

Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum*

"They arrive like thoughts unbidden in meditation, unpredictable from on high. And look as if painted by a great Japanese artist of long ago, delicate yet strong, subtle yet stunning."

Slow Birding, Joan E. Strassmann

The Cedar Waxwing is one of the few North American birds that specializes in eating fruit. It can survive on fruit alone for several months. Brown-headed Cowbirds that are raised in Cedar Waxwing nests typically don't survive, in part because the cowbird chicks can't develop on such a high-fruit diet.

Many birds that eat a lot of fruit separate out the seeds and regurgitate them, but the Cedar Waxwing lets them pass right through.

Building a nest takes a female Cedar Waxwing 5 to 6 days and may require more than 2,500 individual trips to the nest. They occasionally save time by taking nest materials from other birds' nests, including nests of Eastern Kingbirds, Yellow-throated Vireos, orioles, robins, and Yellow Warblers.

The oldest recorded Cedar Waxwing was a male and at least 7 years, 1 month old when he was recaptured and rereleased during banding operations in Maryland in 2014. He was originally banded in the same state in 2008.

They seldom come back to the same place - as rarely do banded birds come back to where they were banded. So likely the ones you see this year are not the ones you saw last year in the same



Photo by Dave Rintoul

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

May 2 - Board meeting - 5:30 Public Library

May 13 - Sat. morning birding
8:00 am Depart from Sojourner Truth Park

May 13 - WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY (see page 4)

Go on nature walk or with us (see Sat. Morning Birding)

Get involved with us

Set up bird feeders



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Lately my attention has several times been directed to another one of those global situations that can put down local footprints. In this case the subject is light. By direct conversation and by items in the news, I've learned of people in this area whose quality of life is suddenly being negatively impacted by too much of it. In these instances specific individuals are being affected, but there is at the same time a much broader effect.

The situation can have its lighter side. There is the story of the trial attorney who, in trying to cast doubt on the testimony of a hostile witness, asked, "Just how far do you think you can see at night?" "I dunno," came the reply, "how far is the Moon?" The reference might as well have been to the stars. The serious side is that light has a compulsion to travel and spread—but it can be manipulated.

Over twenty years ago cell phone towers began blooming. Their tops needed to be lighted for the safety of aircraft, and needed to be brighter than daily sunlight. At night that same brightness flooded the landscape, destroying the comfort of numerous homes, interfering with vision on some highways, etc. A tower five miles from us lit our yard enough for reading with repeated flashes. That problem has been largely ameliorated by using red light through the darker hours. Without going deep into the technical science, red light has longer wavelengths than other visible light, thus impacts eyes with less energy than light of shorter wavelengths.

The recent occasions I've been made aware of involve, particularly, installations that illuminate certain schoolyards as well as (apparently uncaringly) a great deal of their surroundings. Bedrooms are invaded, their windows blurred, blotting out even the little bit of the night sky that had been available. Of what worth is the energy that is projected blocks and miles away from a site where it is wanted? To me it represents preventable waste. My key witness for this is not Tucson, which has been guarding its night sky for too long to offer before-and-after comparisons, but is Calgary, Alberta. For a score of years it has been engaged in a program of hooding and aiming tens of thousands of municipal lights and reports reaping significant rewards in lowered emissions and costs. Since January 1, 2016 Tulsa, Oklahoma, has in effect precisely worded regulations stated to reduce nuisance lighting and glare.

Meanwhile, as stated, the situation is broader than specific sites. When Brewster Higley in the 1870s penned the first verses that have become the song known as Home on the Range, and wrote, "How often at night when the heavens are bright/ With the light of the glittering stars/ Have I stood there amazed...." He was not only expressing the feelings many have that a view of the natural night sky gives an extra value to living, but he was also observing more stars than are visible to our unaided eyes today.

An article on p.10 of the February 11th Science News reports that overall the night sky has become 10% brighter (the stars thus that much dimmer) each year between 2011 and 2022. Satellites, I'm told don't notice this, because they don't pick up light emitted horizontally from signs and windows (which emit as well as receive light). And they are insensitive to the blue light that LED sources scatter upon particles in the atmosphere. While for ground-based and lower altitude creatures there are consequences in having a night sky that is less glittering and more of a vague sheen.

I understand that some creatures depend on visible stars to help them perform their life cycle. Night-active insects become more visible to predators, and those distracted to bright bulbs are also more vulnerable. That is not the sole cause of the widely reported dearth of insects and a resultant serious reduction in needed pollination and birdlife, but needless lighting exacerbates it. In our area scissortails and plovers no longer brighten our days and nighthawks no longer entertain us at dusk. These results seems due more to lack of overall social and governmental will than to any other natural force.

Venus will nonetheless be a dazzling light in the evening sky this May, while Mercury will remain too dim to be seen. Dawn light of the 13th will have Saturn just above and leftward of the Moon, and of the 17th will have Jupiter and the Moon almost in contact but requiring a low horizon to be witnessed. And that evening of the 17th Mars will start a week of helping make a three-point line with the two Gemini Twins, to Pollux's left, both slightly rosy. The Moon will climb alongside that group from the 22nd to 24th.

The Moon also has early evening dates with Virgo's Spica the 3rd, and again the 30th and 31st. In between it visits Scorpius' Antares before midnight the 6th and 7th, and with Leo's Regulus the evening of the 26th. Leo gets to host both Mars and Venus the 31st. Moon full the 5th at 12p34, new the 19th at 10a53.



Transition

Dru Clarke



A spring azure fluttered up and down as I opened the pasture gate. Its tiny, inch-wide wingspan was startling with its powdery blue wings, backdropped by the dry, brown and rutted track it trembled over. There was no standing water to puddle in, a wondrous behavior to happen upon after a rain when the azures congregate to sip en masse. Later, while sitting on the couch, I felt a tiny thing crawling on my neck. A minuscule caterpillar of unknown parentage inched – no, millimetered – toward my hairline. The day before, after mowing fire-breaks along our fence line, I peeled off my dusty socks and found two seed ticks on my calves, symmetrically latched on, greedily trying to gain a blood meal. A third was wedged between my toes. Spring was trying to pry open the door and come bursting in.

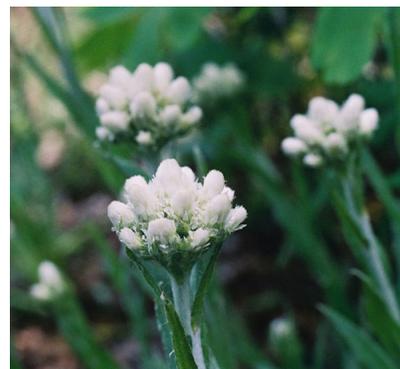
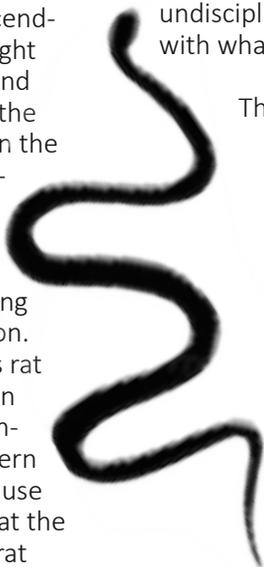
Budburst of the lilacs happened on April 4 here, and the first elm leaves, no bigger than a mouse's ear, gave the trees a faint pale green haze. The daffodils and narcissus had been tricked into blooming by a warming, then nipped by a below freezing night. Recovering a week later, they drooped drunkenly but didn't succumb completely. An early, 90F degree daytime temperature sapped our energy but aroused the flies who swarmed our cows' and horses' backs. A lot of tail-switching and rubbing ensued.

That warm day aroused another resident, who has lived harmoniously with us for several years. In ascending the stairs to go to bed, I noticed a pile about eight inches across on the fifth step. I often put books and a change of clothes on the steps to carry upstairs, the books, to read at bedtime and clothes, to put on in the morning after shedding pajamas. This was an unfamiliar shape, more a coil than a loose pile. It was our 'friend', or one of its offspring, an eastern racer (*Coluber constrictor*). Normally, a variety of snakes spends the winter in our basement, slithering in through crevices in the limestone rock foundation. We've found ring necks, garter snakes, great plains rat snakes (that's another story), slender smooth green snakes (although they are supposed to live in northern counties along the Nebraska border), and eastern racers. No large venomous species, probably because the constrictors are so efficient in catching prey that the venomous have no niche here. (We have LOTS of rat snakes, evidenced by the number of shed skins we find

each year in the basement.) This was not a fully grown racer, only about a foot and half long, and was easy to scoop up in a dust pan and place in a waste paper basket to be gently deposited outside. I felt bad, knowing that it would be a very cold night, but the cracks in the house were nearby, so it had a chance to crawl to a warmer bed for the night. Better there than MY bed.

Smoke today cast a pall over the land: a neighbor was burning west of us. We took the Ranger to check their progress and discovered a careful crew managing the slow burn well. I walked back over the high ground, finding inch-high pussy toes in bloom and death camas blades, five inches tall, stitching themselves to otherwise naked patches of soil. Emerging from the ground, the blades are initially folded, like paper prom pom-poms. Nature's origami. The dormant buffalo wallow, located on the highest level, was dusty and bare of vegetation, excepting some dried sprays of snakeweed blown in from the surrounding prairie. After we burn in the next few days, the prairie will transform from brown to carbon black, to a lush gem-like green that will lure livestock from feeders to freedom. One spring, after the cows had been sequestered all winter, subsisting on hay and molasses-sweetened grain, I opened the gate that held them in and a veritable stampede of thousand-pound bovines rushed the meadow like an undisciplined chorus line, kicking high and gamboling with what I imagined were wide grins on their faces.

The door has been pried open: welcome spring!



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World Migratory Bird Day MAY 13

May 13 - WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

Go on nature walk with us (see Sat. Morning Birding)

Get involved with us

Set up bird feeders

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Tip 2 of 5

 • TRACKED Golden-crowned Sparrow	 • TRACKED Swainson's Hawk	 • TRACKED Tundra Swan	 • TRACKED Whimbrel	 • TRACKED American Golden-Plover	 • TRACKED American Goldfinch	 • TRACKED American Kestrel	 • TRACKED American Oystercatcher
All Species (458) Alphabet				 • TRACKED American Pipit	 • TRACKED American Redstart	 • TRACKED American Robin	 • TRACKED American Tree Sparrow
 Acadian Flycatcher	 Alder Flycatcher	 Allen's Hummingbird	 American Avocet	 • TRACKED American White Pelican	 • TRACKED American Wigeon	 • TRACKED American Woodcock	 Anhinga

Blue Bird Trails & Boxes



Report: Bluebox trail monitor, **Greg Wurst**, has been faithfully monitoring the Bluebird boxes at Carnahan Creek Park. He has cleaned and/or replaced all the boxes on this trail!

While hiking/walking the park you can see the boxes up on the hill (east side).



Cygnus the Swan (A metaphorical bird)
by Peter Zachary Cohen

Aiming down the Milky way, wings out spread in flight,

it can be clearly seen that cygnus splits the night.

'Ween stars to the left and right, he's steady on his aim

Amid the mist of the Milky Way his stars are all aflame.

Denebs burning at this tail, Albireo at his beak;

Sadr joins wings to breast, one more spark amid the streak.

The Sky's great Path, the Star's great Swan
together travel on and on;

Yielding west when autumns nigh
back in summer to split the sky.

This poem in last month's issue of the Prairie Falcon somehow had its last line missing. Here it is in full.



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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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