

Join us Feb.19th, 7 p.m.

at the Manhattan Public Library Auditorium

Program by Scott Vogt of Dyck Arboretum of the Plains

“Prairie Landscapes”



Photo by Jacque Staats

## Pileated Woodpecker

*Dryocopus pileatus*

These crow-sized birds are a memorable sight with their zebra-striped heads and necks, long bills, and distinctive red crests.

This one is visiting a backyard near Keats, along Wildcat Creek.

*(six were seen on the Manhattan CBC)*

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



## prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 43, No. 6 ~ February 2015

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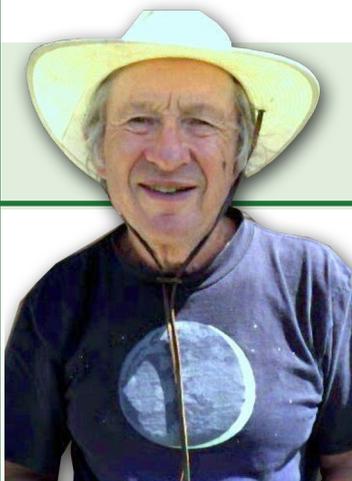
### Upcoming Events

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

**Feb 14 - Saturday Morning Birding**  
8 a.m. Sojourner Truth Park

**Feb 19 - Scott Vogt, Dyck Arboretum**  
**Manhattan Library Auditorium**  
**7 p.m.**

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



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

The seasons keep returning, recognizable though never quite the same; likewise the reflections they engender. Once again I note the hour is late, eyelids are drooping. There is a yearning for the nearby bed or bedroll; it matters not which, because it doesn't matter whether the action in front is in a fireplace or within a makeshift ring of campsite stones. In either setting, the much subdued yet lively remains of a fire that is persisting in eating away at the last piece of wood are entrancing.

By now the main blaze [brightly yellow-and-red-edged-with-blue, hotly-in-your-face, with all its frenetic peaks solidly connected] has worn itself out, exhausted its nutrient, save for that last remaining piece of limb. Some of its warmth lingers, but is diminishing. The replacing chill also pushes one toward recline and cover.

But that last limb still holds to its shape and composition. At random it seems, here then there, little spurts of blue appear from within it, then withdraw; wisps of gray or lit smoke momentarily escape from indiscernible fissures, and simultaneously all about it red beads brighten and dim, and most noticeably various spirals or blossoms of amber leap a short ways up, or expand diaphanously, producing in combination a dance of many veils, the whole performance specific to its time and place, never to be repeated the same.

Now a part of the beleaguered limb collapses to ash. What remains are two separate pieces. The end of one, with red sparkles and shadowed groves, suddenly looks like the face of a large spider. The sparkles burn out into dark circles; the face becomes that of a small monkey. Other transformations suggest different presences, each change producing more ash. Yet wherever wood remains, varied effusions of fire continue to dance. The limb cannot be left alone to its fate. The dancing is too alluring to be left to pass unwitnessed.

Eventually there are only embers, brightening and dimming in interesting patterns. But sleep calls stronger, chill pushes harder. The fireplace screen is emplaced and abandoned, or the once entrancing arena is buried under spadeful of dirt. 'Tis ever thus.

It is likewise also for the millions of bodies aflame out in space, the seen by us and the unseen, all burning toward annihilation, in their cases by implosion, explosion, collision, or methods yet unknown. Meanwhile all the un-ignited planets and their moons give forth their own reflections.

And because during this season the constellations in view contain some of our brightest stars there is a kind of nightly competition for our attention between the reflective and the inflamed. Of the former class our Moon is, of course, the big gorilla, erasing, when he swells his chest, all but the most irrepressible stars such as Sirius, the Dog Star in a frozen leap up toward Betelgeuse on Orion's right (left to us) shoulder as they glide across the southern sky. Later on in the month, Regulus, at the bottom of Leo's reverse question mark, will insist on being present from mid-evening on.

Yet likely it'll be Venus catching most eyes, starting each evening higher in the west, but never high enough that she doesn't set within a couple hours after the Sun, leaving Jupiter, in pale Cancer, to continue drawing attention from dusk to dawn, at his brightest for the year on the 6th. Reflecting Saturn and the Moon form a mixed trio with Scorpio's burning Antares before the dawn light the 12th and 13th, but the reflectors rule alone in the evenings of the 19th-21st as Venus and Mars squeeze together, with the crescent Moon almost literally horning in on the 20th, about two extended hand-widths high in the SW. Mars, being smaller, further from the Sun, and lacking a cloudy cover, will be only one-hundredth as bright as Venus, but will obtain some gilt by association.

The Moon will be full the 3rd at 5p09, new the 18th at 5p47.



# Cyphering

Dru Clarke



unique acoustic signals in captivity. Meaning is conveyed and understood.

We humans claim the development and use of our symbolic number system as the greatest intellectual achievement of all. The origin of zero may be the most remarkable, traditionally ascribed to the Hindu-Arabic cultures. Another writer says zero – symbolizing the absence of something or the presence of nothing – may have been the impression in sand left by a removed stone after that amount of grain the stone’s place represented had been traded. Amir Aczel, author of “Finding Zero,” discovered zero chiseled into a 7<sup>th</sup> century temple’s vine-covered wall in Cambodia, so where the concept really originated is still up for debate.

Animals other than humans can “count,” or, at least, discern which is less and which is more. Our mother cat knew when one of her kittens was missing. A mother skunk, herding her kits across a road, knew when she finally had them all safely across. Our herd of horses knows when one is not present, and they call ‘til it comes trotting in. My friend’s African Grey parrot could probably count to six, if trained as others have been, but she’s content to teach him new words, like “Bazinga” (it took two days). But, truthfully, I think members of a group that live together form such intimate bonds so that if one is absent the others become anxious, even distressed. This behavior is empathic rather than cognitive, and not the employment of arithmetic.

The geese flying overhead were probably obeying physical laws and unaware of the pattern they were creating, and what far afield ruminations they had set in motion. But winter seems long and what could be better to do than to consider the possibilities of discovering hidden meaning in the signs.

*©Jan. 2015 Dru Clarke Note: the girl whose “ciphering” lacked sufficient competence turned out to be a published poet.*

*\*In December, on the ground, in corn fields south of Wamego, Snow and Ross’ Geese gathered in such huge numbers one could only estimate how many there were. A KWPT officer we encountered said easily 50,000 (but maybe as much as a quarter of a million?) coming and going in waves. Numbers seemed irrelevant in the face of such an abundance of life.*

The geese flew in loose ciphers, editing their calculations with strong wing beats, adding and subtracting their numbers according to the vagaries of the wind, temperature, and pressure: tumbling columns of cuneiform figures whose sum total proved elusive as they marked, then erased, their passage across the blank sheet of sky. I wondered if they had any idea of what they looked like from the ground. \*

My one-time boss solicitously rolled his eyes one day when sharing the proclamation his daughter’s teacher had made about the girl’s “ciphering,” or practice of arithmetic. It evidently was inadequate, according to the standards imposed upon that grade level, yet more egregious, it seemed, was the earnest teacher’s use of an idiosyncratic regional term for doing arithmetic; she was, you see, from Tennessee. “Ciphering” **is** doing arithmetic in that state and, I presume, in several surrounding states of the Appalachian family. But ciphers, symbols or marks made without recognizable words, encode messages for human use, but could they exist for other species that may (or may not) be aware of their significance?

The evidence for this is spotty, as far as I could find. All encrypted messages for species other than human are encoded in their body patterns, their “looks,” movements, cries, and fragrant secretions. Visual, auditory, tactile and olfactory, intrinsic to the design of the body and the species, but no symbolic artifact is **created** to be interpreted by members of its kind. The penguin and his single stone, the crow with proffered twig, the bower bird with his elaborate hut, are extrinsic cues linked to courtship rituals, but all have been plucked from their environment: How remarkable it is for us to be the sole proprietors of symbol **making**.

Yet, patterns exist in the natural world that **suggest** signaling of the sort we associate with symbols. The calligraphy found in bark is laden with scent deposited at discrete intervals by the excavating beetle. Claw marks and stripped bark on a tree trunk announce ownership, as does scat on a trail or urine on a fencepost or hay bale. Defensive circling of musk ox, bison and cattle: a signal that danger is near. Red adjacent to yellow on a snake shouts beware. Crests, elaborate tails, wing bars and eyespots, and blood-engorged gular sacs are all startling body adaptations that say, “I’m available” or “stay away.”

Tufted capuchin monkeys recognize and exchange symbolic tokens for preferred food. Chimps and bonobos apparently respond to words on cards as representing the objects they name. Orcas, the largest of the dolphin tribe, develop dialects distinct from other pods, and even create



# SAVE THE NEW DATE

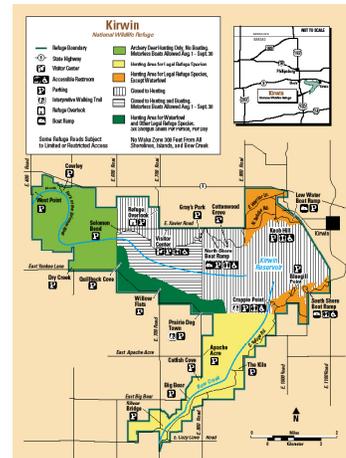
Mark your calendars now!

Friday, March 13, 2015

A day trip to Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge, where the tall grasses of the east meet the short grasses of the west. Wildlife common to this mixed grass prairie are found on the Refuge. There could be cranes, migratory birds, deer, badgers, quail, etc.

You can go to the website:

<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kirwin>



Trip is three hours, one way. Tentative schedule is to leave Manhattan about 10:00 am, eat lunch in Phillipsburg, tour the refuge, see visitor's center, and head home toward sunset, approx 7:00 pm. Probably have supper in Beloit. Contact Carla Bishop, [carla.kay.bishop@gmail.com](mailto:carla.kay.bishop@gmail.com), 785-539-5129, if you are planning on coming. Will need a headcount by March 6 in order to make arrangements for drivers, vehicles, etc.



My cousin, Jane Moore, in Illinois was fascinated by Dru Clarke's article in the January 2015 Prairie Falcon. She gets the newsletter because she supports me annually for the NFHAS Birdathon. She had collected specimens near Hiawatha and she sent me the attached pictures.

She wrote,

*"Dec 20 at 7:32 PM*

*I was very interested in Page 3. I will make sure I send a copy of that page to Dee Ann and Tim.*

*When we "toured" their farm, I collected a lot of the algae fossils mentioned in this article! They are very cool. I just checked and didn't take pics of them on that excursion but I have a LOT of them outside in my rock garden!"*

Thanks for your article Dru.  
Jim Koelliker



# 2014 Manhattan CBC

Brett Sandercock



KS-Birders:

The 2014 Manhattan CBC (66th count) was held on Saturday, December 20 with 54 observers in 23 parties for a total of 115 party hours. Preliminary results as follows.

Total numbers recorded on the count were 73,594 individuals of 94 bird species.

Three new forms were added to the Manhattan CBC checklist: GadwallxMallard (hybrid, count week/cw only), Northern Flicker (intergrade, 1), and Dark-eyed Junco (Pink-sided race, 1).

We had new high counts for four species in 2014: Ross' Goose (38), Pileated Woodpecker (6), Yellow-rumped Warbler (183), and Red Crossbill (27).

Good birds that turned up on the count included: Red-shouldered Hawk (2), Merlin (6), Prairie Falcon (1), Red-breasted Nuthatch (2), Winter Wren (2), Marsh Wren (1), Northern Mockingbird (2), Fox Sparrow (3), Rusty Blackbird (85), Common Grackle (3), and Purple Finch (3).

Four species were seen in the past 3 days but not found on the count day: the GadxMall hybrid (cw), Greater Prairie-Chicken (cw), Northern Goshawk (cw), and White-winged Dove (cw). A near miss was Northern Bobwhite with only a single individual detected (1), down from a peak count of 1,041 in 1982.

Upland gamebirds remain low with zero Ring-necked Pheasants down from a peak count of 87 in 1985 and cw Greater Prairie-Chickens down from a peak count of 132 in 1980.

On the other hand, geese showed elevated populations. Our count of Snow Geese was 48,869, well above the median annual counts of 0-200 birds for the half century between 1949-1999.

Outright misses of species not recorded on the count but detected in >50% of past CBC years included: Northern Pintail, pheasants, Wilson's Snipe, Loggerhead Shrike, Bewick's Wren, Swamp Sparrow, and Brewer's Blackbird.

Thanks to Northern Flint Hills Audubon for sponsoring the compilation and all of the participants who joined the count!

Regards,

Brett K. Sandercock, Professor of Wildlife Ecology

Division of Biology, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, 66506

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The complete report is on our website: [nphas.org](http://nphas.org)

## Free-Roaming Cats: A Conservation Crisis

Domestic cats (*Felis catus*) can provide excellent companionship and make wonderful pets. But when allowed to roam outdoors, this non-native, invasive species threatens the welfare of birds and other wildlife and endangers the integrity of the ecosystems into which domestic cats are introduced.

Domestic cats are recognized as a threat to global biodiversity. Cats have contributed to the extinction of 33 species across the world and continue to adversely impact a wide variety of species, including those that are threatened or endangered. The ecological dangers are so critical that the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) now lists domestic cats as one of the world's worst non-native invasive species.

In the U.S., free-roaming domestic cats kill an estimated 1.4-3.7 billion birds and 6.9-20.7 billion mammals. The sheer quantity of cat-caused mortality is staggering. For perspective, consider that 1.4 billion is equivalent to the entire human population of China, the most populous country in the world. As the number of cats continues to grow and owners continue to allow their pets to roam, harmful impacts will surely increase.

Fencing around bird feeders: Some people have found that placing poultry or rabbit wire fencing around bird feeders and bird baths is a very effective way to prevent cats from killing birds at these locations. The fence need only be two feet high and four feet in diameter. If a cat tries to jump over it, the birds have a greater opportunity to fly away.

Ultimately, cats are not responsible for killing our native wildlife—people are. The only way to prevent domestic cat predation on wildlife is for owners to keep their cats indoors! Citizens can also oppose Trap, Neuter, Release programs, which are inhumane and ineffective at reducing cat populations.

See <http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/index.html> for more information



**The Great Outdoors is  
No Place for Cats.**



## General Hazards To Free-roaming Cats

Outdoor cats, even if otherwise well-cared-for, face an extraordinary array of dangers. According

to The Humane Society of the United States, roaming cats typically live less than five years, whereas cats kept exclusively indoors often live to 17 or more years of age.

While letting cats outdoors may seem the natural thing to do, the hazards that cats face when they leave home are numerous. **The best way to keep cats healthy, and protect wildlife and human health, is to keep cats indoors.**

**Cars:** Millions of cats are killed by cars each year in the U. S. and countless others maimed.

**Animal Attacks:** Outdoor cats can be injured or killed by free-roaming dogs, wildlife, and other cats.

**Poisoning:** Cats can find chemicals that are poisonous to them on treated lawns, in rat or mice bait, and on driveways and roads from antifreeze leaked or drained from cars.

**Human Abuse:** Animal care and control agencies often learn of situations in which cats have been burned, stabbed, poisoned, or hurt by other means.

**Traps:** Cats can get caught in traps set for other animals and may become injured or suffer before being released.

**Predation:** Coyotes regularly feed on outdoor cats, according to a scientific study.

**Feline Diseases** Roaming cats are at risk from many diseases, some of which are acquired from prey animals. Some diseases affecting cats can be transmitted to humans.

**Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV)** compromises a cat's immune system and is the leading cause of death due to infectious disease in cats. There is no cure. The virus is shed in feces, milk, and tears, but is spread between cats primarily via grooming, licking, biting, and shared food dishes and litter pans.

**Feline Panleukopenia Virus (FPV)**, also known as feline distemper, is extremely contagious, either by direct cat to cat contact, or indirect transmission from clothing, by people, or inanimate objects. Fleas can also spread the virus.

**Feline Infectious Peritonitis (FIP)** is a progressive, debilitating, difficult to diagnose, and fatal viral disease. FIP is transmitted via feces, urine, or nasal/oral secretions through direct contact with infected cats, as well as use of common food bowls, water dishes, and litter pans.

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**Upper Respiratory Infections (URI)** are highly contagious and common in felines, especially young kittens.

**Rabies** is caused by a virus which can infect warm-blooded mammals, including cats, people, wildlife, and farm animals. Outdoor cats are at risk of contact with rabid wild animals such as raccoons, skunks, foxes, and bats. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cats are the domestic animal most commonly found to be rabid.

**Plague** is caused by the bacteria *Yersinia pestis*, and is transmitted primarily by wild rodent fleas, mainly in the states of New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and California. Cats can become infected from flea bites or from eating infected small mammals.

**Cat-Scratch Disease (CSD)** is caused by the bacterium *Bartonella*, and is transmitted from cat to cat by fleas. Over 90 percent of human cases are associated with either a scratch or a bite received from a cat.

**Hookworms** are a type of roundworm that live in a cat's digestive tract and can infect human skin, causing lesions. People acquire hookworm larvae through contact with wet sand or soil. For example, sunbathers and children, and electricians, plumbers, and other workers who crawl beneath raised buildings are particularly susceptible.

For more information, go to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention web site at:

[www.cdc.gov/healthypets/](http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/).



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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](mailto:list_serve@ksu.edu)> and join in the discussions.

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