



2018 BIRDATHON Apr. 28-29 Clyde Ferguson, Chair

If you love the outdoors, spring weather and enjoy nature, join us in our quest to count as many bird species as possible in one 24-hour period.

Funds raised will again be used to help with several local projects in Manhattan. A portion of the funds will go towards the Northeast Community Park (Northview), the butterfly garden at Sojourner Truth Park, Alsop bird sanctuary, and the Michel-Ross Preserve and educational activities. In the past, we (you, our sponsors) have donated Birdathon funds to the Washington Marlatt Park, the Rowe Sanctuary on the Platte River in Nebraska.

Many of our ongoing projects and activities, such as wildlife preservation, publication of the Prairie Falcon, and bringing in special speakers for our monthly program meeting are also partly funded with Birdathon funds.

(more information on page 6)

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

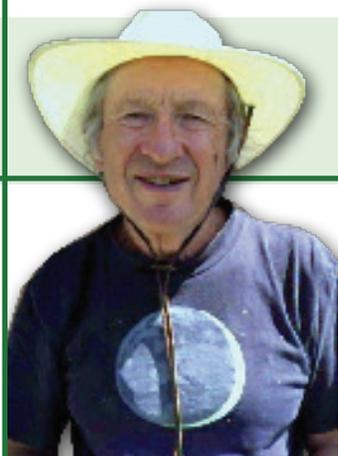
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Upcoming Events

- Apr. 2 - Board Meeting- 6:00 pm
Tom & MJ Morgan home
- Apr. 14 - Saturday Morning Birding 8 am-11 am
Departing from Sojourner Truth Park
- Apr. 24 - Hometown Habitat Documentary 7- 8:30pm
Topeka and S.C. Public Library (see pg. 4)
- Apr. 27-28 - Kansas Birding Festival
Acorns Resort, Milford Kansas (see pg. 4)
- Apr. 28-29 - 2018 Birdathon, (see page 6)



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

A hundred years back from next November, after four years a-boil, the horror of WWI ended. Almost a hundred years earlier, on January 1, 1818, after a two-year gestation, a much less painful and calamitous horror, having awakened on a table in the laboratory of a certain Victor Frankenstein, was first set forth, and has been active here and there ever since. It seems an open question as to which is better known.

And while WWI had numerous instigators, the creature whose story was first published that New Years Day is credited to basically just one author, though Mary Godwin, then soon to become Mary Shelley, may have had some help from her soon to become famous poet husband. Besides that, were it not for a suggestion made during a small party on a gloomy day to see who could come up with the best horror story, she maybe would never have ever composed it. (That was in 1816, the “year without a summer” due to cloud debris from the Tambora volcano’s eruption.)

But just maybe. For in 1780 Luigi Galvani had discovered that electricity applied to a dead frog’s legs caused them to twitch. His frog remained resolutely dead, yet that was amid the Enlightenment when humans were discovering they could manipulate phenomena like electricity that before had seemed tools only the gods could use. Sooner or later, it seems, someone would’ve come up with a tale of galvanism, the production of electricity from chemical reactions, producing life.

Mary Shelley never gave a name to what her Dr. Frankenstein brought to life by putting together various body parts, resulting in a male eight feet tall because of the difficulty of working with smaller parts. Usage alone has pinned on him the name of the doctor who was appalled by what awoke, and fled, abandoning the creature to go forth alone, seeking acceptance and friendship, finding it briefly with a blind man, but encountering mainly depressing rejections, and in fact himself recoiling from his appearance as reflected in a pool. When he angrily seeks out his creator, demanding at least a female companion, the doctor starts to comply, then demolishes his half-finished effort, fearing the two would procreate, to the detriment of all humanity.

Whatever Mary Shelley had in mind is now only a matter for speculation. Some suggest she was giving a romanticist’s warning about getting too materialistic with nature. She could’ve just been having fun letting her imagination roll, while bearing in mind a world with emotions. She gave her book an alternate title: “A Modern Prometheus”, referencing the joyful myth of a god credited with the creation of humans from clay and then angering Zeus by providing them with fire, and for the latter being subjected to a hideous punishment which he endured until rescued by Heracles (a/k/a Hercules). In the end she has the creature take revenge upon the doctor, as well as the doctor’s bride, for awakening him to a life that became so miserable, and then, finding no relief in vengeance, going off into the polar wilderness, never to return. Or so she wrote.

Nonetheless with his imposed name he’s been returning again and again, these two hundred years, in one venue or another; another tragic figure joining those in the daily news.

Speaking of repeat performances, the plainly sparkling form of Leo the Lion will be returning to the evening sky again this month, along with the expansive yet less noticeable Virgo the Maiden trailing lower behind him with the kite-shaped Boötes the Plowman/Herdsmen above her. The latter two are easiest found by noticing their single bright stars in the lower parts of their forms: Spica in Virgo, Arcturus in Boötes, which are way-stations on the imaginable arc that curves from Alkaid (at the end of the Big Dipper’s handle) down to Arcturus and then to Spica. Between Boötes and Leo will be a bunched sprinkle of stars that were once considered the tuft at the end of the Lion’s tail, but are now known as Coma Berenices, the hair of Berenice, referencing an Egyptian lady whose tale is too long to be recited here.

As to the planets, reddish brightening Mars and Saturn get friendly as April begins, being barely an extended finger apart in the morning sky the 2nd just above the Teapot contained in Sagittarius the Archer, which is moving part in and part behind the southern end of the Milky Way. The Moon joins them the 7th and 8th. On the 17th Saturn will stop its west-to-east drift and move in sync with the background of stars before beginning an east-to-west “retrograde” drift that will last till September before reversing--an optical effect occurring as the Earth on its shorter inner orbit passes Saturn on its longer outer track and one looks at the ringed planet from reversing angles.

For the evening show Venus will start descending from ever a little higher, always a little brighter, being to the left of the Moon on the evening of the 17th and left of the Pleiades the 24th-27th. Jupiter will begin showing up with his usual bright shine after 10 o’clock, near the Moon on the 2nd and 3rd. The Moon visits Regula the 23rd-24th, then takes three nights to cross 50° of sky (five hand widths) to come near Spica the 27th-28th; then to neighbor Jupiter again 29th-30th. New the 15th at 8p57, full the 29th at 7p58.

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Winter Quarters, or “Nests for Let”

Dru Clarke

Naturalist Bernd Heinrich, in a recent edition of *Natural History Magazine*, wrote about birds who overwinter in cold climes and how and where they hole up during frigid nights (and sometimes, days). Hollow logs, burrows, dense branches, and even snowdrifts can shelter them, singly or, sometimes, with companions. Nests built to hold eggs and baby birds that persist after their initial use are occasionally encountered by sojourners off the beaten path, but these nests, with a bit of remodeling, can be adopted by some overwintering birds. I set out on a bright March day to find some.

The first and most obvious nests discovered were those of squirrels, high in the crowns of trees, sometimes taken over by opportunistic great horned owls who do little to modify them. Their broad, leafy structures are easy to spot. In a dense thicket of plum, dogwood, and sumac, between prairie pastures, was a telltale pyramidal mound built by "glitter weavers," our native pack rats. One I found years ago had collected a crushed beer can to decorate the exterior, but this one was purely minimalist, its single entrance secreted behind woody stems at ground level. Another, found around the holidays, had sprigs of bittersweet encircling its perimeter, with a cluster of the bright fruits placed delicately on the tippy-top. My favorite today – and in the past – was a waist-high (3 feet tall!) edifice situated in a thick, shrubby growth of Kentucky coffee tree saplings on the edge of a high, level prairie: much of its twiggy surface was studded with horse turds. Was it the fragrance or the heat given off from the ripe 'apples' that drew the rodents to this practice? Or simply their aesthetically appealing shapes?

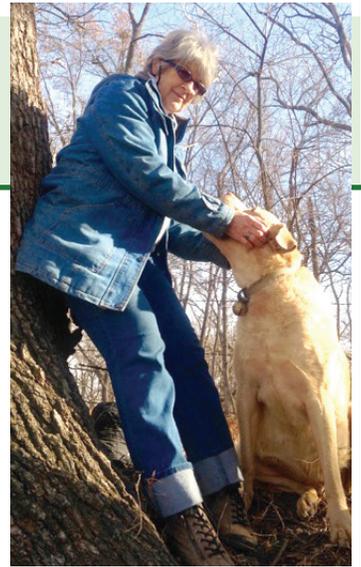
One empty bird's nest was firmly tethered to the slender branches of a smooth dogwood, just at eye height. Having been buffeted by winter winds and freezing precipitation, it had weathered challenging conditions for several seasons. Cup-like, it measured just under 3 inches in diameter and 2 inches deep. Curious about its construction, I found it lined with threads of russet-colored grass (or finely shredded cedar bark?). Could it – if cedar – have been chosen to deter pesky insects from infesting chicks? To impart a pleasant fragrance? (It smelled now a bit like dry hay.) Repel moisture? Create a springy bedding? The

grass blades forming the main structure wound horizontally over and under the supporting twigs, essentially tying it down, mooring it to a firmly anchored shrub. (see photos). Who claimed it I don't know, but a pair of sweet-sounding sparrow-size birds were seen perch-

ing nearby, as if checking out the neighborhood. If anyone can ascribe ownership of said nest, please let me know.

A more imposing nest rested above my head, at six feet, in an almost impenetrable thicket, teetering on a green brier vine. A haphazard mass of twigs, resembling the beginning of a game of Pick-up-Sticks, it was lined with leaves and assorted stemmy growth. According to my *Peterson's Field Guide to Birds' Nests* it most closely resembled, it initially seemed, the nest of the black-billed cuckoo, a bird who returns to our land yearly. (Jays', crows', and mockingbirds' nests – similarly built – appear to have more rootlets in their linings than this one.) But, I didn't feel around in the innards of the nest – to me, it seemed a violation of its space, so it may have had an abundance of rootlets beneath the ruffle of leaves. The nest was less platter-like and more concave than it appeared on first impression, so it may have belonged to our mockingbirds who return before the beloved cuckoo whom I confess is my most welcome summer denizen, arriving around or on May 22 each year to our neck of the woods. (See photos)

None of these domiciles seem to have had squatters move in after the original occupants moved out. I observed them during the day, so may have found some life in them during the nighttime. But, by then, I am comfortably at home in a warm and cozy bed built entirely by someone else.



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KANSAS BIRDING FESTIVAL - ACORNS RESORT, MILFORD, KANSAS

April 27-28, 2018

Bird and Wildlife Viewing Take a birding and wildlife trip you will never forget. Plan now to attend the Kansas Birding festival in 2018. Over 300 species of birds can be seen in the Milford Lake area. This area is rich in birding opportunities during the later part of April.

Not only are there native birds who inhabit the area year round, but it is the prime season for birds that migrate. Combine this with Milford Lake, the wetlands, and the native prairie; and you have the best locations in America for bird sightings.

For more information go to:

<http://www.kansasbirdingfestival.org/>

April 24, 2018 7- 8:30pm
Topeka and S.C. Public Library
1515 SW 10th Street
Topeka, Kansas

As more natural prairie falls under the plow and is converted to parking lots, homes and lawns, wildlife habitat is shrinking. Lost is diversity and critical connections between native insects and native plants. No native plants and insects. No birds.



But we ALL can do something! **Come see Hometown Habitat, a powerful documentary** about how we can make a difference in our own backyards. Hometown heroes from across the nation tell their stories of how they are Bringing Nature Home.

COME AND ENJOY! Bring a friend. Topeka Audubon Society & Jayhawk Audubon Society

Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library, 1515 SW 10th Ave, Topeka, KS 66604

Watch the trailer at: <https://youtu.be/UXbDWTfcK2s>

My First Class of 2018

Margy Stewart



This English major has struggled in recent years to learn more about the invertebrates that play such important roles in our native ecosystems. The beginning of the growing season is exciting to me, because SCHOOL IS STARTING!

My first class of 2018 got underway on the evening of March 4 when I found this moth on the wall next to my reading light. The second one came yesterday, when mosquitoes followed me through our oak woods. One landed on my ring finger and probed the skin next to the nail. It did not bite or whine, like the mosquitoes we're used to.

My teacher is bugguide.net, and I so I learned:

The moth is *Palea vernata*, aka Spring Cankerworm Moth, and the mosquito is *Anopheles punctipennis*, otherwise known as--good grief--Woodland Malaria Mosquito. I can tell you, folks, habitat restoration isn't all wildflowers and butterflies.

The Spring Cankerworm Moth is one of the first to emerge in the spring. Mine was a male, as the females are wingless. The females lay hundreds of eggs under bark and in other crevices, and the larvae can strip trees bare. A lot of the "silk" strands we see floating from trees these March days are the Spring Cankerworm larvae "ballooning" from place to place. Most references to *Palea vernata* can be found in sites devoted to pests.

So bird-lovers, bless the woodpeckers! And the Brown Creepers and nuthatches and all the birds that go up and down trees eating larvae.

My mosquito is likely a female, as the pale patches on the wings are distinctive. Woodland Malaria Mosquitoes are native to the central Great Plains and other parts of North America and are usually found where I found mine--in woods along slow-moving streams. Perhaps I have not noticed these mosquitoes before because often in spring McDowell Creek is in flood. This dry year we get a narrow creek creeping along--and we get *Anopheles punctipennis*.

Why do we have Woodland Malaria Mosquitoes but no malaria? I asked my entomologist friends and learned that malaria was once endemic in North America (indeed, the "fever 'n ague" the pioneers talked about was the fever and chills that accompany malaria). But major draining of wetlands and spraying for mosquitoes, combined with window-screens and successful treatments of the disease led to virtual eradication. The plasmodium parasite that causes malaria needs an insect host and a vertebrate host. As the plasmodium reservoirs diminish in both kinds of host, the chances of a mosquito spreading malaria likewise diminish.

Still I am pretty glad my mosquito's proboscis didn't actually pierce my skin.

In any case, even if our summer mosquitoes are all we have to worry about, we can bless all the insect-eating birds who keep us from being overwhelmed with crawling or flying chewers, piercers, and suckers. Bless the Eastern Phoebe--one of whom arrived in our yard today, vocalizing non-stop. Maybe just in time!



2018 BIRDATHON

Clyde Ferguson

It's time for our annual major fund-raising event, the NFHAS Birdathon. This year's event will be held on:

Saturday, Apr. 28 - Sunday, Apr. 29, 2018

HOW DO YOU DO IT?

It's simple. Collect pledges from your friends, contacts, or enemies to pay so much for each bird species that you can count within the 24-hour period of April 28- Sunday, April 29, 2018. The pledges do not have to be large; dimes, quarters and dollars add up quickly when many participate. Encourage your sponsors to pledge 20 or 25 cents per species spotted and you'll be surprised how much money you can raise with five or ten sponsors. If your sponsors want to pledge a set amount, that works great also.

We encourage you to make this a family outing. Go out and bird for 24 hours beginning sometime on April 28th. It's OK, for example, to bird from 10:00 a.m. on April 28th until 10:00 a.m. on April 29th. Report your findings to your sponsor and collect your pledges (often the difficult part). Send the money, names and addresses to Clyde Ferguson, 2140 College Hts. Rd., Manhattan, KS 66502. You just might surprise yourself with how many species you can identify. If you do not want to go out alone, or don't feel you can ID birds well enough, call me (Clyde) and I will put you with a group.

If you cannot join in the fun of going out yourself, you can still collect names and pledges and one of the members who will be going out can be your "designated counter." We call this a super-sponsor (not that any of our sponsors aren't super in our eyes). If you have a friend that is going out to count, ask him or her to be your eyes.

If you do not know anyone going out, contact Clyde Ferguson (539-4856), or any NFHAS board member (see the back page of your newsletter for contact information), or just send a note to: Birdathon NFHAS, PO Box 1932, Manhattan KS 66505, and we will find someone to count for you. We'll provide a list of the species counted and you can collect the pledges based on that list. On average, we see between 90 and 110 species on a good trip.

Don't forget you can be a sponsor yourself. Make your pledge to a friend or relative who is going to be a counter or super-sponsor. If none of our counters or super-sponsors contacts you, send a note or this form with your pledge and we will add you to our list of sponsors. If you prefer, send a lump sum donation c/o of the Birdathon to the address above. We're easy, we accept donations in almost any form.

Those donating \$15 or more may receive a one year's subscription to the Prairie Falcon (if requested on the form). Our normal subscription price is \$15 and the purpose of the Birdathon is to raise additional funds. Your donations and the donations of your sponsors are a tax-deductible contribution.

Please join us if you can and if you can't, please help us support and protect the wild things.

Clyde Ferguson,
Birdathon Chair



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

Return Service Requested

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Manhattan, KS 66502

Also available online at nfhas.org

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Edited by Cindy Jeffrey, 15850 Galilee Rd., Olsburg, KS 66520. (cinraney@ksu.edu)
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WE NEED YOU!

PLEASE consider joining our NFHAS Board.

The Board meets on the first Monday of each month. The meetings usually last about an hour.

Vice President

Secretary

Treasurer

Board member at large:

Education Chair

Birdseed Chair

NFHAS Board

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Contacts for Your Elected Representatives (anytime) Write, call or email: Governor: 2nd Floor, State Capital Bldg., Topeka , KS 66612. KS Senator or Representative: State Capital Bldg., Topeka, KS 66612. Ph# (during session only) Senate - 785-296-7300. House - 785-296-7500. U.S. Senator Roberts <Roberts@senate.gov> U.S. Senate, Washington DC 20510. Jerry Moran U.S. Capital Switchboard 202-224-3121.