

March Activities

NEST BOX CLEANING & REPLACEMENT AT N.E. PARK Saturday afternoon, MARCH 14th

Bird nest boxes are needing some cleaning and repair before our feathered friends move in for the summer. Want to help? Meet March 14 at 1:00 at the entrance of the Cecil Best Birding trail. We will work until about 2:30. Rain or temperature below 40 wind chill postpones to another day.

LEARN TO PLAY WINGSPAN (the board game) Sunday afternoon, MARCH 15 2:00-4:00

The game is designed for ages 14 and up. I have spoken to more than one birder who received this board game as a gift and has yet to learn to play it. If you are interested in learning it in a noncompetitive environment I would enjoy teaching it to you. It is a little confusing at first for most people. However, this makes it a more interesting game when you learn it. You do not need to know birds to play the game. You will learn about many birds as you play which is, of course, fun.

RSVP by Saturday March 14 to Patricia (leave message OR text) 785-317-1558.s.

MICHEL-ROSS PRESERVE CLEAN UP Sunday midmorning, MARCH 22nd

It's time! For the annual clean up of our 26 acres preserve that is. If you don't know where it is, you will discover this little gem of a forest that you are welcome to visit anytime. Many hands make short work of this task. Please help out if you are able. We will work from 10:00 am to 12 noon and then get lunch at El Tapatio restaurant across the street. Just for fun, anyone who picks a trash golf ball out of our forest will get their lunch paid for! Bring gloves and water to drink. Trash bags and water to refill your bottle will be provided. If you want to bring empty dog food bags, bird seed bags or other large bags that can be reused for trash pick up please do. Meet at the dead end of Canyon Dr. Rain or temperature below 35 wind chill postpones to a warmer day.

BIRD WALK Sunday afternoon MARCH 29th

We are changing the time of our bird walks. They will now be the last Sunday of every month at 1:00 to about 2:30. This month we will walk the trails around Anneberg Park. The park is located along Anderson in west Manhattan. Meet by the picnic shelter near the pond. Rain and temp. below 40 wind chill cancels.

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 53, No. 7, March 2026

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Upcoming Events

Mar. 3 - Board Meeting 5:30
Manhattan Public Library Study room #1

Mar. 14 -Nest box cleaning & replacement
N.E. Park 1:00 pm (see above)

Mar. 15 - Wingspan - learn to play this board game

Mar. 21 - Milford Lake Birding with Chuck Otte
See page 3

Mar. 22 - Michel-Ross Preserve Cleanup
10 am - 12n, lunch at El Tapatio

Mar. 29 - Bird Walk - 1 pm - 2:30 pm
See above for details



Vigil

Dru Clarke

Photo by Jill Haukos



On the prairie, a lone tree is an anomaly. But that it survives, even thrives, may be due to the reverence shown to it by a steward of the land. Or, it might be mere neglect, although I doubt that, as obsessive at eliminating woody growth most ranchers are who depend upon grass to feed summer stock. A lone tree is a simple oasis for livestock on a scorching summer day: one can see them clustered beneath scrawny limbs, jammed together in the meager shade it offers. To them, it is a priceless gift.

I recently read of a sycamore tree that grew in a dip along Hadrian's Wall (A.D.122) in England. (The wall was built to guard the Roman Empire's northwest frontier.) Called the Sycamore Gap tree It was revered by ramblers (our hikers), both local and foreign, who paused by it, both to rest and to enjoy the view of the surrounding countryside. It wasn't a particularly arresting tree, not grand in the sense of old growth oaks and beeches, but that it grew and thrived in such an unlikely and otherwise treeless place was remarkable. In a Kevin Costner movie "Robin Hood: Den of Thieves" (1991), filmed in the landscape by the wall, the tree gained international notoriety, and in 2016 it was named "The Tree of the Year" of England. One evening, after a supposed bout of heavy revelry, two young men, armed with a chain saw, cut the tree down. People were bereft on discovery of the tree's ignominious fate. Bragging about the deed, which they videotaped and considered "a lark" and no big deal, brought about the capture of the two ruffians: a trial led to their imprisonment, and some felt the punishment - they could have each received 10 years! - was not enough for the enormous loss they felt. Prosecutors characterized the destruction as "the arboreal equivalent of mindless thuggery."



Hadrian's Wall

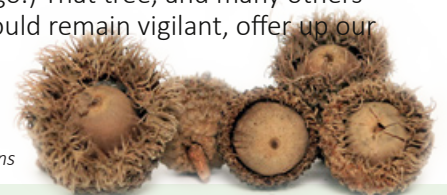
Other instances of potential destruction of revered trees are notable. One 300 year old live oak in Savannah, Ga., threatened by Georgia Power, was saved by social media as the story unfolded of the impending fate. The power lines will take another route. Another live oak, 200 year old "Face of the Inlet" in Murrells Inlet S.C., was destined for removal for a road widening project. It too was saved.

The state of New Jersey has a program to save heritage trees or what they term "witness" trees, those that have through time been alive to witness historic events. Here in Kansas, our "pioneer tree," the cottonwood, has special status as it was the only wood available on the plains for building and gave pioneers the opportunity to settle and stay in an otherwise inhospitable site.

The story of the Louis Vieux elm on the banks of the Vermillion River east of Wamego and Louisville merits mention. Once the champion elm not only of Kansas but of the U.S. it reigned regal and large for over a century. Struck by lightning then vandalized several times it finally succumbed in the latter part of the 20th century, but is memorialized in a humble park, flanked by signage noting the importance of the Louis Vieux crossing by westward traveling pioneers. Today, young elms grow nearby, hopefully the progeny of the once grand elm that marked the passage of throngs of settlers.

A bur (not burr!) oak on Konza Prairie Biological Research Station remains in my tree inventory one of the most impressive. When I used to be a docent, I had school children surround the trunk of this massive tree, stretch out their arms, and touch fingers until the entire girth was enclosed. If I remember, when they formed a line showing the circumference, it was 16 feet! (it may be more now, as that was almost 20 years ago.) That tree, and many others with whom we have an attachment, deserve recognition and preservation. So, we should remain vigilant, offer up our admiration and awe and hugs. After all, it is hard to hug a blade of grass.

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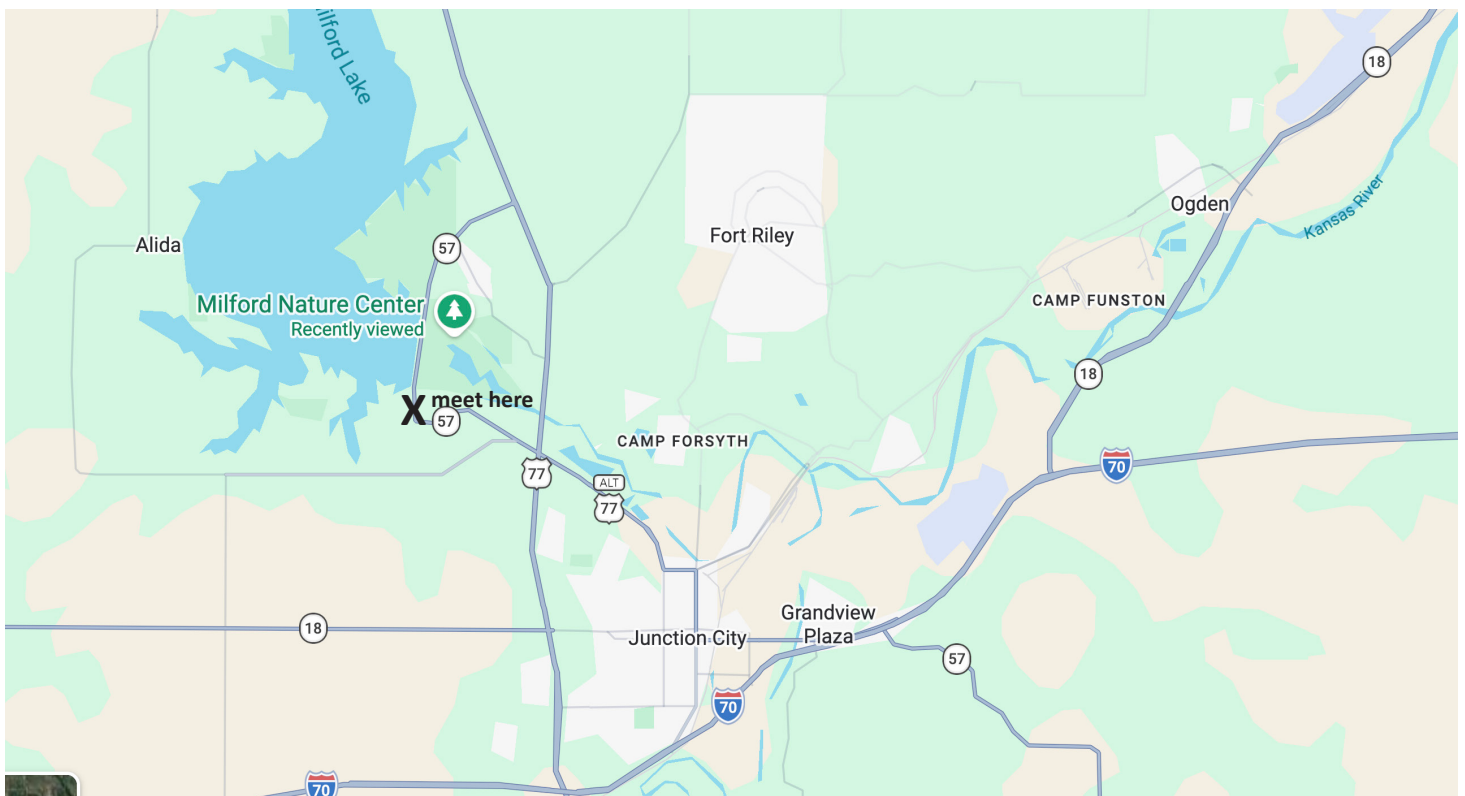
Bur Oak acorns

Things to do!

If a Saturday morning bird walk is better for you (it is a better time for finding birds and hearing them), Chuck Otte still guides a bird walk at Milford monthly starting at 8 a.m. Meet at the parking lot on the south end of the dam, across the road from the Corps of Engineer's Office. Across the street the address is 5203 N K-57 Junction City.

For more details and dates: <https://ksbirds.org/birding/MilfordWalk.htm>

The walks last 2 to 3 hours and we explore areas around or near Milford Lake. Walks are monthly (usually 2nd or 3rd Saturday of the month) from March through November. Walks are led by Chuck Otte - he can be contacted at cotte@ksu.edu. Bring your binoculars, your bird book, comfortable walking shoes and a sense of humor!



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Birding Paddle Trips

San Juan Islands (Part 1) - Archipelago Jay Jeffrey

"Then more walking, on out of town, and here I was at the Anacortes ferry dock at first daylight. ... So I had walked back up into the nearby trees and sat down to rest. Misty rain was falling again, but I was content to let it run into my eyes and trickle down my neck. This was a warm, comfortable rain, fit for the spring season that the Winter Wrens were proclaiming." — in Kenn Kaufman, 1997, Kingbird Highway.

Leon shouted, "Whales!" and took off, a sprinting blur of a human. Earlier we had arrived at the island with sleek fully-laden 17-foot sea kayaks, with a week's worth of gear, food, and water; necessary for self-supported expedition-style paddle trips. We'd unpacked, set up camp, and then began a hike across the island to a lighthouse of historic renown. Through the forested hills, under Mediterranean blue-water colored skies, with low-flying snow-white clouds, we excitedly exchanged philosophical agreement about examples of unmatched beauty on planet Earth. That was mere moments before...the whales.

Two days before, parked in a long line at the Anacortes ferry terminal, I sat in my truck with heavy-duty gear-filled tubs and a kayak strapped to the roof rack. Napping, reading, and on occasion seeing Pelagic Cormorants and Pigeon Guillemots flying in the distance. Professional training to hone ocean paddling skills preceded this day. And I would wait in line at this same ferry terminal annually for several years in the future; for the magic of the San Juan Islands (SJI) Archipelago and also for globally-respected advanced paddling instruction.

Many locals and regional Pacific Northwesterners consider the archipelago magical. Consisting of around 175 named islands, SJI is located in Washington State's zone of the Salish Sea, just north of Seattle and Puget Sound. Eighty-four of its islands are designated as National Wildlife Refuges. The archipelago also includes a National Monument, National Park, a variety of WA state-designated parks, trails, and wildlife areas; and additionally, SJI is part of the Cascadia Marine Trail, a premiere water trail with non-motorized boat campsites that are often secluded. At low tide, around 700 SJI islands and islets are exposed.

Magical? The archipelago is highly unique in countless ways — I'd call it "dynamically multi-layered," which I believe to be a fair assessment: geologically, ecologically, oceanographically, culturally, historically, others; harboring wilderness, remote island life, maritime rhythms, natural beauty, wonder, and mystery. One concealed fact is that, basically, the archipelago is just the tops of a submerged mountain chain that is steep and rugged. Unlike much of the surrounding continental coastal lowlands, the SJI shares much of its geological complexity with the mainland's Cascade Mountains.

The archipelago is tucked between British Columbia's enormous land mass of Vancouver "Island" and Washington State's northwest tip of the contiguous United States; north of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, west of Rosario Strait, east of Haro Strait, and south of Boundary Pass Strait that connects Haro with vast open waters of the Strait of Georgia to the north. All these waters are within the Salish Sea, and SJI is at the heart of it.

Some consider SJI simply as a constellation of Island Wonders, many boaters already consider several of its islands as crown jewel destinations. Our first paddling day wrapped up at sunset, with whole tightly-closed live oysters roasting on an open fire; soon bubbling open, cooked and thoroughly savored (I'm salivating thinking about it).

While preparing our campsite feast, I was retrieving something from my kayak's storage compartment when I saw a dramatically colored Nudibranch, aka Sea Slug, beautifully undulating while free-floating in the clear water, as if swimming (in the shoreline shallows, below my beached kayak). Highly diverse in looks, some species with colors of a rainbow-colored circus clown, an extensive number of species worldwide, and many looking like they were plucked right from the movie, Avatar. They are shell-less marine gastropod mollusks, seemingly highly vulnerable to predators, but are another example of aposematic coloration, just like toxin-laden Monarch Butterflies; many nudibranchs derive venomous protection by sequestering poisonous nematocysts from their anemone prey. Gorgeous, regardless.



Giant Nudibranch, *Dendronotus iris*. Specializes in hunting tube-dwelling anemones. Known to "swim" by undulating its body. Seen next to kayak at first night's camp. Photo © Jay Jeffrey

The Pacific Ocean floods into the Strait of Juan de Fuca bringing nutrient-rich water mixed by the tidal currents. In the SJI, on average there's about a vertical tidal range of 10 feet (water height between low and high tides). Daily high and low tides (4 per 24 hours) surge through underwater canyons, gorges, crevasses, and abysses, all found in-between and around the archipelago's islands; nutrient-dense currents and upwellings from the deep fuel water near the surface. A source of major sustenance. Tiny plankton, crustaceans, fish, birds, seals, sea lions, dolphins and the great whales, all find SJI niches to thrive in.

Birding Paddle Trips

San Juan Islands (Part 1) - Archipelago Jay Jeffrey

That first day's paddle wore a smile, sported prescription-polarized sunglasses, and sucked in rich saltwater air carried by cool breezes over sun-sparkling water. Ocean currents moved at the same speed and power at the surface — carrying a miniscule speck of a kayak — as they did hundreds of feet below the kayak's hull. Rounding an island's point, the water's depth immediately shallowed to only a few feet with the current racing over it; looking through the clear water, as the kayak zoomed along, it felt as if I were riding a hovercraft suspended over ground. Looking up, a small islet not 10 yards long was covered with Harlequin Ducks shared with several Black Oystercatchers; the sun at my back, the golden light on them — brilliant, colorful, crisp, the memory photographed through canyons and creases of my brain with immaculate detail; the background a large orange honeycombed-sandstone island capped with conifers and splattered with red madrone trees. Magical? Naturalist says, "Hell yes!"

Only the sound of a breeze, tidal water of moving currents slapping the kayak's hull, slurping of small whirlpools disappearing into ominous dark depths, but also a faint, "Pshhhh." If quick, a glimpse in the faint sound's direction might provide a look at a surfacing Harbor Porpoise as it takes a breath; shy, elusive, occurring in deep powerful currents, they're quick to resubmerge. Yet, exciting and invigorating if successful with the look; a unique, small, rarely seen blunt-headed short-dorsal finned porpoise — with mysterious lives, even to marine researcher biologists.

Harbor Seals often showed up for quick laughs, smiles, and general entertainment. Sometimes their bowling ball-sized head pops up at the water's surface, not moving, but rotating around like a submarine's periscope. They've got huge dark eyes, broad dog-like head, with a chubby and thick cat-like whiskered snout. They can be curious, and may follow you for some time, not very far from your kayak. Or they may be "hauled out" on shore to rest and warm up, they do this in a comical way by laying motionless in a "banana" like posture; flippers and head lifted up.

Magical? Wait till you read more about exotic-looking, ravishing, and quirky sea birds...and the whales!

To be continued...

2026 © Jay Jeffrey

Closing Quote, via Jay. As we reach winter's end and rally toward the spring equinox, I'm grateful for one particular tribe of birds: *"Whoever saw a dejected Chickadee? Even on the greyest day of midwinter, when the thermometer remains below zero and the snow lies deep over the land, the Chickadee is the personification of cheerfulness and good nature."*

— in Godfrey. W.E., 1966, The Birds of Canada.

Coastal expedition sea kayaks, secured ashore. Photo © Jay Jeffrey



Harlequin Ducks sharing mini-islet with Black Oystercatchers. Taken from narrow closed-cockpit sea kayak, one-handed with camera, in fast current and small tidal rapid (i.e., it's blurry). Photo © Jay Jeffrey



Harbor Seal "hauled out" to rest and warm in sun. Photo © Jay Jeffrey



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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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