

**"THE WORLD'S WORST PROBLEMS"**  
**DR. WALTER DODDS**  
**TUESDAY, NOV. 16, 7 P.M. MANHATTAN PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
**GROESBECK MEETING ROOM, 2ND FLOOR**

Dr. Dodds will explore some of the worst problems that currently, or could be predicted to, afflict humanity. The root causes and required solutions will also be addressed in a general sense for all the major problems. The presentation will build on "Humanity's Footprint," a recent book on global environmental issues by Dr. Dodds. The talk will bring out points based on sound scientific facts, and issues that humanity should not ignore if they are to at least sustain current lifestyles, and certainly if we are to improve living conditions for all people.

Dr. Dodds is a University Distinguished Professor in Biology at Kansas State University.



NORTHERN FLINT HILLS Audubon Society,  
P.O. Box 1932, MANHATTAN, KS 66505-1932



## prairie falcon

NORTHERN FLINT HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 39, No. 3 ~ NOVEMBER 2010

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### Upcoming Events:

Nov. 1 - BOARD MEETING 6 p.m.  
HOME OF TOM AND MJ MORGAN

Nov. 13 - BirdSeed PICKUP UFM parking lot,  
8:30-11:30 A.M.

Nov. 13 - 8 A.M. - NOON: SAT. Birding - Cleanup  
AT Michel-Ross PRESERVE - BRING A BAG  
& binoculars (STAGG HILL)

Nov. 16- PROGRAM by WALTER DODDS,  
7 p.m. TUESDAY,  
MANHATTAN Public Library  
GROESBECK MEETING RM

DEC. 6 - BOARD MEETING

DEC. 18 - MANHATTAN CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT



## SKYLIGHT PLUS

PETE COHEN

The sky looked perfectly clear but the same observation contained evidence to the contrary. Numerous swallows were soaring about and the setting sun was a scarlet disk. What seemed clarity was likely a huge haze of flying insects and suspended particles.

It's old news that things aren't always what they seem. Hook-and-line anglers depend on it, and just because it quacks and waddles and flaps like a duck doesn't mean it isn't a shooter's decoy.

Price tags reading \$9.99 apparently manage to make items seem significantly less costly than \$10. An Australian friend who arrived via Minneapolis remarked on the special beauty of seeing that city's lights from the air. I could not figure what could be special about Minneapolis' "lights" until I realized I was misinterpreting her pronunciation of "lakes."

A brief news item this past summer indicated that the cat that prides itself as a mouse-catcher may simply be living easy thanks to a parasite that causes mice to behave carelessly--the parasite needing time in a cat's stomach to complete its life cycle. With so many better traps, owls, foxes, etc. around to interrupt it, that such a life cycle survives seems newsworthy. Also of interest was the report that the same organism, related to the one that causes malaria, has been noted in schizophrenia and in people who (by whatever measure) exhibit a lack of curiosity. If curiosity can be affected by an organism, why not kindness, etc. Here another phrase becomes important: correlation doesn't necessarily indicate cause. Still, the question remains open.

The difference between appearance and reality is a distinction doctors, detectives, and

everyone else need to keep making. But one thing is certain, when the stars of November appear above, for the foreseeable millennia it will be November, no matter what Earth's atmosphere makes it appear to be.

At, say, the middle of November the celebrity constellation, Orion, has arisen in the east, following Taurus with his red eye, long horns, and the Pleiades on his shoulder. The Gemini Twins are above the horizon north of them. The Milky Way is streaming east-west from between the Twins and the Hunter, past the bright star Capella in the pentagonal Charioteer, Auriga, thence containing the amorphous brightnesses of Perseus, then the notable Queen Cassiopeia, a W now as one looks north. Then it provides a flight path for Cygnus the Swan (aka the Northern Cross) with bright blue Vega in the Lyre Bird to the north of the Swan's extended neck and the sparkle of Altair, in Aquila the Eagle, slightly southward.

Going back east and southward the Great Square of Pegasus is present modestly, trailing the gown of Andromeda, a laterally curved long V, with the small three-star constellation of Aries below it. The two Pisces fish swim faintly below Pegasus, and faintly below them, from east to west is the lateral loop of Eridanus the River, then Aquarius, then saucer-like Capricorn just fitting into the scene at the SW.

But they'll all be second, third, and fourth fiddlers to Jupiter blazing between Aquarius and Pisces through the evenings, setting before being outdone in spades as Venus rises in the east ever earlier in the pre-dawn to wee hours, shining--The Old Farmers' Almanac says--250 times brighter than Spica in Virgo a little above her, and Saturn a little further yet above. The Leonid meteor shower competes with Old Man Moon till he sets about 4 am. on the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>. Moon is new the 5<sup>th</sup> at 11p52 and full the 21st at 11a27.

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In lieu of the regular second Saturday bird walk, please stop by the Michel-Ross Preserve and bring a bag along with your binoculars. If you are picking up birdseed - stop by and help with the cleanup, and look for birds! Whether a half an hour or all morning - your help will be greatly appreciated - and we will have a cleaner preserve.

Patricia Yeager



## LIFE AFTER DEATH

DRU CLARKE



On the bank of a nearby creek, whose name I will keep secret, is a pair of dead trees. Possibly elms who succumbed to the plague of Dutch Elm disease, they are without bark and stand tall and pale against the forest of healthy trees. The reason for their continued importance and value long after their demise is that they are home to a family of red-headed woodpeckers. Woodpeckers have resided in these trees for as long as I can remember, but this year there seems to be a particularly rich one for these startling birds.

As I stood on the low water crossing watching the trees, I saw first, two, then three, and finally five adults on one of the trees, the tallest, at one time! Two juveniles, distinctly different in their brownish-gold plumage, clung to the trunk below the adults. Not only do they drill and nest in these trees, but they use them as a perch they return to over and over again, sort of like a lookout station. Both male and female birds are colored the same (monomorphic) so can't be told apart in the field. But how striking they are with their blood red head, black cape and tail, and cottony white belly. No wonder the Cherokee cherished it as a war symbol and used its head as an ornament for battle; the same bird inspired Alexander Wilson to become an ornithologist and Longfellow in imagery in his poem *Hiamatha*.

Numerous vernacular names have been given to this spectacularly colored bird, and my favorite is shirt-tail bird, although a contemporary one might be Dracula bird for its vampire-like feathering. It is a raucous extrovert, and you often hear them squabbling before ever seeing them. No songbird, its calls are like something you might hear in a dentist's office or mistake for the "tchurring" of a squirrel.

They are, interestingly, omnivorous, and are one of four species of woodpecker who cache their food, the other three being the red-bellied, the acorn and the Lewis' woodpecker. The red-headed, however, is the only one who covers the cache with bark or leaves. They have been known to store *live* grasshoppers, wedging them in tight places so they can't free themselves. They also fly-catch, a behavior they are especially good at. A population decline in some areas has been linked to



the disappearance of a certain species of grasshopper, and competition for nesting sites with the European starling has also been offered as a reason for their disappearance in other regions. But they are an 'edge' species, so benefit from some human-generated environmental change. Ironically, the bird's numbers were enhanced by the blight that killed the American chestnut: all those dead trees were a windfall for nesting sites. Studies of their population ups and downs are imperfectly

understood, and it seems a lot more attention should be given to research on this extraordinary bird.

Following the microburst in August that destroyed many trees in Manhattan, tree removal has been at an all time high. Dead trees in an urban area can be hazardous to life and property, but they are a boon in remote rural settings where animals can reap the benefits of their existence. They provide life after their death and leaving them standing should be one of our priorities. The red-headed woodpecker would be one named in their will as main beneficiary.

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## K-STATE FRESHMEN RESPOND TO "GHOST BIRD" DOCUMENTARY

MJ MORGAN

On September 15, 2010, NFHAS sponsored the screening of the award-winning national documentary, "Ghost Bird," describing the controversy over the sighting of an extinct ivory-billed woodpecker in Arkansas in 2004. Many of you were able to view this film -- we counted over eighty people! MJ Morgan, Vice-President of NFHAS, brought her K-State freshman history class. These students then wrote strong responses to Ghost Bird. Read their memorable reactions and insights below. The future of conservation and also, of local chapter memberships like our own will depend on this generation of activists.

**Melissa Murray, Lenexa, Kansas:** "The ivory-billed woodpecker used to thrive in our iconic forests...but it seems in American history we make the same mistakes over and over again."

**Andrea Kruse, Manhattan, Kansas:** "...has resulted in the extinction of multiple amazing creatures we're supposed to be sharing this world with."

**Chance Bentley, Caney, Kansas:** "Man has come to believe that his want comes before the need of an animal."

**Adam Rosendahl, Leavenworth, Kansas:** "...the Singer Sewing Machine Tract in northeastern Louisiana is reminiscent of the early American settlers over-logging their local forests."

**Diane Enix, Fort Collins, Colorado:** "Our sky that once was filled with giant flocks of birds is now only sprinkled with some of the few species left."

**Elizabeth Chasteen, Topeka, Kansas:** "Even species that were once abundant are subject to extinction when their entire habitat is taken from them."

**Brandi Herman, Hill City, Kansas:** "Fast forward to the future and the same, undeniable fact is still true about most Americans. We want it all."

**Jessica Smith, Rantoul, Kansas:** "The establishment of Jamestown in 1607 was only the beginning of a rapid effort to dominate land."

**Dylan Shade, Topeka, Kansas:** "The history of woodland wastefulness carries on all the way to the 1940s destruction of the Singer Tract."

**Kris Wittman, Council Grove, Kansas:** "I know that the human being is constantly having an effect on the life of wild animals."

**Levi Winkler, Sabetha, Kansas:** "We can make many connections between the ways that 17<sup>th</sup> century New England colonists and the people of northeast Louisiana in the 1940s treated their environment."

**Alexis Filippo, Chicago, Illinois:** "Colonists used the beautiful, untouched forests at their disposal, treating them as an unlimited lumber yard."

**Alex Henry, Stockton, Kansas:** "This is why finding the ivory-billed woodpecker would have been amazing... a small light in a very dark history."

**Amber Griggs, Arkansas City, Kansas:** "And even now, have we taken notice to the effects of our actions and how they impact our environment and animal species that share our planet?"

**Angela Graves, Tescott, Kansas:** "This early land was lush...filled with forests. Destruction of these forests led to habitat loss for wildlife."

**Haylee Smith, Mulvane, Kansas:** "What an amazing sight it would be to see the graceful ivory-billed woodpecker take flight!"

**Katie Crosswhite, Kansas City, Missouri:** "The Singer Sewing Machine Company knew all the risks. They knew they were destroying habitats and nature but they proceeded with the destruction anyway."

**Joe Blundell, Spokane, Washington:** "Ghost Bird documentary only talked about a few bird species, but more than 140 species have been wiped off this planet."

**Erin Morts, Wichita, Kansas:** "Indians would also use the beak and tail of an ivory-billed woodpecker as part of their apparel..."

**Amber Kriley, Stockton, Kansas:** "Ghost Bird has really opened my eyes to the fact that we have destroyed so much of our environment."

**Kyle Pfautsch, Lenexa, Kansas:** "What the early New England towns did to their habitat is what we yet did in the 20<sup>th</sup> century."



## TAKE NOTE

### MORE ABOUT WOODPECKERS

There are more than 180 species of woodpeckers worldwide, but none of them are found in Australia, Madagascar or New Zealand.

A woodpecker's **tongue** is up to **4 inches long** depending on the species, and it wraps around the skull. Many woodpeckers have barbed tongues that help them extract bugs from trees and holes.

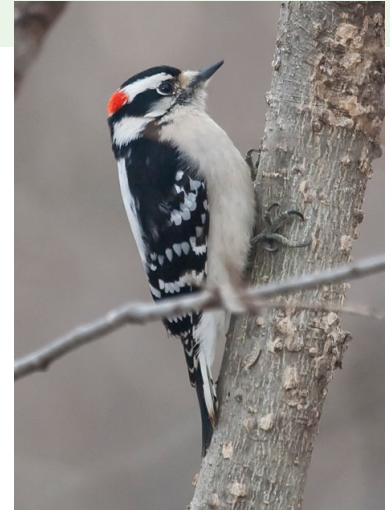
Most woodpeckers have **zygodactyl feet**, which means they have toes facing the front and toes facing the back to help them grip trees and poles vertically. They use those toes with their stiff tail feathers to brace on trees as they climb.

The two largest woodpeckers in the world are the imperial woodpecker and the ivory-billed woodpecker, but both may be extinct. The largest confirmed woodpecker is the great slaty woodpecker of Southeast Asia, which measures 20 inches long. The pileated woodpecker is the largest North American woodpecker species.

The **piculets** are a type of woodpecker found South America and Asia and they are the smallest woodpeckers, measuring only 3-4 inches long depending on the species.

Between feeding, excavating nest cavities and drumming, woodpeckers can peck up to 20 times per second, or a total of 8,000-12,000 pecks per day.

Woodpeckers don't get headaches from pecking. They have reinforced skulls structured to spread the impact force, and their brains are tightly cushioned and protected.



*Photo by Dave Rintoul*

The downy woodpecker is the most common backyard woodpecker in North America, and is one of only about two dozen woodpecker species found in the United States.



On a lighter note: check out these clips on YouTube, from BBC One Just go to YouTube, and search Funny Talking Animals.

Funny Talking Animals - Walk on the Wild Side  
Especially episode 3:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQ1HKCYJM5U>

### “SAVE YOUR HOLIDAY WINE BOTTLES!”

A wonderful re-purposing use for large glass wine bottles is to make a butterfly watering station from them for next season. The depression in the bottom of wine bottles, called the punt, is a perfect size to hold water for butterflies of all sizes. After removing labels, bury wine bottles neck down in a row. The punts will fill with rain water – or you can keep them filled – and provide a line of tiny watering troughs for butterflies. One NFHAS member set up a wine bottle station this past summer and reports the butterflies were drinking steadily every day. It's especially effective to place the bottles near plants that attract butterflies.

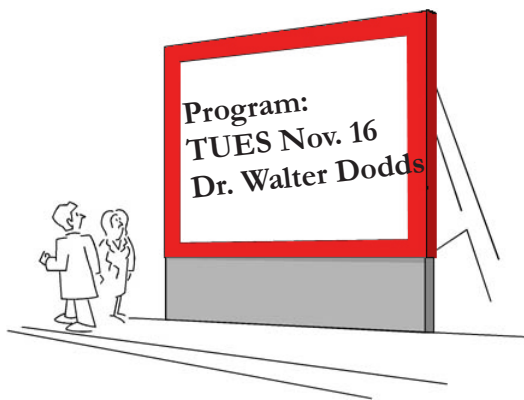


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Subscription Information: If you do not want to receive the national magazine, but still want to be involved in NFHAS local activities, you may subscribe to the Prairie Falcon newsletter for \$15/yr. Make checks payable to the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, and mail to: Treasurer, NFHAS, P.O. Box 1932, Manhattan, KS, 66502-1932

RARE BIRD HOTLINE: For information on Kansas Birds, subscribe to the Kansas Bird Listserve. Send this message <subscribe KSBIRD-L> to <[listserve@ksu.edu](mailto:listserve@ksu.edu)> and join in the discussions.

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