

JOIN US IN PLANNING OUR YEAR

We will have our planning meeting July 15 from 3-5 pm at the Morgan residence 1440 Beechwood Terrace. **Please bring lots of ideas, a snack to share and a friend** to introduce them to our Chapter.

WE NEED YOU!

The board needs:

- Vice President
- Secretary
- Bird Seed Sale chair
- Education/Outreach chair
- Member-at-Large

See page 7 for more information on how you can help our chapter!

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 45, No. 11 ~ July/Aug. 2017

Inside

- pg. 2 - Skylight - Pete Cohen
- pg. 3 - Chores - Dru Clarke
- pg. 4 - Book Review "birdology"
- pg. 5 - Alsop property update
- pg. 6 - April Birdathon History - Clyde Ferguson
- pg. 7 - Planning meeting INFO

Upcoming Events

* JULY 15 - Planning meeting 3-5
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

NO NEWSLETTER AUGUST

Sept. 11 Board meeting



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

It wasn't planned that way, but it is nice that the sky provides such a prominent topic for the 200th edition of this column: the total solar eclipse that should cross the breadth of this continent

from Oregon to South Carolina on August 21st, the first to be seen from somewhere in this country since the show played in the Pacific Northwest in 1979.

At the same time, it seems there's not anything more to be said about it that hasn't already been available from wall-to-wall sources. Yet some may not have seen what astronomer Bob Berman writes in the *Old Farmer's Almanac*, that in the minute before and after totality those in its path could see shimmering bands on light-colored ground surfaces, that cameras can't capture--believed to be the result of air temperature pockets, possibly the result of the brief mid-day cooling.

I'm told that those interested in other accompanying sights could see irrepressible Venus, who will have been gradually out-shone by the Sun when dawn brightened the eastern sky earlier, re-appearing as the daylight dims, as much as 15 to 30 minutes before totality, near to the west of the Sun. Then about 30 seconds before and after totality will be available for spying a dim Mars between Venus and the Sun. Equally dim Mercury will be a little east of the Sun, while a more visible Jupiter will be always toward to the eastern horizon.

If one can spot a faint star just off the NW quadrant of the Sun, that will be Regulus, at the base of Leo the Lion's backward question mark, usually observed rising in springtime's evenings. Other possible spottings include Sirius, the brightest star, and the top of Orion, (both normally chiefly winter visions) just above the NW horizon, and next higher and along a loop that will curve from west to east over Leo, will be the Gemini Twins, and Capella, the bright star in the pentagon of Auriga; further on, the Big Dipper; and on eastward, Arcturus, the bright star at the base of the kite-shaped Boötes, the herder/plowman.

And it can't hurt to repeat the warning that the eclipsed Sun can be viewed safely by the naked eye only during the brief totality, a matter of about 30 seconds to 2+ minutes, depending on location. Number 12 or 14 welders glass is said to be safe for looking at the central attraction at any other moment.

Plus, in case it might be useful for anyone to check here, totality is scheduled to cross the far northeastern corner of Kansas within the first ten minutes after 1 pm. CDT, though the whole show will gradually begin and end an hour and a half before and after. More precise details exist elsewhere.

It's been estimated that any one locality on Earth sees such an event only once every three or four centuries, yet Cape Girardeau, Missouri, is hitting the jackpot with another total solar blackout due to include it on a path from Texas to Cleveland, Ohio, to Maine and beyond in 2024. 'Tis said that this August's show should set a record for numbers of people viewing it. And if all the interest translates into action it might also set a record for a rolling traffic jam, 1000 miles longer than the Oregon Trail.

Meantime other things celestial will go on apace. Mercury will be present in July evenings but very low. Saturn will be below the Moon on the 6th, its rings fully displayed for those with instruments. Venus will be flirting about Taurus' star Aldebaran particularly in the early morns of the 11th through the 20th, with the Moon chaperoning on the 20th. Jupiter will spend the evenings setting in Virgo, with Spica the closest star, and the Moon a notable companion on the 28th.

In August, on the 2nd, the Moon will again be above Saturn before brightening up to blur the Perseid meteor shower due the 12th, then visiting Venus in Gemini the 29th. It will be above the early-to-bed Jupiter the 24th-25th, and again over Saturn the 30th.

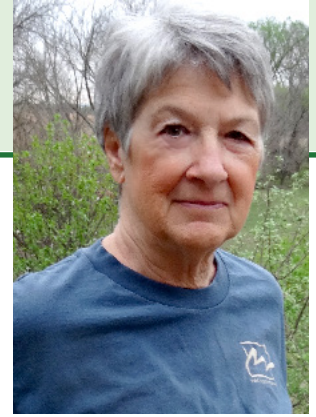
All the while Scorpius will spend the summer poking up in the southeast before swimming the nights away along the southern horizon, followed by Sagittarius with the spout half of its Teapot in that end of the Milk Way. Higher up westward in the evenings Arcturus will be glowing, setting by midnight on the 20th to be in position for its daytime appearance during eclipse. Following that in the celestial overhead parade will be the three spaced-out stars of the Summer Triangle: blue Vega in the little constellation Lyra just west of the Milky Way; mid-stream will be Deneb at the tail end of long, wings-spread-out Cygnus the Swan, and just past his beak-star, Albireo, and in a separate stream of the Milky Way, will be Aquila-the-Eagle's Altair, recognizable by having a dimmer neighbor to either side.

The Moon will be full July 8th (11p07) and August 7th (1p11); new July 23 (4a46) and August 21st (1p30)

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Chores When Choring Isn't Work

Dru Clarke



Spring grass is up, so the cows don't come down to feed mornings: they're on native pasture far afield, and may be north or south, depending on where the tenderest shoots are, whether it is raining or not (if it is, they are in the trees), the temperature (if it's hot, again, they are in the trees or standing in the pond), and where the flies are swarming the least. They need to be counted daily, so I take the Ranger and the two dogs as it's a crapshoot where they might be, and I can't walk over rough terrain well or for very long. And I like to drive.

In the northwest pasture death camas, strewn in a swath by some evil hand, has bloomed and gone withered and brown. But lovely periwinkle blue Tradescantia, or spiderwort, has come on in unlikely places – a wet bottom and a bare spot with no competition. The cows avoided the camas and haven't found the spiderwort yet, content to browse on newly leafed-out shrubs and trees as well as the nourishing grass. Just a yard or so in front of the Ranger out from the grass exploded a bright, winged missile – scrubbed white and jet black and crimson red – a red-headed woodpecker. I'd seen them often in the hollow by the creek, where they've nested in a dead tree, but did not expect one among the grasses of the open prairie. I had seen them often sitting on the electric lines that cross our south pasture but never knew why they'd choose such a perch. Cows accounted for, back at the house I looked up "red-headed woodpecker" – thank you, Cornell Lab – and discovered that their primary diet consists of grasshoppers! And, where do you find grasshoppers? Uh, grasslands. Mystery solved.

Beyond the front porch and yard is a long brome meadow that runs between the tree-lined lane and the creek, sloping down to the dirt road. Watering the potted flowers hanging from hooks on the porch, I happened to look out over the meadow and saw an unusually compact owl cruising from southeast to northwest. I knew immediately that it wasn't a barred or great-horned – its plumage was more russet brown and its build more bullet-shaped. Had I just seen a short-eared owl? Checking Cornell's site again, it was confirmed: short-eared owls are active during the day. I played recordings of their calls and recognized having heard them before, at other times when I could not attribute the source to anything I

was familiar with. (I verified recently another weird sound a banshee cackling? – that we heard one summer evening as my son, grandson, and husband sat by a fire where we toasted marshmallows: Red fox, just across the creek, probably eyeing our sweet treats.)

Retrieving the mop from the deck, my attention was drawn again to the meadow where a segmented line of brown forms crept warily toward the creek bank. The first form rose up as if inflated and turned, fanning its tail – a male turkey was leading his brood as a sergeant would lead his troops through a mine field. The hen, larger than the half-grown chicks, brought up the rear. Replacing the mop, there on the deck was my old friend the Eastern racer who had visited us IN the house a few weeks before: I guess he likes it here as much as we do.

In the south pasture are a dozen of our mares and geldings. We take them a bucket of range cubes every morning to do a head count and check for any potential injuries or illness. Here was a yellow-striped garter snake peeking out from behind a wild prairie rose bush that grows by the gate post. A pair of coyotes have a den on the slope of high ground where there are some old buffalo wallows. Frequently they stand, in an alert scouting posture about thirty yards apart and watch us as we feed the horses. Sometimes they simply melt away, become invisible, as if they were never really there. Another time, the dogs chased them, then the coyotes turned, and chased them, running so fast that one crashed into the smooth wire fence as the dogs escaped.

Sometimes my husband offers to do chores for me: he already does the vacuuming as it is hard on my back, but I always reject his charity when it comes to chores involving the outdoors. Even this winter, when the temperature dropped below freezing and I was bottle feeding a sweet calf twice a day, I felt alive and part of something larger than myself. To me, chores are not so much work as an opportunity to reconnect with nature, to discover something I may not be aware of, something to ponder and may never truly understand, something to care about and for.

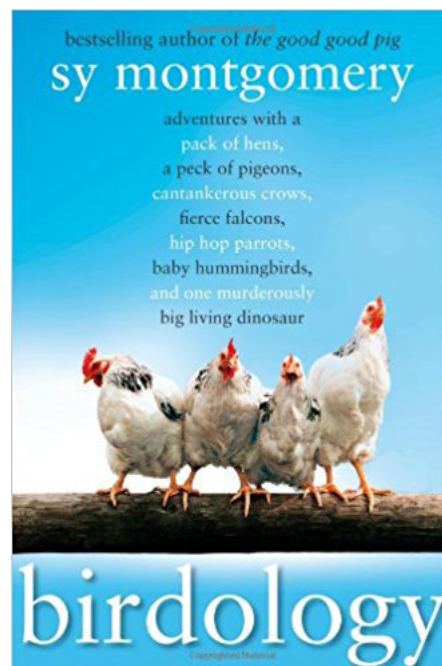
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Book Review:

birdology by sy montgomery

"Not much gets past a pigeon. They notice details that humans miss: one study found that pigeons could learn to recognize the difference between the painting style of Manet and that of Monet faster than many college students. At one time, the U.S. Coast Guard trained pigeons in helicopters to spot orange life vests at sea; they outperformed human spotters three to one."

excerpt from "birdology"



Don't be put off by what may seem to be a silly title (there is really a reason for it) or a cover showing four nervous chickens and a subtitle that includes the phrase "Hip-hop Parrots." *Birdology* is an original, even brilliant, account of seven species of birds—their fundamental strangeness and their strange familiarity. Each species, whether seemingly mundane like a chicken or a pigeon, exotic like a hummingbird, or alien as a cassowary, symbolizes an essential quality of birds. For instance, the cassowary shows without a shadow of a doubt that (all) "birds are dinosaurs." Hummingbirds demonstrate that birds, with their hollow bones and air sacks, "are made of air." Improbably, her flock of chickens demonstrates that "birds are individuals." The author also covers birds of prey, their raptorial fierceness; pigeons and their mysterious senses; the uncanny ability of parrots to communicate real "ideas"; and the adaptation of crows to the urban landscape.

All about Birds" review

excerpt

GOOD LITERATURE envelops the reader in a whole world; it invites us to be visually, verbally, and sensually present in that place. While absorbed in a good book, we lose ourselves to extraordinary possibilities and come back to our quotidian lives a little richer, a lot more compassionate.

Birdology is, plain and simple, good literature. After you set the book down and step back into your daily chores, you'll notice a tinge of difference in just about everything you perceive. For instance, by now, it's fairly common knowledge that birds are dinosaurs. But Sy Montgomery renders this abstract notion palpable. When we interact with birds, she reminds us, "we are communing across a gap of 300 million years" — making birds a little like stars, whose light we see millions of years after it first shone. Early on, Montgomery emphasizes the "otherness" of birds. The 150-pound cassowary, with its bony weapon of a head and a lethal blade on its feet, comes clear as a living dinosaur. "I am witnessing the story of evolution writ small," says Montgomery.

review by reviewed by BK LOREN in Orion

Alsop Property Progress



Two fishermen in a canoe

Back in the early 1980s, the National Audubon Society held a Birdathon. It only lasted a few years. But a couple of local members did get the NFHAS Birdathon established and it continues to this day.

Clyde Ferguson and Cecil Best were fishing partners. About 1985, they were fishing out of a canoe up a stream that fed into Milford Lake (this was their first Birdathon) Clyde would point out some of the birds he saw. Cecil was learning (and eventually became a very good birder and the Cecil Best Trail is in his honor). It became their habit to bird as they fished.

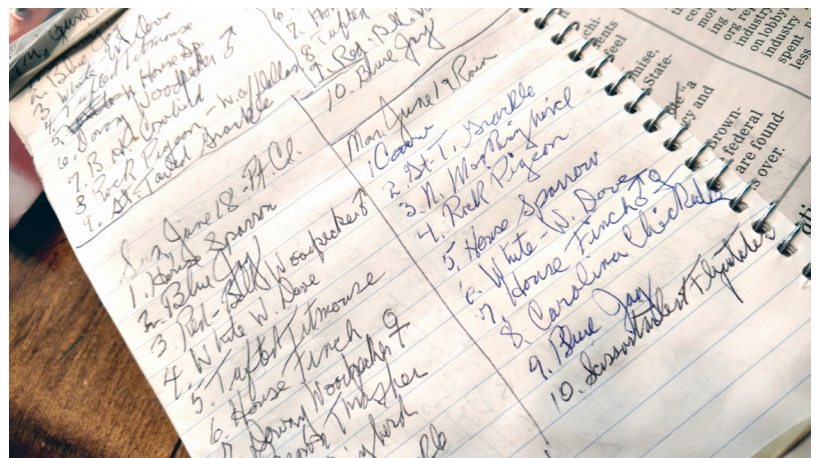
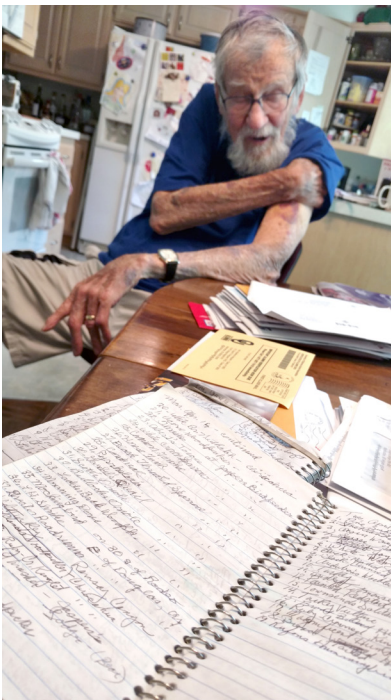
On one of those fishing trips they saw 4 species each – including a screech owl. According to Clyde, it was Cecil's idea to get organized and get some people to sponsor them and they could raise money for the NFHAS.

They recruited friends, colleagues and neighbors to be sponsors and/or to join in the "Birdathon." Many were from the University. The first "Birdathon" they "swept the swallows," said Clyde. The pledge was 10 cents a species. Unlike the Christmas Bird Count, once you saw a species you didn't have to keep counting that species, and you could cover a bigger area.

Over the years it has grown and they no longer bird by boat. Clyde said after that first couple of years, they have never counted less than 80 species! "We see birds today that we never used to, such as the white-winged dove and lots more Mississippi kites, but western meadowlarks are in decline. Of course there were the occasional vagrants, such as surf scooter, yellow legged loon, and a brown pelican.

These two fishing buddies started our annual Birdathon, and they kept it going, year after year, for over 30 years! Clyde gets help from Jim Koelliker now (Cecil died in 1990). There have been many who have been on the Birdathon, and still participate – but since Clyde couldn't remember all their names you will have to wait until we do a bit more research.

Clyde keeps a journal of all the birds he sees-everyday since the 70s, all of the birds seen from his back porch, on his travels, wherever he is.



ANNUAL PLANNING MEETING

It is that time of year again to reflect on what you, the members, want Northern Flint Hills Audubon to be.

More fun? What is fun to you?
Great speakers at monthly meetings? Who would you like to have a conversation with?
More purpose? What action would inspire you ?
Frequent birding field trips? Would you like to be the leader of one?
Where would you like to go?
Have experience with children?
Want to participate in creating an event?
Want to host a meeting at your home and share your birds with the group?

Volunteers are always needed for ongoing projects as well. Whether you can help with small tasks or large projects, everyone's contribution is valuable. We don't know what you can do for your Northern Flint Hills Audubon unless you step up and tell us. Here are some options to start your own ideas flowing.

Carpentry skills: bird houses/feeders, shade arbors, trail boardwalks

Letter writing skills: paper or electronic, thank you notes, speaker invitations, political advocacy

Organizational and motivation skills: start a project, be an officer, help with organization of club

Birding skills: Teach monthly morning birding or teach a bird song class or kids' class

Land management skills: Take on one of our properties and take charge

Know many people in town: Make connections with outside birders and prairie advocates

Gardening skills: Help water, weed, plant, amend soil, adopt a section of the Alsop garden

Fund raising/ promotion skills: help advertise our events or help raise funds

Legal counsel: help to lower our property taxes or whatever else might come up

Speaking skills and knowledge of a subject of interest to our group: Will you be a speaker?

Been a NFHAS member for years: Help with memories and 50th anniversary celebration

I'll bet in reviewing this list you have thought of something you can contribute. Big or little, every donation of time, skill, and money boosts the morale of other active members. Please come to the planning meeting (July 15, 3-5) and share what you can do. If this date and time are not possible for you, please send me an e-mail (pyeagerbirder@gmail.com) close to the meeting date and share what you want to contribute.

You are appreciated.

Patricia Yeager, President



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Non-profit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 662
Manhattan, KS 66502

Return Service Requested

Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society.
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Also available on-line at www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html

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, PO Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250**. Make checks payable to the National Audubon Society and include the **code C4ZJ040Z**. Questions about membership? Call 1-800-274-4201 or email the National Audubon Society join@audubon.org. Website is 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

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