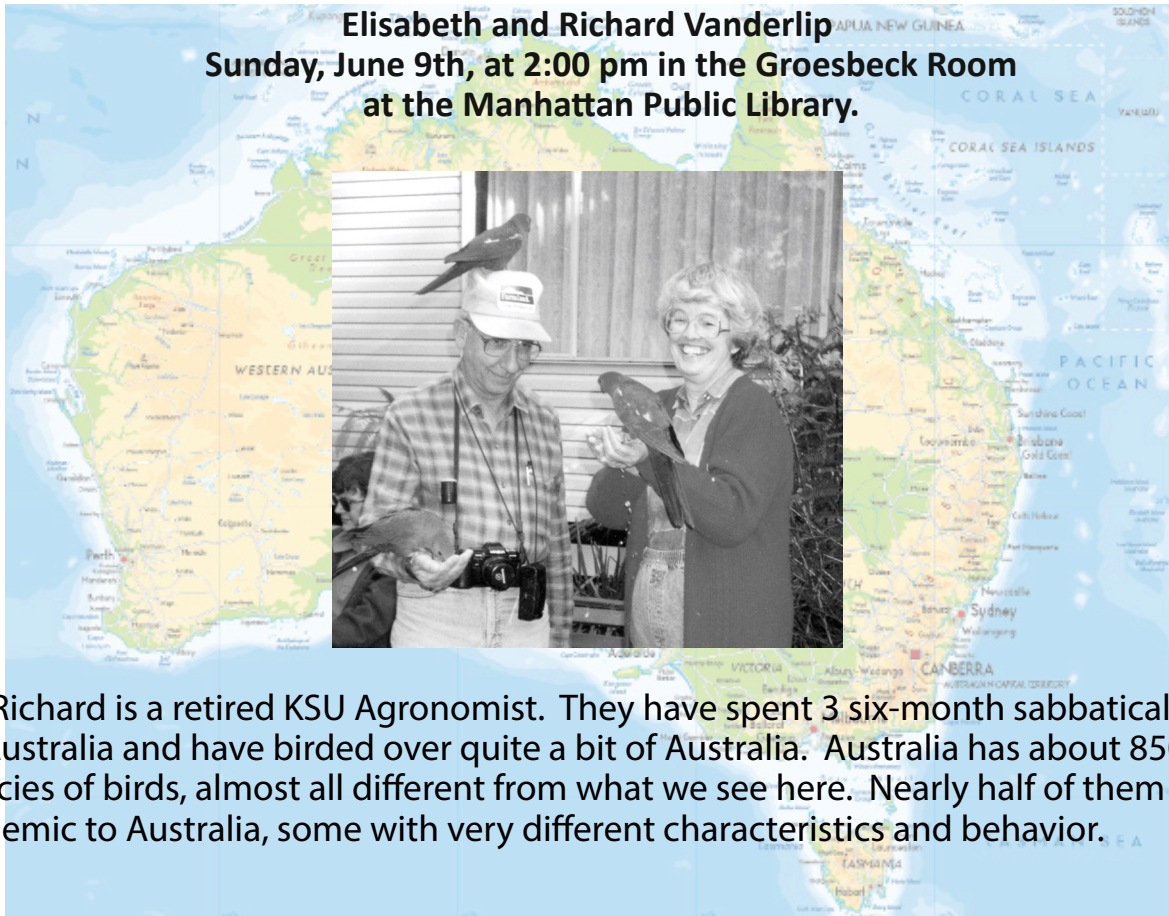


"Birds of Australia"

Elisabeth and Richard Vanderlip
Sunday, June 9th, at 2:00 pm in the Groesbeck Room
at the Manhattan Public Library.



Richard is a retired KSU Agronomist. They have spent 3 six-month sabbaticals in Australia and have birded over quite a bit of Australia. Australia has about 850 species of birds, almost all different from what we see here. Nearly half of them are endemic to Australia, some with very different characteristics and behavior.

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 52, No. 10, June 2024

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Upcoming Events

Jun 4 - Board Meeting 5:30 pm, Manhattan Public Library Study room

Jun 8 - Saturday morning birding: Departs 8:00 am from Sojourner Truth Park

JUNE PROGRAM:

June 9 - Birds of Australia - Richard Vanderlip 2:00 pm Groesbeck Rm. Manhattan Public Library



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Following up from last month's article: it must've been particularly interesting in its own way, maintaining an existence in the company of dire wolves, saber-toothed tigers, and short-faced bears, all of which being notably bigger and potentially aggressive.

According to Dan Flores in his book, "Coyote America", the current reading of the fossil record says that coyotes joined this company around 3.2 million years ago, diverging from their canid forebears, solely in what is now called North America. For a time they had the company also of huge mastodons, mammoths, rhinos, camels, beavers, and more; they were huge, I find it suggested, in order to produce enough heat, for they lived during the Pleistocene's great ice ages that came and faded, and finally left behind only those who could survive the environments brought about by the latest warm-up, all reduced in size, and not all in North America.

One thing noted about coyotes is that they had been larger, too, and evolved downward much faster than any of the others, taking a scant 1000 years, an eye-blink in fossil time-counting. This presages a key component of the species now: adaptability.

Early on, fossils show, they ranged much of the continent, but by the time humans arrived, about 15,000 years ago (sources vary), conditions were such that coyotes had essentially yielded the eastern forests to the bigger wolves and bears, and the mountains to the cougars, and had become mostly at home on the open plains and deserts, with some outliers in the Pacific Northwest. There began a history of human/wildings relationships in which coyotes found human encampments and cities intriguing. Certainly for them a new source of scavenging, and their cleverness at it, particularly their ability to learn from the mistakes made by others of their kind, evoked from the humans a special response.

As Dan Flores describes it, among the Aztecs coyotes, unlike raccoons, etc., achieved the status of a deity; not as a single remote god, but as gods-among-us, whose sly ways humans recognized as closely corresponding to the behaviors of their fellow humans. As mentioned last time, Flores reports that the Aztecs had several coyote

gods, including one they honored with costumed festivities and another they considered as the patron of pleasure and the arts, including, naturally, song. The Aztecs and the more northern humans had tales in which Coyote as the main character appeared sometimes as having the power of being the Creator of the Earth and procurer of the buffalo, at other times being the lustful trickster often undone by its own lack of restraint.

So for millennia, while other creatures from ravens to spiders also held roles in the tale-telling traditions of the continent's first humans (I wonder if somewhat analogous to today's movie stars), those humans viewed their equally variously vocal neighbors with a regard perhaps best captured by the Aztec expression: huehucoyotl. In English: "Old Man Coyote"

With the coming of Europeans that relationship was to undergo a change that has been horrific, with a coating of wonder. Next time.

Bright though it be, Venus makes only a low, brief appearance in the early morns till the 4th, then disappears until it begins ducking out of the evening twilight later in the month. Mars takes up the planetary slack with Saturn, bracketing the Moon on the first and keeping in touch the 2nd-3rd and Mars shines its reddishness between a returning Jupiter and the Moon the 15th—all during the wee hours.

The Moon gets near the Gemini Twins the 8th; Regulus at the base of Leo the 11th; and stays close to Spica in Virgo the 15-16th. It glows close to Antares as darkness descends the 19th. The Saturn and the Moon will ride the sky together from around midnight till dawn the 27th.

Meanwhile the northern summer will begin at 3p51 during the longest day of the year the 20th. The Moon will be new the 6th at 7a38, full the 21st at 8p08.

Correction to May Skylight: "the star Arcturus is 36.7 light years away, not that many million miles as accidentally stated."

Snakes Alive

Dru Clarke



A vine of a snake, lime green and twining, easily three feet of legless wonder, it seemed to want to slide inside the house, thwarted by a much bigger biped who quickly closed the door. This slithering 'slim fellow' (taking liberties with Emily Dickinson's 'narrow fellow') appears yearly, either it or its offspring, and is welcome outside. Somehow its kind finds its way up through the corner cupboard (built just above the cellar of loosely joined limestone) to the ceiling vent in the west bedroom where, presumably, it would enjoy a nap beside one of our cats who has appropriated the bed. This is a Western racer, elegant and lithe and usually speedy, although a few years back I found one tied in knots, dead, on the edge of our lawn, evidently victim to a foiled but lethal attack. This is a snake we do not mind sharing our domicile with and I was sorry to see its lifeless body.

Another species we aren't so enthralled with. In gathering our hen's eggs from a nest box resting on the floor of the poultry palace (so anointed due to paying homage to my husband's carpentry skills) I noticed the interior of the box seemed darker than usual. The palace is unlit so I couldn't see very well and usually I feel the oval smoothness of an egg within. A gaping mouth, visible from the white lining, told me a snake lay coiled, ready to defend its dinner. A black rat snake was no stranger to these parts.

In the old, abandoned well adjacent to our house they



had a hibernaculum: a mass of twisting, living, black licorice ropes overwintered there. We built an addition over the well, so they must have relocated their winter quarters, but we still see them often. Some migrated to the cellar and we find thin, translucent skins shed as they grow. They are impressive snakes, fattening and lengthening to just under two meters (Joe Collins referenced one from Butler county that was 74 inches), with a maximum suggested of 101 inches. During courtship, the male sometimes bites the female before he aligns his body next to hers to copulate. They are constrictors and are opportunistic feeders, as we can testify. We were protecting, we thought, a chick and its mother in a wire cage to keep it away from the rooster and other hens, when we found a black rat snake

had crawled into the cage and swallowed the chick but was then too fat to crawl out! Another ate all of the wren nestlings in a nest on a ledge in our implement shed, and just yesterday, the blue jays created a loud ruckus in an attempt to drive one from a nest in the closest hackberry tree. We think that because this snake is so successful as a constrictor we have never encountered a venomous snake on our land. (I am very familiar with copperheads as I grew up with them and saw them frequently.)

Our pond is big enough to float a craft and I used to take Sukie, our small shepherd mix, with me when I'd paddle my poke boat about. One day, a large water snake who had been basking on the shore took umbrage at our proximity and came straight at us so fast that it created a wake in the water. The dog was so scared she climbed from the bow into my lap! Fortunately, we escaped without it boarding.

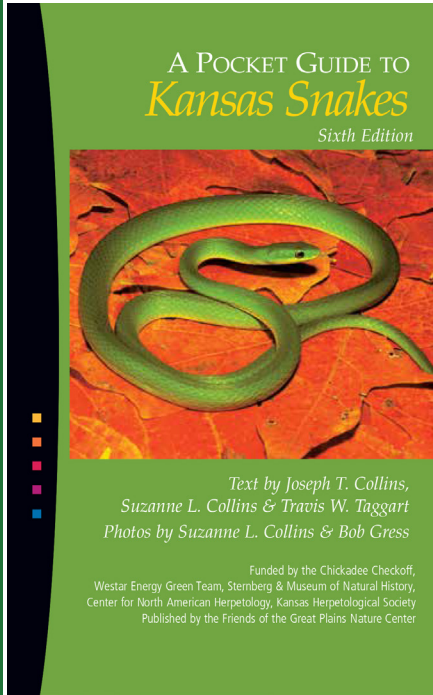
On nearby Hopkins Creek, a perennial creek happily flowing full now after recent rains, a limestone ledge affords a great haul out spot for the resident water snakes. Last year, we found a milk chocolate colored plainbelly specimen basking on it, but it soon disappeared, probably providing a meal for the great blue heron. And, spring is in the air, evidenced by two copulating water snakes on another flat rock in the creek. The larger of the two slipped back into the stream when we approached, but the other remained unmoving: post-coital bliss or ennui? It fled when we splashed water on it.

A student I keep in touch with told me that she used to come into my classroom before school and hold the snakes. One looped its tail tightly around her back belt loop and she was late getting to her first hour class as a result! And, Lowell Johnson's son, David, while on a field trip into Project WOLF proudly presented me with a slender, lime green-tailed snake: a baby copperhead. We gently released it away from everyone. Snakes most definitely enliven our lives.



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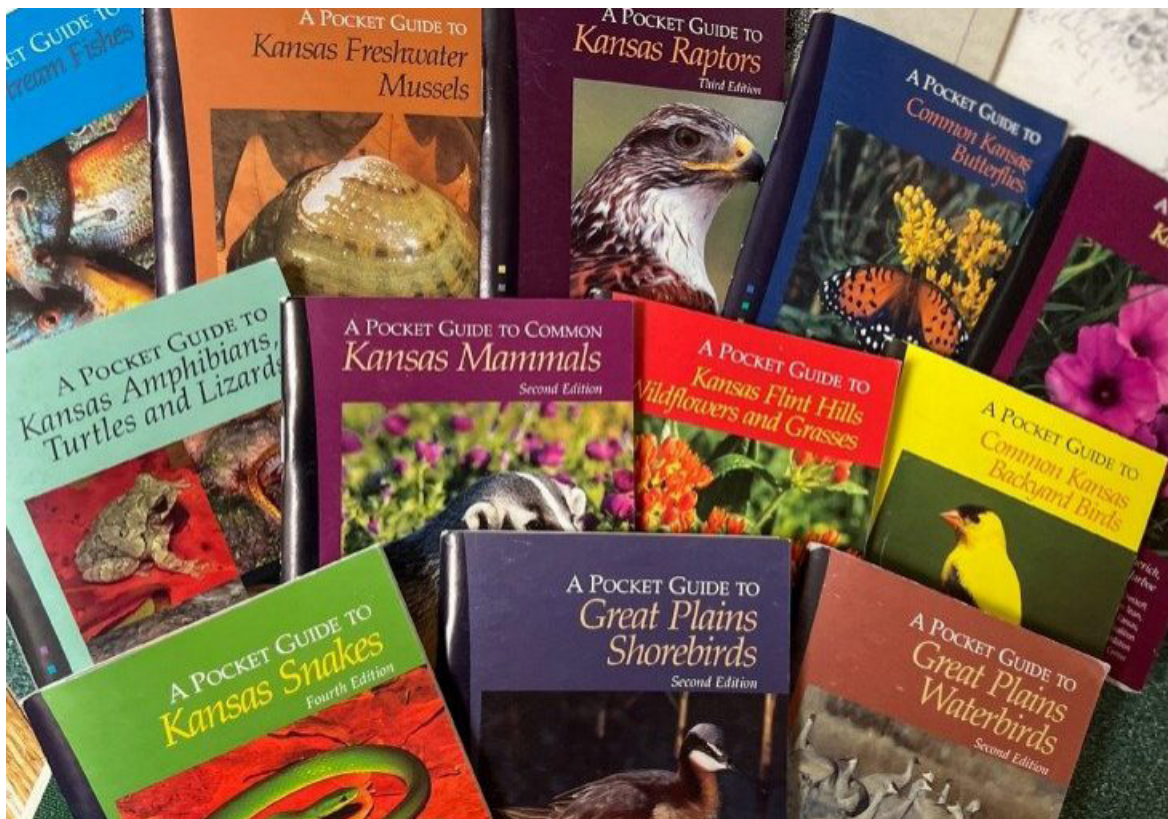
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2024 Birdathon Report

Jim Koelliker



Dear Friend,

The 40th annual Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Birdathon, April 27-28, was the effort of five teams who searched in an area generally centered on Manhattan. Our teams were very successful and found a total of 129 species, a new record. The Master list can be found on our website as well as the Composite list. The birders who reported their findings, and the local areas we all searched are at the bottom of the Master list. Despite the very windy, stormy weather of the afternoon of the 27th, our results are amazing. This 2-page report is my effort to continue the more than 20-year effort to show the species found, 104 this year for my Koelliker team, identified by the **RED "4"** in the **'24 column**, and the 24 additional species not found by my team, but found by the other four teams are identified by the **RED "A."** The row for each species provides a way for you to see how often each species has been found in the previous twenty years.

Unusual species found this year are shown on the fourth page, **Best Birds of 2024**. Four species, Bewick's Wren, Kentucky Warbler, Short-Billed Dowitcher, and Canvasback Duck, were first-time finds in at least the past twenty years! The other four shown were also quite rare to be found. Every year we miss several species that we expect to find. Our biggest misses are listed on that same page. Considering the weather, chilly and generally windy, and other personal limitations, I am thrilled with our results. I was hoping to exceed one hundred. *PS: As I am preparing this, a painted bunting is at the feeder. We have not reported one for the past twenty years during the Birdathon!*

I always enjoy working on this Birdathon because I like the challenge and making this detailed report helps me be even more aware of our local birds. Too, I hope you find this report interesting & informative.

Yes, this report is a request for your financial support for the Northern Flint Hills Chapter of the Audubon Society. This effort is our primary fund-raising activity. Last year over forty contributors generously donated over \$3,000 that the chapter put to effective use to support our efforts in the area.

I am again asking for your support for my team and/or any of the others who made this effort a success by completing the form on the bottom of this page and sending it along with your check or cash to me, Jim Koelliker, at 3500 Mintons Lndg, Manhattan, KS 66503.

This year, too, our NFHAS helped the KSU Bird Club, avid student birders on campus, with some expenses to go birding at Cheyenne Bottoms and one of their members worked in Clay County and Upper Milford Reservoir area the same time as the Birdathon. While their efforts were outside the areas we have scoured over the forty years of the Birdathon, they reported their results to me. So, I included their findings in the comprehensive summary of all the species locally to show the breath of species you might expect to find in our wider areas and it is on the last two pages of this report. Their efforts increased the total species identified to 175! This total effort shows me the wonderful diversity of bird species that you might expect to find in the wider area of eastern Kansas in late April.

I hope you find this report interesting and useful.

I look forward to your support of this 40th Annual Birdathon!

Thank You!

2024 Birdathon Report

Jim Koelliker



Bewick's Wren – 1st time found



Kentucky Warbler – 1st time found



Snow Goose – 3rd time found



Least Flycatcher – 3rd time found

Best Birds of 2024

Biggest misses this year: Coot, Great Horned Owl, Wood Duck, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Bonaparte's Gull



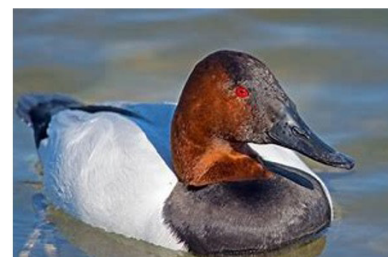
Le Conte's Sparrow – 2nd time found



Hudsonian Godwit – 3rd time found



Short-Billed Dowitcher – 1st time found



Canvasback – 1st time found

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Manhattan, KS 66503**

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Thank you 785-776-4915 koellik@sbcglobal.net

In addition to my party, Koelliker, four other local parties reported their efforts to find species in a general area from north to Olsburg, south and west to Geary Co. State Lake and east to Lake Elbo. Weather pleasant to stormy.

In addition to my party, Koelliker, four other local parties reported their efforts to find species in a general area from north to Olsburg, south and west to Geary Co. State Lake and east to Lake Elbo. Weather pleasant to stormy.

Koelliker, Michie, Mayfield, Shih
Yeager, Bower & Fay
Taylor & Jeffrey
Staats & Oberst
Bower
KSU Bird
K

The KSU Bird Club has a large area around Milford Lake and Clay Creek. The Club reported from birding in the Cheyenne Bottoms and

and one report
County. Most
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areas.

KSU Bird Club Local
KSU Bird Club CB & Q.

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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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