

THANKS to all who came and helped clean up the Michel-Ross Preserve!

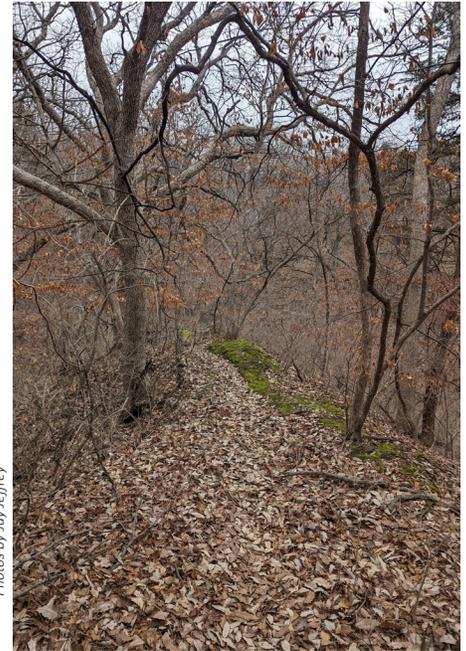
The 10 adults and one child that spent the morning picking up trash at the Michel-Ross Preserve Feb. 10th made a big impact. The serenity of the trails beyond Ridgewood Drive and Canyon Drive have been restored because of their work. Now no trash obstructs the forest view. The drive along Stagg Hill Rd is much improved. Thank you to Merry Bower, Jay Jeffrey, Scott Taylor, Kevin Fay, Jessica Boeckman, neighbor John Hill Price and wife and child, Patricia Yeager, Steve Kramer and Susan Blackford.

We had fun and were impressed with what a difference a group can make. There was talk that we could meet at the preserve once a month and really improve the two things that need to be addressed. Those two things are regular trash pick-up and killing the invasive bush honeysuckle.

SO LET'S DO IT!

March Michel-Ross meet-up: Saturday morning March 16th at 9:30 am. Meet at the Bebe daycare (2605 Allison Ave) parking lot. This time we want to attack large bush honeysuckle bushes (3 inches at the base or larger). We will need a chainsaw brigade. I will be calling members until I get a commitment of at least 3 who are willing and able to bring their chainsaws and help at this month's effort, but we could use many more. Each person with a chainsaw will need another to follow them to poison the stump. (We are sorry we need to use herbicide, but it is the only way to save our forest.) We will need more people to haul out the honeysuckle branches. Of course, trash pick-up is always on the agenda if you'd rather. We will gather at El Tapatio when we finish for the day (about noon) to eat lunch together.

This Michel-Ross workday is weather permitting. If we must cancel (rain, snow or temperatures below 35 degrees), we will meet on March 23rd instead (same time, same place).
~ Patricia Yeager



Photos by Jay Jeffrey

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

Mar. 5 - Board Meeting 5:30 pm, Manhattan Public Library

Mar. 9 - Sat. Morning Birding,
leaves Sojourner Park at 8 am

Mar. 16 - Michel-Ross workday - 9:30 am - See above

April 2 - Board Meeting 5:30 pm, Manhattan Public Library

May 11 - Migratory Bird Day - focus on the importance of insects - upcoming info in April newsletter



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

In his 1842 poem, “Locksley Hall,” Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote, “In spring a young man’s fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.” These days I’ve become old enough to add a few other distractions, and one of the things that comes to mind as this season is warming, is—grasshoppers, and the lack of them.

It’s not news that there has become a dearth of insects generally in Kansas and elsewhere, along with a great diminution of the birds who feed on them, but it’s the grasshoppers, when they are present, with whom we collide, and perhaps it is that (now lack of) contact intimacy that now puts them forward in my springtime thoughts. And I’ve realized I know so little about them. So I’ve inquired.

I find that grasshoppers have been around for at least 200 million years before there was grass. Apparently they had the same physical structure as now, and ate on whatever land plants (available since 700 million years ago) that their long legs banged them against and were chewable. Grass showed up about 70 million years ago and became for some of them an acquired taste.

Utah State Extension Service tells me that those now eating primarily on grass have ridged mouthparts for grinding the hard silica they encounter; those specializing on forbs have cusps for tearing leaves; and then there are generalists. How many species of grasshoppers have been identified seems to depend on your source, though 11,000 seems a common number. Again I’m amazed at the meticulousness biologists achieve in differentiating so much among such multitudes of individuals.

Females deposit their eggs from the long pointed end of their derrieres (males’ bodies end in an upturn). The eggs are left on loose soil in sticky clusters in the summer and fall. They then need a certain range of moisture to hatch in the spring, whereupon they go through five nymphal stages to become the colorful winged, springy, improvident creatures depicted in Aesop’s fable of The Ant and the Grasshopper. And are, I’m told, a good source of protein.

Somehow, apparently when their populations reach certain densities, something triggers an increase of serotonin in their brains. Serotonin is an enzyme used in humans to treat schizophrenia and as a sleep aid. With its increase in grasshoppers, they resemble Robert Louis Stevenson’s “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.” They change to brown, and enlarge with longer wings; they become locusts (not to be confused with fruit of the same name). These can mass together into the implacable swarms well-known to history, particularly in the Horn of Africa but globally as well.

They were an especial scourge on the U.S. plains from 1873 to 1877, particularly in Kansas in 1876; why those years is unclear. I read the largest recorded swarm happened in 1875, being over 100 miles wide and 800 miles long, equaling the area from Maine through Delaware, though I can’t find a direct statement that that is where the swarm occurred. In any case, based on last year’s lack of a breeding population, such an arousal seems an unlikely thing to worry about here in the year ahead.

Two brightnesses open the month ahead, as Venus and Jupiter come close to hugging in the early evening on the 1st, then stand off a bit on the 2nd. Then during the wee hours of the 3rd the Moon and Scorpius’ Antares get chummy. Next Jupiter and the Moon have a rendezvous as night thickens the 13th. The faint Pleiades cluster located on Taurus’ shoulder take Jupiter’s place but above the Moon the 14th. The star El Nath, the tip of one of Taurus’ long horns, has a turn at nightfall the 16th. On the 18th it’s Pollux, the brighter of the Gemini Twins close to the upper left of the Moon, again at nightfall. On the 21st it will be Leo Regulus as the Moon’s companion, and it will be Spica, the bright star of Virgo rising just above the Moon in late evening the 26th.

In other news, the 24th will provide a best chance to see Mercury low in the west at sundown. And around 2 am that night will be an even more elusive opportunity to catch the Moon dimming ever so slightly as it passes through the Earth’s penumbral shadow, signaling the coming total solar eclipse to the U.S.’s southern-, mid- and northeastern areas two weeks hence, on April 8th.

Daylight Savings Time begins 2 am the 10th. The vernal equinox will occur at 10p06 CDT the 19th. The moon is new that 10th at 4a00, full the 25th at 2a00.

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Anomalies Dru Clarke



Along the verge of the lane, a tuft of yellow, a frilly button the size of a nickel, caught my eye. It did not belong. The rest of the ground was a shaggy brown, with no relief to the drabness. But it was there, defying the expectation of sameness underfoot, all the way to the edge of the woodland where cedars, at least, offered some green. What tricked this *diente de leon* into blooming in mid-January? The dandelion is not a native wildflower, but is a very adaptable one, finding a niche wherever the wind carries its feathery, parasol-like seeds. Its jagged, toothy-edged leaves spread in a rosette hugging the ground allow it to capture the weak sunlight of a winter day, warming and fueling its chlorophyll-making cells in preparation for spring's burst of growth. Its gathered leaves are bitter but a tonic for the liver, and its blossoms yield a serviceable wine. But, its most winning feature, to me, is its sudden and striking appearance in an otherwise uniformly green lawn, defiantly audacious in elbowing aside the carefully attended grass (most of which is not native as well) of a smug suburbanite.

Early morning feedings find us near grain bins filled with corn, soybeans and molasses that we scoop into ten-pound buckets to carry to our grateful cows. Night time visitors clean up the spilled grain, identified by their tracks in the mud. Raccoons, opossums, skunks, opportunists all. 1500 pound round bales of brome or prairie hay (hefted by a skid steer loader) placed close to corrals where stallions as well as our bulls are sequestered provide the roughage they need. It is from these bales that occasionally a familiar sound emerges: a field cricket's chirp. (This is produced by stridulation where a scraper on one wing is drawn across a file on the other wing, the frequency of the chirps made dependent upon the temperature.) Now, one would expect to hear the cricket as the ambient temperature rises – the ideal is from 80 to 90 degrees – as the male tunes up his acoustic instrument to begin his insistent courtship. However, the unmistakable sound of a male field cricket in full-blown courtship mode is coming from one of these round bales

of hay. Hmm...no...chirp...chirp...chirp. Puzzling out how this is possible, I finally settled on...well, maybe you can guess...fermentation of the hay. Either by yeast or bacteria, when hay is moist, fermentation can happen, and, as it is a metabolic process, heat is generated. We've often seen steam rising from a bale in the dead of winter, and, as it happened here, some steam was noted as we forked up hay to feed. Some opportunistic male cricket, stimulated to feel amorous, began his serenade. The air temperature was in the 20's, so within that elephantine bale it must have been toasty warm. Good luck finding a receptive female in that pile.

In your ramblings during winter, be 'present', note your surroundings, look and listen and feel for anomalies, be they unlikely blooms, odd animal behavior, or any other peculiar, out of time, out of place event. Nature offers up continual surprises.

(How he could hold his wings up at a 45 degree angle to be able to draw one wing across the other in a tightly packed hay bale seems a herculean task, almost impossible to imagine or perform.)



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A Murder of Crows?

Collective nouns for birds

The number of dastardly sounding nouns for crows, such as murder, mob and horde, probably come from medieval peasants' fears that the sinister-looking corvids had been sent by the Devil or were witches in disguise.

A confusion of collective nouns?

Many of the bird species have more than one collective noun. As with crows, there are myriad company terms to describe finches (charm, trembling and trimming) and geese, depending on whether they're flying (skein, wedge, nide) or gathered on water (plump) or land (gaggle).

The delightful word skein is actually an abbreviation of the Old French *escaigne*, which meant a hank of yarn that, when folded back on itself, resembles the 'v' shapes with which geese transcribe the sky when locomoting long distances. That geese in flight are also referred to as 'a team' or 'a wedge' both reflect the graceful birds' distinctive mode of travelling en masse.

John Zimmerman called a group of vultures a "faculty" - and then would smile.

Country Life

<https://www.countrylife.co.uk/nature/collective-nouns-for-birds-68344>

Bird Spot (a british list of collective nouns)

<https://www.birdspot.co.uk/culture/collective-nouns-for-birds>

A wake of buzzards	An orchestra of avocets
A confusion of chiffchaffs	A mural of buntings
A chattering of choughs	A water dance of grebes
A commotion of coots	A booby of nuthatches
A murder of crows	A quilt of eiders
An asylum of cuckoos	A mischief of magpies
A curfew of curlews	An aerie of eagles
A trembling of finches	A wisdom of owls
A swatting of flycatchers	A quarrel of sparrows
A prayer of godwits	A wisp of snipes
A crown of kingfishers	A kettle of swallows
A parcel of linnets	An invisibleness of ptarmigans
A cast of merlins	A committee of terns
A conspiracy of ravens	A descent of woodpeckers
A worm of robins	A pitying of turtledoves
A parliament of rooks	A banditry of titmice
An exultation of skylarks	A circlage of house martins
A murmuration of starlings	A scold of jays
A hermitage of thrushes	A charm of goldfinches
A volery of wagtails	A fall of woodcock
A museum of waxwings	A deceit of lapwings
A chime of wrens	



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The purpose of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society is to teach people to enjoy and respect birds and their habitats. NFHAS advocates preservation of prairie ecosystems and urban green spaces thus saving the lives of birds and enriching the lives of people.

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