



**Vultures are gone, eagles are back.  
Must be fall in the Flint Hills.**

Time to get ready for the Christmas Bird Count.

Come and review winter plumage, songs, waterfowl and shorebirds tips, and what birds to expect ...

You can also sign up for the CBC - and the sector you want do.



**Meet at the Groesbeck Room in the  
Manhattan Public Library, 7 p.m. Nov. 14th.**

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



## prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 41, No. 3 ~ November 2012

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### Upcoming Events

**Nov 4 Annual Michel-Ross Cleanup 1-3p.m.**

**Nov 5 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.  
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan**

**Nov 10 - Saturday Birding 8 a.m.  
Meet Sojourner Truth Park**

**Nov 14 - Winter Birds Review: Groesbeck Rm  
Manhattan Public Library 7-9 p.m.**

**Nov 15 - Deadline for Prairie Falcon articles**

**Happy Thanksgiving**



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

It's time for bed, but I've carelessly been too generous with the staves, so the fire

is still dancing brightly before me. Sleep is silently calling but I loath to pour water on such varied gaiety, or even put up the screen and leave it to perform unappreciated.

Our home fire is rather like a wandering pet that returns to the nook we provide in the fall. As the springtime warms it abandons that nest and goes out cavorting with others of its kind, sweeping away the prairie grasses in long wriggly lines. Later on it might perform various helpful services or as willingly become part of wild masses of flame that blacken mountainsides, reduce dwellings to ash, race at 30 mph through the treetops in the northern woods, without hesitating take the lives of any whom it overtakes.

Then in the autumn our small parcel of fire separates again and returns to nestle in our stove. It is no more like a conflagration than a housecat resembles a tiger. It makes gentle snappings and crackings and breathes soft puffings that are rather like a housecat's muscle-driven purring. And though it is not a pet to be held on one's lap, and will ill-reward any attempt at petting, it is a warming, calming, always interesting companion.

It not only leaps, it creates interesting pictures as it shrinks the wood it is feeding on. One chunk for a while will become a small dragon, with red glaring eyes and flickering tongue, and then be changed into the head of bird with flowing scarlet head feathers, and then diminish to appear as the crimson lava flow from some distant, smoking volcano as the fire comes close to finishing its meal.

Now its athletic zeal abates and it lies down to low, steadily changing patterns of glowing embers that occasionally sparkle here and there and show keep its warmth is still on offer. Those changing thought-stirring patterns have their own fascination, challenging one to interfere or to leave and miss some new configurations and inspirations.

But it is foolish to accept the challenge. One cannot stare down a fire, which, though its heat does fade, will keep sudden winks and glows teasing one to wait just a little longer all night. Already, I realize, I have dozed off, and missed some of the goings-on. My eyelids would just as soon close again. My thoughts are tired thinking. Up goes the screen. It will stay up till the twilight chill starts to settle tomorrow, and I awaken my companion with another offering of the energy hidden in the remains of dead trees.

Meanwhile Jupiter will be available for consultation all month, though engaged with the moon after sundown on the 1st and again on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Mars should be above the Moon as darkness comes on the 15<sup>th</sup>. The Leonid meteor shower will be on view the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> in Moon-less dark.

Other specialty acts are for early risers. Competing with the dawn of the 11<sup>th</sup>, the Moon, Saturn, and Spica will form a triangle, with Spica the faintest and lowest, below a brilliant witness: Venus. Saturn will be to the left of a thinning Moon on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Venus plays musical chairs with Spica, moving from upper to lower right the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>, then slips past to the right of Saturn the 26<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>.

On the 13<sup>th</sup>, the new Moon (new at 4a08 our time) will send a total solar eclipse sweeping past northern Australia and much of Oceania. Moon will be full on the 28<sup>th</sup> at 8a46.

*©2012 Peter Zachary Cohen*

## The Jersey Shore

### Dru Clarke



September has always been a month when I could not travel as it is the start of the school year, but now, freshly retired from full time, I indulged a newfound freedom by going, of all places, to the Jersey shore.

My cousin had a place near Point Pleasant that we used as our home base, but we headed out early one morning and threaded the coast line on Route 9, parallel to the faster Garden State parkway, to get a feel for the shore environment and communities after the high tourist season.

At Tuckerton, we took a narrow road that navigates over the salt marsh to end at the Rutgers Marine Science Field Station, recently converted from a former coast guard station. (I am a Douglass-RU grad and taught Oceanology for years, so this detour was a must.) Dripping from the blooming *Baccharis* (groundsel trees) that edged the road, were migrating monarch butterflies, so many they were nearly impossible to count. Before the last one-way bridge, a stand of scrubby trees served as a perch for two juvenile black-crowned night herons. The parents stood watch on both sides, at a discrete distance, giving the youngsters some independence. At the station I shared our find with the director, Ken Able: he had driven the road twice a day for twenty-five years and had not seen the night herons.

The wind and the sound of the pounding surf contributed to a first fitful night in Cape May: the old but historically rich Hotel Macomber hissed and shook in the strong south-southeast wind, not a promising portent for seeing the expected migrating birds that gather at the southern tip of New Jersey. They were hunkered down, waiting for north – northwest winds to give them a welcome push across the seventeen miles of Delaware Bay and onward to their wintering grounds.

At Cape May Point County Park the ranger scanned the sky for any movement of birds. Earlier a sharpie (sharp-shinned hawk) harassed several smaller birds and a few circling turkey vultures stirred the air. On the pond in front of the hawk watch platform, floated widgeon, gadwall, laughing gulls and the beautiful but undesirable (from an ecological viewpoint) mute swans who treated us to a balletic heart-shaped symmetry of curved necks. In the shrub of the marsh catbirds ruled and a yellow warbler was confirmed. One lone birder waited patiently on the path behind the dunes for a glimpse of a clay-colored sparrow, while others wandered over the nature trail to an observation deck to spy on an osprey on its nesting platform. Back at the hawk watch, a Caspian tern finally showed up and put on a spectacular

series of flyovers and dives into the pond. (I missed the one seen at the Christmas Bird Count, so this was especially sweet to see.)

Off Sunset Beach, the terminus of the state where Delaware Bay spills into the Atlantic, a host of Foerster's terns and a sprinkling of laughing gulls harvested schooling fish as I gleaned Cape May diamonds from the strand line. These smooth stones are created from raw quartz chunks that wash down from the Pennsylvania and New York highlands, the headwaters of the Delaware. When they reach the interface of the bay and the ocean, the push and pull of the rising and ebbing tides tumble them and buff their rough edges, and they are deposited in windrows by the waves of the high tides. Most are white, but some are rose or peach pink and others, smoky, and they glow with a satiny sheen in the backwash. In my pocket, they feel cool and hard.

Back on the ocean beach by the jetty at the end of Beach Avenue, hundreds of skimmers and a handful of Foerster's terns rest in late afternoon. The skimmers lie flat, their uneven beaks like scissors stuck in the sand. A man ran at them, arms waving wildly, to get them to rise up because his wife wanted 'a good picture.' Hands on hips, I gave him my most baleful stare. They eventually left, but only after the flock had split into three separate groups further down the beach. Waddling close to the jetty was a bruiser of a black-backed gull, the evident despot on this section of shoreline. A pair of knowledgeable birders enlightened me about their nefarious bullying tactics, so I watched him with some disdain, as I had the photographer's mate. At least the gull was expected to behave badly.

At home, I fished the Cape May diamonds from my jeans pocket, and put the most beautiful, shaped like a fat white satin heart, on the sideboard. One of our cats, Wilson, flipped it off and it shattered on the tile floor. How the stone had survived its journey from the mountains to a bay beach seemed marvelous to me, only to be destroyed by one playful motion. Maybe we should leave objects of nature where we find them and just take away memories.

© Dru Clarke October 2012





# Our Field Trip to the GPNC



Kathleen Jones, Judy Cattell, Harriet Yonke, Pat & Fred Freeman, Dick Cattell.

I am kind of glad we only had six people for our trip (seven counting me). It was just the right number to amble along the trail, looking for birds, observing the grasses, trees, turtles, sharing stories and getting to know each other.

We didn't see many birds - great blue heron, red-winged blackbirds, flicker, white-throated sparrow, eastern towhee, killdeer, possibly a Le Conte's - and quite a few Mallards and

Canada geese. **It was such a beautiful day!** An extremely enjoyable time! PLUS - a late lunch at Jimmy's Diner, where you can get a real chocolate soda.

Even the two-hour drive was beautiful, with all the fall colors - yellow cottonwoods, orange-brown sycamores, the purple-reds of Big bluestem, burnt-orange of indian grass, and the pinkish tinged milo.

I'll go with you guys again anytime! - *Cindy Jeffrey*



OK, we did pose for this one!

## My Introduction to Birding

*Received from Norm Peck via e-mail:*

Hello. I'll probably miss it, but I thought I'd check, since I got my start in birding with John Zimmerman, Seivert Rohr and Steve Fretwell in the early 70s in Manhattan while I was an undergrad there. I'll be there for about a month, but probably leaving on the 12th or 13th of Dec. (in an effort to be back in Washington in time for the Ellensburg CBC I started in 1979 as a fairly new grad student at Central Washington University). Hope all is well with the North Flint Hills Audubon, be well, Norm Peck

P.S.

A stern grilling from J. Zimmerman was occasioned by my sighting of an immature golden eagle on my first CBC, apparently the first on a Christmas Count in Kansas in some 39 years. Fortunately another, more experienced birder in the next sub-area (across the river on Hunter's Island) also saw one, probably the same one. I was on the highlands on what was then the very new Konza Prairie, and the bird flew over less than 30' up, so no mistaking what it was. Needless to say, I was hooked.

Norm Peck (shkwavrydr@gmail.com)

**How did you start?** Please send me your story! cinraney@k-state.edu or 15850 Galilee Rd. Olsburg, KS 66520

### Why Do Birds Matter?

In March, **AUDUBON magazine** will publish a special issue of the magazine focusing entirely on birds. We're asking people who are passionate about birds—from ornithologists to artists to authors and, above all, Auduboners like yourselves—to briefly answer this one fundamental question at the heart of our natural world and all the work we do: **WHY DO BIRDS MATTER?**

Perhaps it's their ability to fly or sing. Or maybe because they serve as bellwethers of a healthy planet.

We'll leave it to you, and would most appreciate your contributions which, of course, will dovetail with Audubon's efforts to save focal species throughout the flyways.

Please send one or two sentences to David Seideman, Editor, at dseideman@audubon.org by Friday, November 2. We will do our best to fit as many contributions as possible in print and on our website.

# A birder's experience

Anyone who has been birding for a while knows that birding keeps you humble. Just when I thought I had seen most birds in Kansas and certainly knew of them, I saw a bird that is a lifer for me and just four miles north of where I live. I had not known of the species until I saw it. I consoled myself by thinking at least I knew it was different.

On Sept. 16th, my husband Kent and I were walking across a breezy native prairie pasture for just short of an hour, yet we had noticed only two bird species by sight or sound. They were an occasional Meadowlark and two Prairie-chickens. Suddenly, a smaller bird flew up from under my feet and darted back down into the grass. Expecting it to be a sparrow I would never see again, I walked on when Kent said, "Stop. There it is."

We were walking a two track where the grass was shorter and there were some bare spaces between clumps of grass. There it was and my brain started listing field marks: long beak (therefore not a sparrow), pink legs, a large looking eye (maybe it is an immature), hiding now, all I can see is part of the tail and there is white on the outer tail feathers (OK, maybe it is just a Meadowlark), it steps out and has a speckled breast, no, not a Meadowlark because it's too small and immature. Meadowlarks do not have a speckled breast and it is brown, just LBJ brown, and silent. Stumped, I eagerly find my Kansas Birds field guide to narrow the possibilities and sure enough there it is on page 246, a bird I had never seen or knew about, Sprague's Pipit. Another guide suggests that a birder learn the Sprague's Pipit's distinctive call. Certainly, that would be the easier way to find it. I hope I will hear it next time it migrates through now that I know to listen for it.

*Patricia Yeager*

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On the Monday, Oct. 22nd the Manhattan Mercury reprinted a story from the Kansas City Star, a full page spread, "Youth flocking to pastime dominated by retirees."

THE KANSAS CITY STAR MAGAZINE

Young avian aficionados flock to bird-watching

By CINDY HOEDEL

The Kansas City Star

It focused on Matt Gearheart as a birder. Matt is vice president of the Kansas Ornithological Society, and on the board of the Burroughs Audubon Society and Audubon of Kansas, so many of you may know him.

The writer captured what I would call the "culture" of birders (from novice to "Big Year" folks). If you didn't see the article google Kansas City Star, and search "Matt Gearheart" or go to <http://www.kansascity.com/2012/10/19/3870182/birders-keep-their-eyes-on-the.html#storylink=misearch>

Here are a couple of excerpts:

"They have odd patterns of speech, as well. They do not speak in hushed tones, as one might expect, but they do speak in fragments. Interruptions are completely permissible so never apologized for, and broken-off stories are continued after minute-long breaks with not so much as a "like I was saying ..."

The effect is something like this: "A couple weeks ago I was heading up to the airport ... did you get that red-breasted nuthatch? ... to go to Louisiana to look at a work project ... that's a big kettle of Franklin gulls up there, what do you think, 10,000? ... so I swung up to Smithville on the way because ... do you want to try to call in the eastern phoebe with a barn owl screech? ... Nic had texted me that a red phalarope, this high Arctic shorebird, had been seen ... there it is! Did you get it?"

Sound familiar?





## BIRD SEED SALE:

Please remember there is no birdseed sale(s) by our chapter this year, because there is no one to coordinate it. We are sorry this has happened, but we had no choice. If someone is interested in doing it next year, contact a board member!

The world is mud-luscious and puddle-wonderful. ~e.e. cummings



Annual Michel-Ross Cleanup Nov 4th, 1-3 p.m.  
Meet at the sign on Stagg Hill Rd.

**We need your help.**

Visit us online  
[nfhas.org](http://nfhas.org)

E-Newsletter: If you wish to opt out of the "paper" Prairie Falcon newsletter and get it on-line as a pdf - send your name and email address to Jacques Staats - [staats@wildblue.net](mailto:staats@wildblue.net)





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Membership Information: Introductory memberships - \$20/yr., then basic, renewal membership is \$35/yr. When you join the National Audubon Society, you automatically become a member of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society. You will receive the bimonthly Audubon magazine in addition to the Prairie Falcon newsletter. New membership applications should be sent to National Audubon Society, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Make checks payable to the National Audubon Society. Membership renewals are also handled by the National Audubon Society. Questions about membership? Call 1-800-274-4201 or email the National Audubon Society [join@audubon.org](mailto:join@audubon.org). Website is [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org).

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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