



*Carolina Wren, photo courtesy of Dave Rintoul*

## Spring Migratory Bird Count May 12, 2012

The spring International Migratory Bird Day count will be held on Saturday, May 12. We have several parts of Riley County that were not covered last year, so if anyone wants an area or wants to join an existing group, please e-mail me at [jim.throne@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jim.throne@sbcglobal.net). The expectation is that you count all birds heard or seen in your assigned area, and provide a list to me with some trip information. I then compile the information for the county, and submit the list to eBird.org. Zealots like myself will be birding from dawn to dusk, and will also spend some time owling; but, others spend just part of the day birding. This is a great excuse to spend the day birding, so please consider joining us.

Jim Throne

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 7 - Board Meeting 6:00 p.m.  
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

May 11 - Butterfly Garden "weeds"  
5:30-6:30 see pg. 4  
Sojourner Park

May 12 - Migratory Bird Count  
contact Jim Throne:  
[jim.throne@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jim.throne@sbcglobal.net)



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Ironically our word “soil” derives from the Latin “*solum*” meaning “bottom,” though soil is at the top of the Earth’s structured layers. It

provides for one of our signature activities in the warmer seasons: digging. Some people modify that procedure by taking hold of machine handles; some of us take hold of wooden handles, typically with one metallic end, and engage the soil *mano-a-mano*, factoring in some principles of leverage but calling on only our muscles to provide the energy needed to till some ground, plant a bush, etc. And as astronomers gaze up at a cosmos containing zillions of particles, the material we aim down at can hold within a gram’s worth “a billion individual microbial cells, encompassing tens of thousands to a million different species,” per *The Science News*, January 28, 2012.

These species exist in the tiny spaces between soil particles that they have found or created, and where there is enough organic input to make up for the work of the microbes that consume it. (See *The World Beneath Our Feet*, James B. Nardi, Oxford U. Press, 2003).

In that regard, according to the same *Science News* article, there are some folks who are *really* digging, unearthing mature trees down to and including the taproots, a good part by hand. They are on a hunt to get a clearer handle on what happens to the atmospheric carbon taken in by living plants and passed on to the soil.

It’s apparently been “standard knowledge” that this pass-on is accomplished via litter, the dead remains of living matter that becomes part of a lingering microbial-resistant humus that gives topsoil its brownish color. However results from this digging and related research has led to findings that a) the carbon in litter is actually very quickly released as part of the greenhouse gas, methane, b) that

most of the carbon transfer from trees occurs deeper, exuded from the living and then dead roots, and c) that as carbon intake increases (read: global warming) trees put more carbon into the soil, but the microbes get even busier expanding their production of the methane that can escape up through the soil to the atmosphere, and the soil’s carbon content decreases.

Unsurprisingly, there is evidently controversy between these findings and continuing proponents of a more vital role for humus. And a great deal of uncertainty as to how soil quality will become changed and therefore affect the future.

In the sky for May, there’s a high probability that the Moon will put on a scheduled show the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> by being both full and at perigee (closest to Earth) simultaneously, barring of course some unscheduled heavy storms. Then on the 20<sup>th</sup>, when near its apogee (farthest from Earth) it will get between us and the Sun, creating an annular eclipse whose main shadow will start in Asia and then come in a relatively narrow straight line whose midline will extend from Redding, California, through Reno, Albuquerque, Lubbock, then ending at Midland, Texas. Here we should see it as a partial eclipse starting about 5 p.m. Annular means that the Moon is too far from us to fully cover the Sun, so there will be an arc of Sun around the shadow.

Venus, while still gleaming, will be lower in the sky each evening, and will, on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, dance with the Moon nearly on the tips of Taurus’ long horns. Venus will be just to the right of El Nath, the tip of the right horn; the Moon will venture closer to Zeta Tauri, the tip of the left horn.

Mars begins separating from Leo’s Regulus and will be above the Moon the 28<sup>th</sup>. Saturn, remaining loyal to Virgo’s Spica, will be part of the two-some below the Moon the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>. Jupiter and Mercury are on leave. The Moon full the 5<sup>th</sup> at 10p35, new the 20<sup>th</sup> at 6p47.

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*Editor’s Note/correction:*

*Last month, I mistakenly put the March Skylight in the April issue. So if there was confusion in the stars - it is my fault!*

*gj*

## Prairie Woods Dru Clarke



In spring, the warm season tall grasses which have been dormant all winter long are just awakening, but I am impatient and turn to the trees for signs of the new season.

Trees along the watercourses—the springs, the seeps, the streams—are leafing out, some time after the redbuds' fuchsia flowers brighten a mixed woodland.



Remnant elms, holdouts against Dutch elm disease, sport clusters of pale green ellipses that flutter in a breeze, eventually littering the ground like sequins. Oaks are beginning to put out bunches of slender, toothed leaves, shiny with renewed life. Cottonwoods' leaves twist and tremble on their flattened petioles, reminding me of a congregation in rapture. Only the hackberries languish, waiting until the possibility of frost has passed.

Patches of prickly ash, with their thin branches guarded by stout spines and citrusy—fragrant compound leaves, ready themselves to host the giant swallowtail butterfly's larvae. Last summer an adult female floated lazily among these shrubs, delicately alighting here and there to deposit her eggs. The plant's vernacular names are toothache tree or numb gum tree, for if you chew on a twig or some bark, your mouth will go numb. Other shrubs—coral berry and rough-leaved dogwood—green up in the understory or, unfortunately, fan out into the grassland and convey a feeling of hope that spring has finally arrived, and, that we need to burn to keep them at bay.

American Indians who lived on the plains frequently settled along or near streams and rivers and

built earth lodges using the plentiful wood from trees associated with riparian reaches. Cottonwood was a favorite, being moist and soft, and therefore pliable. Posts were set in the ground and angled or bent, then, a lattice of reeds or branches was superimposed, then covered with thatch, then earth. The Mandan, the Arikara, and the Hidatsa are usually associated with these structures, although archeological work done locally along Wildcat Creek has revealed postholes indicative of these lodges. Often the lodges would be constructed next to tilled fields, and some were as much as 60 feet in diameter.

A tree on an open grassland may provide the only shade for large animals—think bison or cattle—or a perch for an alert raptor or courting songbird. One that withstands frequent fires is the bur oak—known too as “mossy cup” oak—with its thick bark. It likes rich bottomland soils, however, and is, coincidentally, the dominant tree at Alcove Spring, famous as a stopover for pioneers who ventured west on the Oregon Trail. The Donner party lost Sarah Keyes, a seventy-year old woman, here from consumption, and others of fame—John Fremont and his exploring expedition and Marcus Whitman leading a thousand émigrés to Oregon—camped by the spring in the shade of these magnificent oaks.

This year the Flint Hills seems to be burgeoning earlier than ever, and that may not be as positive as it seems. Without sufficient rain to sustain all this new foliage, it may wither and die before enough nutrients can be generated to see its parent through fall and winter. Fingers crossed, we embrace the hopeful nature of spring and look forward to a nap under the leafy boughs of a tree in the summer to come.

© Dru Clarke April 2012

# Butterfly Garden Work Schedule



Warm weather came early this spring and plants sure have been growing fast, including the unwanted ones in the butterfly garden. A great big **THANK YOU** goes to **Jacque Staats**, who has been keeping the butterfly garden growing and successfully producing butterflies and other pollinators for the past three years. This year we will have to manage without her leadership. Alas, our chapter is challenged to initiate a new plan to keep our garden thriving.

To start taking care of our garden this summer, please put it in your schedule to help Friday May 11 at 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. **THAT'S RIGHT - JUST ONE HOUR OF YOUR LABOR PLEASE.** Nearly all members can help. Even if you are only able to pull 5 weeds and 10 people show up to do the same that is 50 weeds gone. Bring a sack supper for yourself and we will eat together at the shelter in the park at 6:30 p.m. Drinks will be provided. Raindate is Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> same time and place. We will plan to repeat this garden weeding blitz and supper each month. Plan to join us and bring friends. The more the merrier!

*(The butterfly garden is on the east end of Sojourner Truth Park, 10<sup>th</sup> and Pottawatomie, one block south of Howie's recycling)*





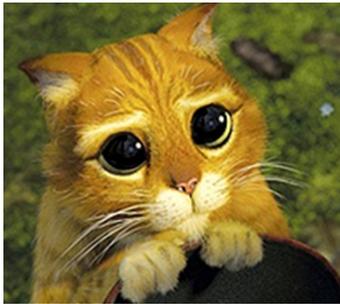
WE NEED YOU



TAKE NOTE

## TREASURER NEEDED!!

We need someone to step-up and take on the treasurer duties. Carla Bishop will help you get started. Paying bills, picking up the mail, and attending the Board meetings are the main duties.



PLEASE

How many ways can we say it?



INVASIVE SPECIES in Kansas  
please do not plant these.

Common garlic-mustard  
 Russian –olive  
 Autumn-olive  
 Japanese honeysuckle  
 Amur honeysuckle  
 Tatarian honeysuckle  
 Common buckthorn  
 Multiflora rose  
 Common trumpet-creeper  
 Northern catalpa

Chinese yarn  
 Winged burningbush  
 Chinese spindle-tree  
 Orange day-lily  
 Obtuse-leaf privet  
 Bell's honeysuckle  
 Trumpet honeysuckle  
 Osage-orange  
 White mulberry  
 Beefstake plant  
 Asian smartweed  
 Kentucky blue grass  
 Siberian elm

*Kansas Forest & Woodlands, Kansas Forestry Department*

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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 Jacque Staats - [staats@wildblue.net](mailto:staats@wildblue.net)





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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, 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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