tropical fare, then returned when more temperate conditions prevailed. Not true, it seems, as flocks of American Robins are ubiquitous this winter, and, it seems, every winter.

In summer, they are seen in mated pairs, spread out over larger territories, and are encountered less than now. So, what sustains them now? Apparently they are frugivores, or fruit eaters, but not entirely, as discovered by wildlife biologist Mike Blair (KDWP) and another writer from Minnesota. The fruits of red cedar, bittersweet, sumac, hackberry and chokecherry (all plants found locally) become more digestible as they freeze, then thaw, and are readily available to these flocks. But the birds augment this diet with items of higher protein content. Blair videotaped them at Benedictine Bottoms Wildlife Area (near Atchison), scratching in the leaf litter: when he investigated, he found small coil-shelled snails that the birds apparently were eating. The Minnesota writer discovered that a robin had snagged a fish from a small open pool in a local park! And we've seen them here, scrabbling about in the duff of our meadow and the litter of the woodland. What they find may be those snails, but more likely the box elder bugs that occasionally find their way into our warmer house.

Robins are thrushes, related to the more melodic and haunting lyricists, the wood and the hermit thrush of the eastern deciduous and hemlock forests. These are becoming more threatened by the spread of the parasitic cowbird, here once termed the 'buffalo bird' for its habit of trailing bison on the prairie. Prairie birds apparently have evolved some behavioral defenses against it, but eastern birds, not having evolved so closely with it, are more naïve and vulnerable to its sneaky ways. The recent exploitation of the Marcellus shale has led to fragmentation of the eastern forests (in Pa.) through road construction and other infrastructure, and has made it easier for the cowbird to find the nests of these iconic birds. Fragmentation also makes it more difficult to find a mate. It is hard to imagine the eastern forests being the same without the flute-like songs of thrushes.

The robin's song is cheery ("cheer up cherrily, cheer up, cherrily") and upbeat and simply lifts your spirits when you hear it. When flocking, they don't seem to do this: it isn't

the season for mating and it might take a whole lot of energy to keep up such a buoyant attitude.

Our American robin, a true thrush, is quite different from the more diminutive European robin that has been re-classified as a chat. The mythic origin of the robin's red breast popularized in Christian literature is touching: a thorn broken from Christ's crown pierced the bird's breast as it tried to comfort him in his suffering. Another explanation is that the bird's breast was scorched by trying to carry water to souls trapped in Purgatory. The European robin's poppy red-orange plumage tints not only its upper breast but its tiny face, over the eye and the beak and looks as if it fell face first in a bowl of cream of tomato soup. Our robin is more robust and would never tip over and embarrass its face.

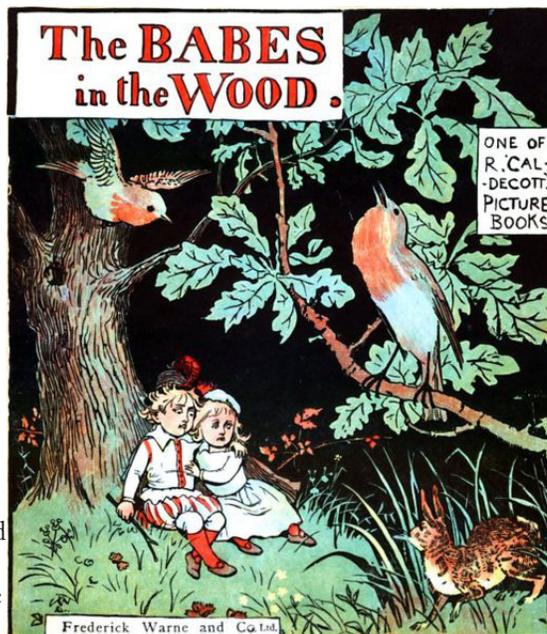
The classic children's tale *Babes in the Wood* tells of two children, whose parents died, and whose uncle, greedy to inherit what was theirs, hired ruffians to kill them, but abandoned them in the wood. The children wander, then die, and are covered up with leaves *by robins*. It was first published as an anonymous ballad in 1595, then published in a book illustrated by Randolph Caldecott (for whom the Caldecott medal was named) in 1879. The tale is supported by a reputedly true happening from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the place, Wayland Wood, in Norfolk County, England, is protected by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and is a site of specific scientific interest for its remnant Ice Age flora. Some say "Wayland" is a corruption of "wailing" of the children as they wandered lost in the wood. On a more cheerful note, more befitting the children's eponymous caretakers, postmen in Victorian England wore red uniforms and were nicknamed robins.

As spring nears, a final quote from Thomas Bailey Aldrich fits the season and the bird:

"What is more cheerful now...than an open-wood fire? Do you hear the little chirps and twitters coming out of that piece of apple-wood? Those are the ghosts of the robins (and bluebirds) that sang upon the bough when it was in blossom last spring..."

or, those robins that tenderly covered the children with leaves in that faraway wood.

©Dru Clarke February 16, 2013



# Drama at the Backyard Birdfeeder Tour

MJ Morgan

Thanks to Patricia Yeager's amazing planning, teams of three and four birdwatchers drove in different loops to four member homes all on a frosty February morning. At the Yeager, Rintoul, Staats, and Burnett homes, birds dove and started up, flew off with seeds, ate with abandon, watched warily from trees, sang and called warnings, drifted above with ominous wings, swam in *suites* (mallards), arrived in *skeins* (Canada geese), and busied themselves on rock feeders, deck rails, watering pans, and thickety patches of ground. At the Rintoul home, a sharp-shinned hawk made several appearances; according to host Dave Rintoul, the hawk had plummeted to the deck to take a junco earlier in the morning. Our team saw his shadow pass by but never glimpsed him. But Dave got a picture!



*photo by Dave Rintoul*

One team reported the following list – the species listed are new ones at each location. Because of the tendency for late winter birds to move quickly in and out of migratory areas, this list represents just one team's observations. Between team arrivals, or gracing the attention of just one group but not others, birds found nutrition and welcome (but not always safety!) in the yards of Riley and Pottawatomie County birders.

**Yeager home**, Lake Elbo: Flicker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Red-wing Blackbird, Junco, Goldfinch (many of these visitors, enough to make a *charm* – the wonderful Old English collective plural); Tufted Titmouse, Pine Siskin, House Finch, Blue Jay, Brown Creeper, Mallard, Canada Goose

**Rintoul home**, northwest Manhattan: Butterbutt (AKA Yellow-rumped Warbler), White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-Breasted Nuthatch, Chickadee

**Staats home**, Keats Road: Cardinal, male and female, another sharp-shinned hawk!

**Burnett home**, Tuttle Creek Lake: Crow, Merganser, Harris Sparrow

The Audubon board would like to thank our hosts, most especially Doris Burnett for providing a delicious hot soup lunch, a warm house to gather in, beautiful views of the cool grey, rippling lake, and her rising and falling *clouds* of pine siskins.

At the Staats' home, we sipped hot tea while watching many pairs of cardinals hop and cavort across giant granite boulders. This *cardinalship* gathered near depressions in the enormous rocks holding seeds. When a sharp-shinned hawk drifted down into a tall hackberry, suddenly there was not a bird visible anywhere on any rock. Every scarlet feather disappeared in seconds.

It was a morning of hawk drama! Don't miss the annual tour next year, always on or near Valentine's Day.

We want to also thank our drivers - Kathleen Jones, Clyde Ferguson and Donna Roper!

- MJ Morgan



Pine Siskins at Doris Burnett's,  
*photo by Jim Koelliker*



Hermit Thrush at Dave Rintoul's  
*photo by Jim Koelliker*

## Cats and Birds

### “The facts”

**Steve Zack**  
Bird Coordinator, Wildlife Conservation  
Society Species Program

The old adage about taking the cat out of the wild, but not the wild out of the cat now has a number associated with it. That number is 2.4 billion.

That staggering number is the median estimate of birds in the United States killed each year by domestic cats. Fluffy, Ginger, Tabitha, etc. Many thousands of millions of birds because we put feral cats in our woodlands (the majority of the kills) and allow our house cats out of the house. These numbers are revealed in a new study by Smithsonian and Fish and Wildlife Researchers, which in turn is built upon more than a score of close studies.

Their results modeled a range of 1.4 to 3.7 billion kills of birds by cats, and, perhaps more incredibly, kills of 6.9 to 20.7 billion kills of small mammals by cats in our country each year. Billions! This study makes clear that cats are, by far and away, the most single important cause of wildlife loss by an anthropogenic (human-linked) cause in the nation. Birds killed by cars, by windows, by lighted towers, by wind energy? Merely millions. Cats? Billions.

I am a conservation biologist and have been part of diverse studies of other human-linked

effects on wildlife through the years. While the concerns in those studies are usually about specific species and regional threats, those numbers (if estimated) usually estimate dozens, or scores, or hundreds, and maybe sometimes thousands of birds lost to an issue. Our and other recent success in working with the Department of Interior in protecting key Arctic Alaska habitats from development meant the protection of millions of nesting birds and hundreds of thousands of caribou.

Only millions and thousands, not billions. Passenger pigeons were considered the most abundant bird on earth, and were thought to number between 3 and 5 billion birds at the time of European settlement in North America. The extinction of the Passenger Pigeon is considered one of the most dramatic extinctions due to humans ever. Our cats, particularly the feral cats we have directly or indirectly put out to roam, kill the equivalent of passenger pigeon peak abundance on an annual basis.

Most everyone would agree that keeping house cats (estimated to be some 29 percent of the kills -- say “only” some 700 million birds worth) in the house and confronting the bigger problem of feral cats is needed. If you love cats and care about nature, there are billions of reasons to keep your cats out of the wild.



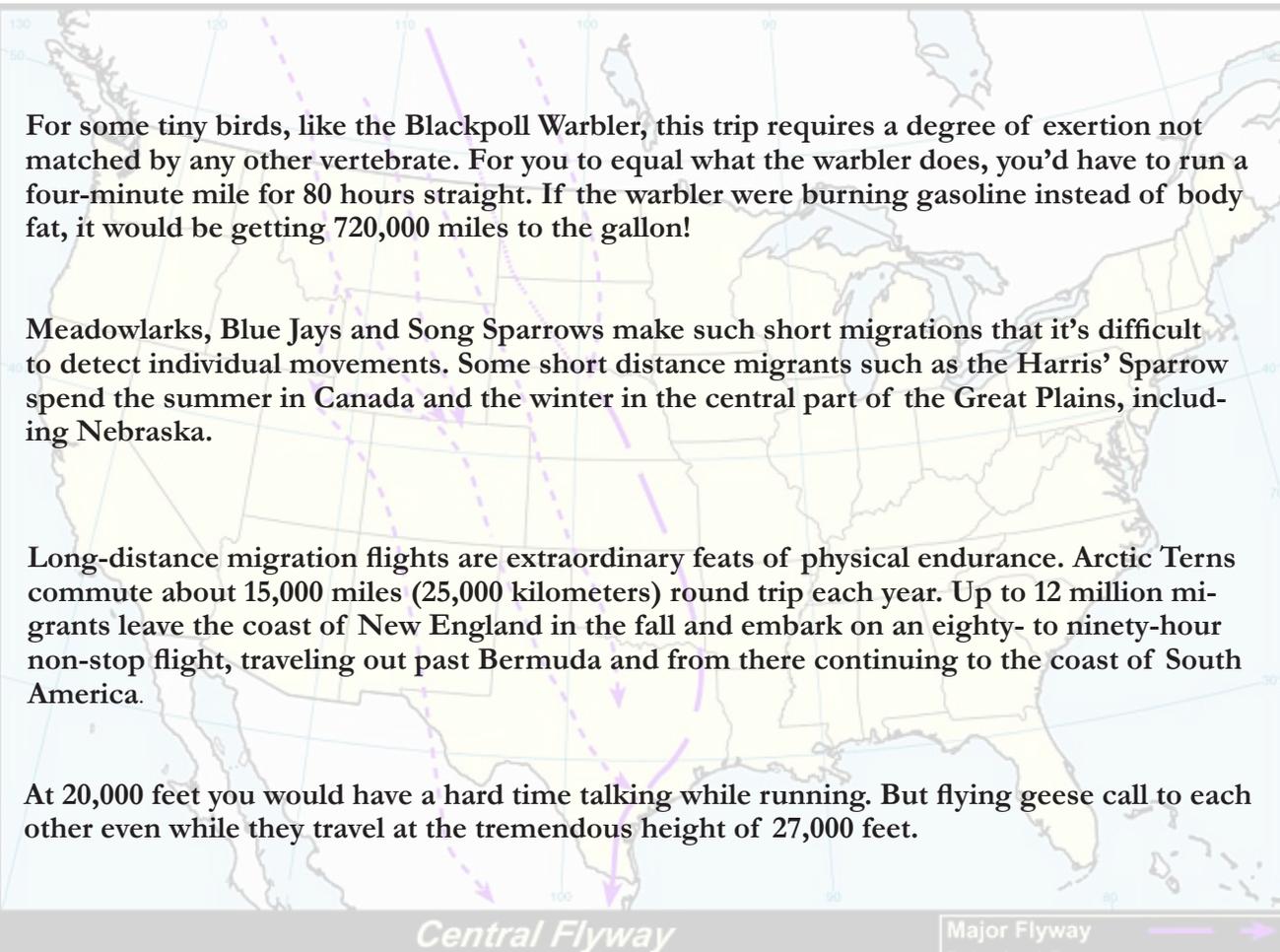
<http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Publications/PressMaterials/PressReleases/NZP/2011/catbirds.cfm>

**How did you start birding?** Please send me your story! cinraney@k-state.edu or 15850 Galilee Rd. Olsburg, KS 66520

# International Migratory Bird Day

Jim Throne has coordinated the Migratory Bird Count since 2007! A big **Thank you** to Jim and best wishes as he is leaving the Manhattan Area. However, he was so considerate and responsible to find his successor, Dr. James Campbell, Research Entomologist.

The spring International Migratory Bird Day count will be held on **Saturday, May 11**. We have several parts of Riley County that were not covered last year, so if anyone wants an area or wants to join an existing group, please e-mail me at [jf.campbell@cox.net](mailto:jf.campbell@cox.net). The expectation is that you count all birds heard or seen in your assigned area, and provide a list to me with some trip information. I then compile the information for the county, and submit the list to eBird.org. This is a great excuse to spend the day birding, so please consider joining us.



For some tiny birds, like the Blackpoll Warbler, this trip requires a degree of exertion not matched by any other vertebrate. For you to equal what the warbler does, you'd have to run a four-minute mile for 80 hours straight. If the warbler were burning gasoline instead of body fat, it would be getting 720,000 miles to the gallon!

Meadowlarks, Blue Jays and Song Sparrows make such short migrations that it's difficult to detect individual movements. Some short distance migrants such as the Harris' Sparrow spend the summer in Canada and the winter in the central part of the Great Plains, including Nebraska.

Long-distance migration flights are extraordinary feats of physical endurance. Arctic Terns commute about 15,000 miles (25,000 kilometers) round trip each year. Up to 12 million migrants leave the coast of New England in the fall and embark on an eighty- to ninety-hour non-stop flight, traveling out past Bermuda and from there continuing to the coast of South America.

At 20,000 feet you would have a hard time talking while running. But flying geese call to each other even while they travel at the tremendous height of 27,000 feet.

Central Flyway  
(with Principal Routes)

Major Flyway

Principal Routes

## Name that bird...

*(Answers on back page)*



*photos by Jacque Staats*

*“A goose flies by a chart the Royal Geographic Society could not improve.”  
— Oliver Wendell Holmes*

## More on a murder of CROWS

Crows are members of the *Corvidae* family, which also includes ravens, magpies, and blue jays. Loud, rambunctious, and very intelligent, crows are most often associated with a long history of fear and loathing. They are considered pests by farmers trying to protect their crops and seedlings. Many people fear them simply because of their black feathers, which are often associating them with death. But research demonstrated crows are actually very social and caring creatures, and also among the smartest animals on the planet.



### Social Environment

Crows are very social and have a tight-knit family. They roost in huge numbers (in the thousands) to protect themselves from enemies like red-tailed hawks, horned-owls, and raccoons. Crows also use at least 250 different calls. The distress call brings other crows to their aid, as crows will defend unrelated crows. Crows mate for life.



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

Printed on 100% post-consum-  
er recycled paper



Non-profit Organization  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Permit No. 662  
Manhattan, KS 66502

Return Service Requested

*(Song Sparrow and Northern Shrike)*

Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society.  
Edited by Cindy Jeffrey, 15850 Galilee Rd., Olsburg, KS 66520. (cinraney@ksu.edu)  
Also available on-line at [www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html](http://www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html)

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

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