

**APRIL 22, 7:30 P.M.**  
**DOUGLASS COMMUNITY CENTER**  
**BLUEBIRDS**  
**TAMMY STEEPLES, PRESIDENT**  
**KAW VALLEY BLUEBIRD ASSOC.**

*The bluebird carries the sky  
on his back.*  
-- Henry David Thoreau, journal



Tammy Steeples earned a B.S. in Elementary Education and MS from Kansas State University. After hearing a talk on bluebird trails at a garden club meeting, she joined the monitoring crew at Clinton Lake. Her interest in Bluebirds has not waned, and she has served as the president of Kaw Valley Bluebird Association for several terms. They monitor the Perry Lake trail and helped establish the Rotary Club Arboretum trail near Clinton Lake Sports Complex.

The KVBBA evolved from Wes Seyler and Tom Rodhouse – who started working on Blue Bird trails, first at Clinton Lake. The organization now oversees more than a dozen trails throughout the Kaw Valley.

So join us for both dinner with Tammy Steeples at 6:00 at della Voce, 405 Poyntz, and her presentation at the Douglass Community Center, 901 Yuma at 7:30.

NORTHERN Flint Hills Audubon Society,  
P.O. Box 1972, MANHATTAN, KS 66505-1972



## PRAIRIE FALCON

NORTHERN FLINT HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 37, No. 8 ~ April 2009

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BIRD DAY  
JIM THRONE

### Upcoming Events:

- Apr. 2 - BOARD MEETING 6 p.m.  
(TOM & MJ MORGAN HOME)
- Apr. 11 - SAT. MORNING BIRDING, 8 A.M.  
MEET AT SOJOURNER TRUTH PARK
- Apr. 22 - PROGRAM: "Bluebirds"  
DOUGLASS COMMUNITY CNTR  
7:30 p.m.
- Apr. 25-26 BIRDATHON SEE pg. 3-4
- May 7 - BOARD MEETING 6 p.m.  
(TOM & MJ MORGAN HOME)
- May 9 - MIGRATORY BIRD COUNT  
JIM THRONE SEE pg. 7



## SKYLIGHT PLUS

PETE COHEN

As in December, the subject of natural vis-a-vis artificial lighting has crossed my path, this time more specifically as I belatedly learned of House bill (HB) 2064 introduced into this year's Legislature with a hearing held January 30th. It proposes caps on artificial lighting that affect a limited list of areas in the state. The caps, based on technical readings of ambient luminescence, would be phased in so that by 2025 none of the listed areas would be subject to illumination more than 200% of the natural, and 90% of those places would have no more than 130% of the natural. By 2055 - over 45 years from now - 90% of the places would have less than 110% of the natural.

The places listed for such slowly arriving protection are: state parks where overnight camping is allowed; any wilderness act preservation areas in the state; the Cimarron national grasslands; Quivera national wildlife refuge, the tallgrass national preserve; and any military night training areas in the state.

The bill was introduced at the behest of Robert Wagner, regional representative of the International Dark Sky Association, and received written support at the Energy and Utilities Committee hearing from the Kansas City office of the national Department of Defense. It was introduced by Rep. Tom Sloan (R. Lawrence), one of the Legislature's strongest supporters of wind energy, while the Sierra Club, also a strong supporter of wind installations, testified in opposition. Tom Thompson, the Club's testifying lobbyist, and Frank Drinkwine, a regional spokesman, told me they felt there'd been insufficient discussion of the criteria and of possible consequences, interference with sitings of utility-sized turbines being one such. (Relatedly, Mr. Drinkwine affirmed the Club's support of a moratorium on industrial turbines in the Governor's designated "Heart of the Flint Hills"). As of this writing several sources have pronounced the dark sky bill dead for this session.

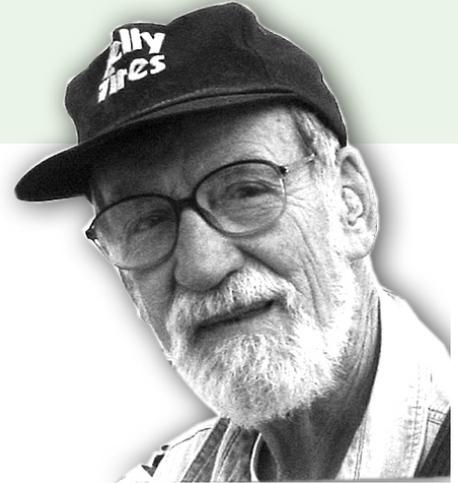
I think this could also be considered an energy conservation bill, and conservation (a/k/a efficiency), I've found, is broadly regarded as the strongest card we now hold for obtaining more usable kilowatts. Calgary, Alberta, as I've mentioned away back, is saving half their dollar and emission costs for street lighting by just hooding their fixtures to shine only downward. Mr. Drinkwine, of Kansas City, expressed a hope for more discussion on the matter and suggested the problem of urban lighting should be considered. Mr. Wagner, also of K.C., earlier told me he felt attending first to the more rural areas would be more effective. As the news of the bill spreads, I'm finding more interest in it, so it will have a future here and likely in next year's session.

Robert Service, in *The Cremation of Sam McGee*, wrote of when "the dogs were fed and the stars o'erhead were dancing heel and toe." He was referring to a Yukon night years ago, and there will be a lively dance over the Flint Hills through April nights ahead, with Saturn attending in the lower reaches of Leo every night, almost till dawn, and enjoying a "pas de deux" with the Moon on the 6th. Also, on Old Man Moon's dance card is a flirtation with Antares in Scorpio the 12th; *StarDate* says the affair will begin at midnight and become increasingly intimate toward morn. During the beginning dawn on the 22nd he waltzes with rising Venus, brazenly maneuvering in front of her (occulting), briefly taking her from view. The constellation of Pisces will host and reddish Mars will be dimly witnessing from below, while Jupiter, in Capricorn, will be a bright distraction to the upper right. Then as darkness comes on the 26th the Moon, the Pleiades, and Mercury will form a short totem pole low in the WNW, the Moon acting the raven's part on top. Mercury will be in position there every evening from the 10th to the 30th, while *The Old Farmer's Almanac* advises that he will brightest earliest in the month, above the horizon by about the width of an extended fist plus a finger, and gradually dim.

The Moon will cooperate with the Lyrid meteor shower by shrinking to a dim crescent as the shower reaches its peak possibilities on the night of the 21st. He will be full the 9th at 9a56 and new the 24th at 10p23.

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## ANNUAL BIRDATHON CLYDE FERGUSON



It's time for our annual major fund raising event, the NFHAS Birdathon. The event will be held this year on April 25-26. 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 by the event this year 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, and educational activities at our new Michel-Ross Preserve. 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, and our El Salvador sister chapter. 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.

### 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 count within the 24-hour period of April 25-26. The pledges do not have to be large; dimes, quarters and dollars add up quickly when many participate. Encourage your sponsors to pledge 15 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 25th. It's OK, for example, to bird from 10:00 a.m. on April 25th until 10:00 a.m. on April 26th. 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 Clyde and he 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 one year's subscription of 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 the preservation of nature.

*Clyde Ferguson, Birdathon Chair*

**THERE IS NEWS IN EVERY BUSH.**  
**-- JOHN BURROUGHS, WAKE ROBIN, 1893**



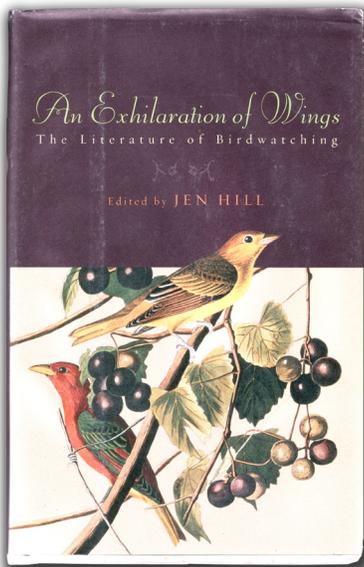
## WALKING THE CECIL BEST TRAIL

On a bright, but cold February afternoon I sought out the Cecil Best Birding Trail. Beginning at the Big Blue parking area, I followed Linear Trail under the highway, then left the cement for a path mowed alongside the river. Bluebird boxes line the riverbank, but power lines overhead, industrial buildings near by, and the sounds of traffic detract from this would-be tranquil environment. Tens of noisy crows were the only birds insight. I walked more quickly toward a wooded fence row and saw a sign - the Cecil Best Birding Trail. I stepped onto the well-traveled dirt path, and entered another world within the trees, where the wind and noise fell away.

I slowed as cardinals, chickadees and juncos caught my eye. Then, as I approached a water crossing, the sounds of hundreds of robins and starlings filled the air. The birds were perched all around me, periodically rising in groups, shifting in flight. Closing my eyes, I paused on the wooden bridge to listen, raising my face toward the sun. As the trail leaves the woods, it leads to a piece of restored prairie in Northeast Park. Ahead of me, a coyote emerged from Big Bluestem and Indiangrass that is over five feet tall. I quickly crouched on the trail and watched as it moved uninhibited through the prairie. Even now, I often think about the serenity and joy I experienced walking the trail that February afternoon.

*Annie Baker*

*(The Cecil Best Birding Trail and Michel-Ross Preserve are two properties owned and maintained by NFHAS, and the NFHAS created/restored the prairie in Northeast Park.)*



### Quotes

I think, that, if required, on pain of death, to name instantly the most perfect thing in the universe, I should risk my fate on a bird's egg.

-- T.W. Higginson, *The Life of Birds*, 1862

They'll come again to the apple tree, --  
Robin and all the rest, --  
When the orchard branches are fair to see  
In the snow of blossoms dressed,  
And the prettiest thing in the world will be  
The building of the nest.

-- Mrs. M.E. Sangster, *Bird World*, 1898

*The Exhilaration of Wings, the Literature of Birdwatching*, Edited by Jen Hill,  
copyright 1999, published by Viking Penguin, Penguin Putnam Inc.



## CLEARING BY NOON DRU CLARKE

It had been overcast early in the morning but was supposed to clear by noon. October 24, 2008 turned out to be the most beautiful day of the year.

Not warm and soft like a late spring day, but brisk enough for a medium weight jacket. But it was the atmosphere more than the ambient temperature that was so astonishing: its clarity made all things – clouds, hills, trees - appear outlined, highlighted, with margins like pieces in a luminous landscape puzzle.

This happened in the northern Flint Hills, around 39 N. In northern Scotland, in Inverness (around 57.5 N), the light was like this, and may be like this more often than not. Standing on a bridge watching the river Ness and its salmon run by, we witnessed air so clear that it seemed on the verge of shattering. We spoke in lowered and hushed voices, subconsciously fearing a higher, louder pitch might bring it all down. Imagine being immersed in molten, but chilled glass: that is what it was like for both the fish and us. Not having been to the southern hemisphere, I don't know if a similar phenomenon occurs in southern Australia and New Zealand at those analogous latitudes.

Maybe it takes a lack of industry (minimizing particulate matter from combustibles), intact ground cover (mitigating dust from eroding soil), a favorable wind (blowing from a pristine direction), a recent rain (cleansing the air), or a combination of some or all of these to allow this incredible phenomenon of a transparent atmosphere to exist. If you lean toward the mystical, it may be a gift from a benevolent spirit who figures that we mortals need a day like this once in

a while. Days like this lift our spirits, make us feel more alive, more likely to breathe deeply and take in sharply distinct, earthy odors: even sounds, like birdsong, are enhanced.

It is ironic that the haze of particles that inhibits clear views provides nuclei for raindrops to form: one begets the other. The nuclei may not always be noxious, as pollen grains can serve as well as dust and ash, but produce a yellow rain. Rain washes out the air, a fresh, tarry smell assaults your nose, and a beautiful day ensues. Where one lives is part choice, part serendipity. Those living in and downwind from large, car-driven urban centers and concentrated industry suffer from environmental injustice, and not just from breathing stinking, acrid air. So do those trapped in valleys where the usual dilution solution to pollution is hampered. People who live in such places seldom experience these sublime, light-filled days.

One cold February day in late afternoon I reached the dogleg turn in the road leading north to home. To the right the prairie sweeps upward in billowing folds. The grasses blanketing the earth there seemed to be burning from within, like a sea of joss sticks ignited by pilgrims marching east. Shimmering orange-red, the slim embers did not collapse into ash as they would have had they been afire: instead, they stood as if immortal. In the morning of that same day, the grasses had been straw, unremarkable: now, I sat bone still in my truck in the middle of the road watching the grass 'burn' as the sun dropped low to the horizon.

I know the physics of this tricky play of light, but that doesn't make it any less remarkable. To have the good fortune to live in the Flint Hills (and Scots, in Scotland), especially on days when it clears by noon, or when you arrive at a bend in the road at exactly the right moment when the prairie is ablaze in the setting sun, is something I wish for everyone.

*Dru Clarke – (begun 1/16; finished 3/ 3 /09)*

### Project Budburst, 2009 Campaign Underway

Join a national citizen science field campaign in gathering valuable environmental and climate change information from across the country. Project BudBurst engages the public in making careful observations of the phenophases such as first leafing, first flower, and first fruit ripening of a diversity of native trees, shrubs, flowers, and grasses in their local area.

Phenology is the study of the timing of life cycle events in plants and animals. In other words, studying the environment to figure out how animals know when it is time to hibernate, and what "calendar" or "clock" plants use to begin flowering, leafing or reproducing. Phenology has an enormous impact on the natural environment and how we interact with it in our everyday lives. Because plants are at the base of the food chain, anything that affects plants ripples out to affect the rest of the ecosystem.

Phenological List of Konza Prairie Animals "Who's Here" and Plants "What's Blooming" <http://keep.konza.ksu.edu/ecology/>

Phenology is important because...

...it affects whether plants and animals thrive, or survive, in their environment

...our food supply depends on the timing of phenological events

...changes in the timing of phenological events can be used as an indicator of climate change.

Join Project Budburst in collecting important climate change data on the timing of leafing and the flowering of trees and flowers in your area. Register online to save your observation sites and plants that you are monitoring throughout this year and for coming years. [www.budburst.org](http://www.budburst.org)

Phenology is for the birds! Check out these websites:

Journey North <http://www.learner.org/jnorth/>

Migration of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds

<http://www.hummingbirds.net/index.html>

North American Bird Phenology Program

<http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bpp/>

Project Feeder Watch <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw/>

## TAKE NOTE



# SPRING MIGRATORY BIRD COUNT MAY 9, 2009

JIM THRONE, COORDINATOR, COMPILER

The spring International Migratory Bird Day count will be held on Saturday, May 9<sup>th</sup>. Anyone who wants to cover 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*

### History of International Migratory Bird Day - IMBD

IMBD was created in 1993 by visionaries at the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. From 1995 to 2006, the program was under the direction of the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Because of its consistent growth, IMBD is now the premier education project of Environment for the Americas. IMBD continues to focus attention on one of the most important and spectacular events in the life of a migratory bird -- its journey between its summer and winter homes. Today, it is celebrated in Canada, the U.S., Mexico and Central America through bird festivals and bird walks, education programs, and Bird Day! We invite you to join us in this important celebration.

<http://www.birdday.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 Jacque Staats - [staats@bri.ksu.edu](mailto:staats@bri.ksu.edu)





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**Subscription Information:** Introductory memberships - \$20/yr., then basic membership is \$35/yr. When you join the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, you automatically become a member of the National Audubon Society and receive the bimonthly Audubon magazine in addition to the Prairie Falcon newsletter. New membership applications may be sent to Treasurer, NFHAS, P.O. Box 1932, Manhattan, KS 66505-1932. Make checks payable to the National Audubon Society. Membership renewals are handled by the National Audubon Society and should not be sent to the NFHAS. Questions about membership? Call 1-800-274-4201 or email the National Audubon Society [join@audubon.org](mailto:join@audubon.org).

If you do not want to receive the national magazine, but still want to be involved in our 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 <[list\\_serve@ksu.edu](mailto:list_serve@ksu.edu)> and join in the discussions.

Contacts for Your Elected Representatives ( anytime) Write, call or email:

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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](mailto:Roberts@senate.gov)> U.S. Senate, Washington DC 20510. or Brownback <[Brownback@senate.gov](mailto:Brownback@senate.gov)> U.S. Capital Switchboard 202-224-3121.

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