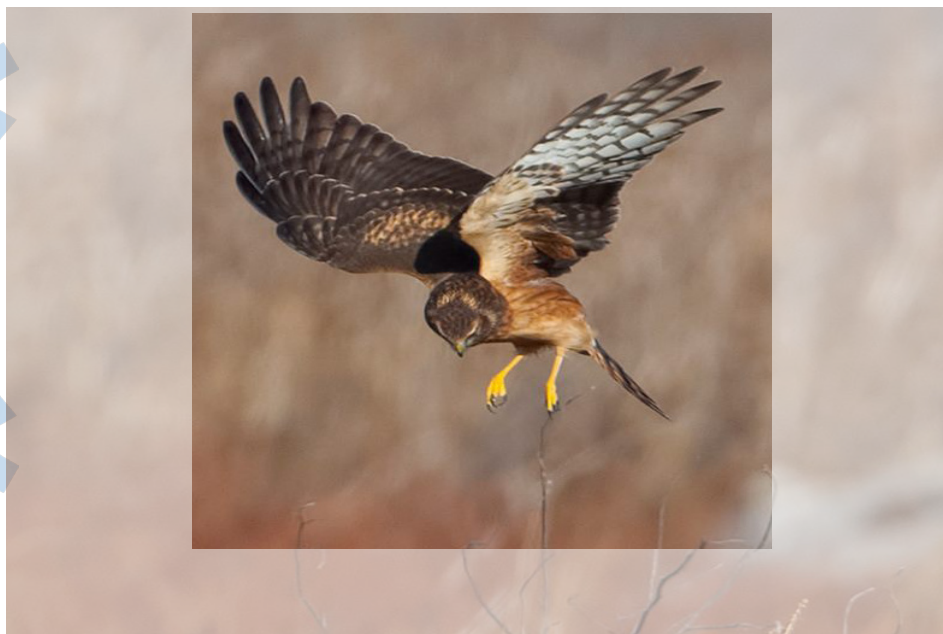


# Nothing says Winter on the Prairie like a Northern Harrier!



Another great photo from Dave Rintoul

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

**Jan. 4 - Eagle Days, Tuttle Creek Corps of Engr.**

**Jan. 6 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.**

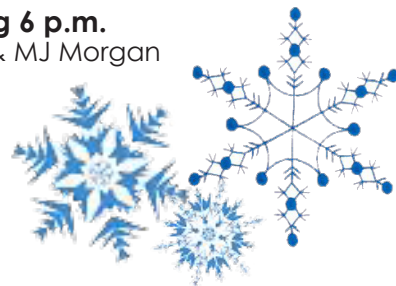
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

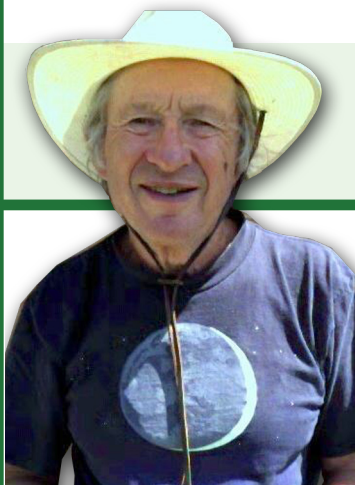
**Jan. 11 - Saturday Morning Birding**

Meet Sojourner Truth Park, 8 a.m.

**Feb. 3 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.**

Home of Tom & MJ Morgan





## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Some eggs hatch, some don't. Comet ISON, apparently was curdled as it tried to make a hairpin bend around the Sun Thanksgiving Day, and lived up to the fears that

it would not emerge from behind, glowing like the Great Comet of 1682, though it was approaching on the same path.

Meanwhile another "chick" that was brooded and hatched in living seasonal colors a dozen years ago has gotten a boost for greater growth sooner rather than later. The Flint Hills Nature Trail that's been for years gradually coming into being with private donations and lots of volunteer work is on track (where tracks used to be) to become the longest privately managed public hiking, biking, horsebacking trail in the nation, reaching eventually from Herington through Council Grove and Ottawa to Osawatomie, 117 miles.

One span already open, from Council Grove to one mile east of Admire has a six mile stretch through the Flint Hills without a road interruption. Another ready section, from just west of Ottawa to Osawatomie connects with the 56.8-mile linkage of the Prairie Spirit Trail (now a state park) and Southwind Rail Trail (developed by Allen County) that goes south from Ottawa to Humboldt. There's another 20-plus mile stretch of the Flint Hills open in between but without a finished surface or decked bridges. And some areas not yet open. See [www.kanzatrails.org](http://www.kanzatrails.org)

But now with help from the state in the name of tourism the Trail has received \$2.4M in grants from the federal Transportation Enhancement and National Recreation Trails programs of the Depts. of Transportation and Interior. This money comes with professional engineering and designing that will provide enhancements that volunteers would be hard-put to include, though that will still leave full completion of the trail and future maintenance up to private funding. The USDA is adding \$175K to help develop businesses along the Trail and the Kaw River waterway. The Santa Fe Trail, whose route this one partway follows, grew somewhat differently.

A projected 38 mile connection from Pomona to Topeka is now open for 9 miles at the north end, known as the Landon Nature Trail. Efforts will go on to connect with Lawrence and to the Kansas City trail system, while Missouri people work to connect that system to the Katy Trail and a thus establish a traffic-free pathway all the way to St. Louis. Meanwhile what's available now provides not only great opportunities for scenic fresh-air exercise but a special resource for bird-watching and census-taking, and access to dark sky viewing.

Overhead in January, while the Earth comes its closest to the Sun the 4th, the Quadrantid meteor shower will have a chance to do what it will after the waxing Moon sets early. The Big Dipper's bent handle points into the "arc to (the bright star) Arcturus," and midway between them the constellation of Quadrans, now retired, used to be. Meteors of this shower will seem to originate from there.

That virtual arc continues to Spica in Virgo, one of the Zodiacal constellations which, like the planets and even the Moon, all move closely along the ecliptic (the Sun's apparent path across the sky) so Spica, though about 250 light years from us, receives a lot of transient visitations. Mostly these are respectful, though sometimes the Moon will occult (pass in front of) her, and Wikipedia says that Venus behaved that rudely on November 10, 1783, but will refrain from doing so again until September 2, 2197.

Virgo is associated with fertility, thus grain, and Spica gets her name as a spike of corn or wheat. She's actually two stars rotating very closely about each other and is the 15th or 16th brightest star, depending on how you want to count Betelgeuse (Orion's right shoulder) whose brightness varies. Like do you count Grover Cleveland, who served separated terms, as one President or two?

Either way, Jupiter, up all night in Gemini, will have no competition as the next-brightest-beside-the-moon, for Venus will distance herself and go modestly to bed in the west early. Mars will pop up about midnight as a companion to Spica, and amid the wee hours, Saturn will come swimming up dimly surrounded by the stars of Pisces the Fish.

The Moon new at 5a14 the 1st and again at 3p39 the 30th. Full 10p52 the 15th.

© 2013 Peter Zachary Cohen

## Glass & Ice

Dru Clarke



The east bedroom's windows frost in glaze'd coats, excepting one round disc in the southeast one that is clear and dry. Could it be caused by an anomaly in the glass pane, original from the house's construction over a century and a half ago? Or is it a special portal, allowing a glimpse of the rising sun, created by the heat of the propane stove on the floor below?

Glass, I know, is created from sand, or silicon dioxide, with some soda ash added to alter the sand's melting temperature. Heating the mix to above 3000 degrees and allowing gas bubbles to escape over several hours, yields a clear, unflawed glass, desirable when a product that is completely transparent is needed.

Birds, however, seem to suffer from the use of this property in a window or door as they tend not see it and sometimes fly into it, knocking themselves out or, worse, breaking their fragile necks. A russet-backed Carolina wren stunned itself in this manner a week ago, and I was able to see it before our yellow cat did. It hit so hard it defecated a loose, berry-colored (I hoped not blood) splat and did not try to escape when I picked it up. Its feathers were puffed out like a dandelion gone to seed and it felt as light as one. It spent the morning in the bathtub with a basket over it. When it had sufficiently recovered, I released it, careful to check for a prowling feline. Since then I have heard it (or a relative) chattering from the trees near the house. The crow image, left over from Halloween, adhering to the glass in the door it hit evidently was not much of a deterrent, so I'll be looking for a silhouette resembling a sharp-shinned or Cooper's hawk.

Sand, however, can be more than silicon dioxide. While much is of continental origin, the source of quartz and feldspar, some sands are volcanic and have semiprecious particles, like garnet and tourmaline, in them. Others are skeletal and

may be composed of coral, planktonic "tests" (shells), baby mollusk shells (like chambered nautilus), or even sea urchin spines, which resemble green celery sticks or miniscule purple Grecian columns. One type is "oolitic," meaning "egg stone," and forms from lime precipitating around fish poop. Each grain is perfectly round! My collection of sand exceeds a hundred samples, collected by friends and students and brought

to me in soda bottles, discarded cardboard boxes, plastic bags, and pill containers. Someone who specializes in identifying and collecting sand is an arenologist. The derivation of this word is a bit morbid: In Rome, the *arena* where gladiatorial contests were held was covered with sand to soak up the blood shed by the wounded and dying.

The ice on the old windows mimics the nature of the original glass: imperfect, it has formed in rivulets, thicker in some

places than others, translucent and bubbled, and tear-dropped, melting unevenly in the morning sun. It is infinitely more interesting than the newer, flawless glass in the house. How two different substances – ice and glass – can be so alike yet form under entirely different conditions: one, through heat, the other, through freezing. We won't be replacing the old glass anytime soon.



©2013 Dru Clarke



# Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge trip

Sometime before dawn on Saturday, November 23, four NFHAS members piled into Eve Parks' car for an all-day expedition to Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge. It was a cold day, but the car heater worked just fine and much bird viewing at the refuge can be done from within the car. The species list for the day was not overly lengthy—29 species—but it was the identities and quantities of some of the birds seen that made for a memorable trip. Somewhere in the neighborhood of 100 Trumpeter Swans and at least 30 Bald Eagles were definite notables, and two White-faced Ibises, along with fairly close views of a male Pintail Duck and a female American Wigeon also stood out as we reviewed the day.

The scene-stealer, however, was the spectacular incoming and landing of what must have been tens of thousands of Snow Geese. We were pulled over to the side of the road to view an extensive pack of Mallards on some open water, when we noted some Snow Geese beginning to stream from the direction of the Missouri River toward the water. We had been seeing them periodically during the morning, but this was quantitatively well beyond earlier sightings as raft after raft of birds stretched all the way to the horizon. As we watched, they begin to break formation and direction, and to begin circling around and forming layers in the sky, each layer with geese heading in different directions. Then they began tightening their formations over the water, and congregating into an ever-growing mass that slowly circled and descended toward the water. Finally, the first ones began landing, and the rest, still in a great mass, followed, landing and closely spacing themselves on the surface.

Some reflection suggests that this undoubtedly is an everyday occurrence in multiple places along the flyway. We nevertheless felt lucky to find ourselves in the right place at the right time to view the entire sequence. As an eager outdoor photographer, I also was delighted to see that we had a really good lighting angle, and I had at it with two cameras. Time stamps on the images span about 13 minutes. It was a very thrilling 13 minutes.

— Donna C. Roper



# Manhattan CBC Report

Dave Rintoul reports that 52 observers participated in the 65th Manhattan Christmas Bird Count. There were a total of 101 species identified with a total of 106,025 individual birds counted.

Some of the highlights were:

Trumpeter Swans,

Pileated Woodpeckers,

Marsh Wrens,

Red-shouldered Hawks

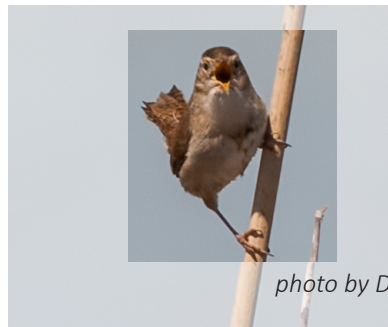
and lots of species of waterfowl including a couple of late (cold) American White Pelicans.



*photo by Jim Koelliker*



*Joshlaymon (Own work) [CC-BY-SA-3.0 ([httpcreativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/))]*



*photo by Dave Rintoul*



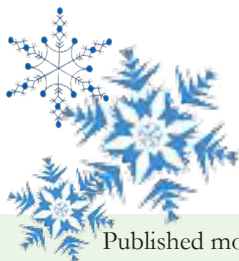
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Edited by Cindy Jeffrey, 15850 Galilee Rd., Olsburg, KS 66520. (cinraney@ksu.edu)  
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Subscription Information: If you do not want to receive the national magazine, but still want to be involved in 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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