



photo by Dave Rintoul

## 34 Warblers - a video by Paul Griffin

Mar. 16th, 7 p.m. Groesbeck Rm., Manhattan Public Library

Dinner with Paul at 5:30 p.m. Bluestem Bistro (Aggieville)

*"Much to my surprise... while sitting on a limb out in the open, the nesting pair of bald eagles mated," Griffin wrote Jan. 31 in an e-mail to area birders. "I just happened to be videoing them at the time. They were about 150 yards away and that is obviously too far to be certain, but it sure looks real to me."*

A semi-retired aircraft designer who has lived in the Wichita area for about 40 years. Paul started "serious" bird watching in April 2002 in Oak Park, in Wichita, mainly because it is a 10 minute walk from where he lives. "I'm a little bit different as a bird watcher, as I use a video camera as my binoculars. I tape what I'm looking at for later reference." Since April 2002 Paul has video taped about 200 species of birds in Oak Park.

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

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

Mar. 12 - Sat. Morning Birding 8 a.m.  
Meet at Sojourner Truth Park

Mar. 16 - "Warblers" by Paul Griffin  
5:30 Dinner - Bluestem Bistro  
7:00 Groesbeck Rm.  
Manhattan Public Library

Apr. 4 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.  
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

Apr. 9 - Sat. Morning Birding 8 a.m.  
Meet at Sojourner Truth Park



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

I haven't kept records but memory suggests that, after mostly ignoring this area for a couple decades, Old

Man Winter has now for a couple years in a row, given us a certain amount of attention. Not as much as he's given other areas it seems. We have friends in northern Minnesota and one, a surveyor, recently told of being at work standing in 26 inches of snow. The snow was so "sugary" in his description that with each step his foot would sink the whole 26 inches down to ground. A lady who's about 5'10" tall reported being able to walk through a drift that came above her waist. She and her young daughter had great fun with this oddity, and the surveyor in general prefers winter's effects, for the leaves are gone, making sighting easier, the frozen bogs make moving about easier, and there's nary a mosquito or cloud of flies to swat at.

Here the white blanket has been the impresario providing lively and colorful entertainments at the bird feeder. The performers are not amateurs. They are earning their daily living, and we are paying equity rates in feed to enjoy the shows. The snow has surprised us by revealing how many deer are passing through the yard around the house at night. We have no feed out for them, but they doubtless have their reasons. And inevitably there's been the small fur-tufted hollow bordered by the imprint of long feathers testifying that an owl or hawk has been plying its trade upon a rabbit.

As has happened occasionally in the past, considerations of such winter doings stir a vision that remains shelved somewhere in my mind. I awoke one morning, when my age must've been still in a single digit, on a train that was moving very slowly through an extensive rail yard where dark rails were making parallel patterns through solid snow cover. A conductor's voice had awakened me, telling someone it was one below zero outside. Simultaneously the window at my shoulder went passing by a switch-

man who was outside scarcely an arm's reach away. I can still see his heavy tan jacket and gray scarf and the clenched set of his jaw that made it clear to me that he was defying the cold there because he had to, which made me look about at the other adults near me, traveling at ease in the heated coach. That sudden contrast made a lasting mark on my growing concept of the world, pointing me to grasping that the things of the world that I was part of did not just happen on their own.

Of course the same can't be said for what can be perceived in the sky--unless something that someone does modifies what is there or what can be perceived. With clear skies this month Jupiter (the brighter) and Mercury will both be low in the western evening twilight from the 13th through the 17th. Descending Jupiter (a little lower each night) will be angling closer to ascending Mercury (a little higher each night) coming closest on the 15th, with Mercury the one further aloft afterwards. The Univ. of Texas' *STARDATE* reminds that the Messenger spacecraft is scheduled to enter orbit around Mercury on the 18th, on a closer orbit than those previous with one goal to see if there really is polar ice there despite its closeness to the Sun.

Venus should continue to be the Morning Star low in the SE at dawn, a companion to the Moon on the 1st and again on the 30th and 31st. Jupiter takes its turn with the Moon on the 6th and 7th. Leo the Lion, taking command of the evening sky, trails its brightest star, Regulus, above the Moon at dark on the 17th. Saturn rises on one side then the other of the Moon the 19th and 20th. Antares, the bright red dot in Scorpio, fills out the Moon's visiting card early on the 24th.

Meanwhile the winter formations, more or less centered around Orion, are in full flight ahead of Leo as darkness comes and they yield to approaching springtime, which begins at 6p21 the 20th. The Moon is new the 4th at 2p46, and full the 19th at 1p10. *The Old Farmer's Almanac* remarks that this will be the closest full Moon of the year, and it won't be this close again till 2016. Likely the tides will vary, and not on their own.

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## Maintaining a Balance

### Dru Clarke



The hoarse “kree” of a hawk coursed through the still, chill air. I looked up to see a red-tailed hawk climbing resolutely, then wheeling slowly above the tree line. Another called from the east, but out of view. This pair had been here through the summer, probably trying to raise young, but we never saw them. Raccoons, crows and their kin, and owls do a number on their eggs and nestlings. Great horned owls, incapable of constructing their own nests, frequently ‘horn in’ on the red-tails’ abodes, forcing them to build new ones. Great horned owls and red-tailed hawks coexist in the same habitat, and we’ve seen both hunting in late afternoon, the owl in the trees by the creek, and the hawk over the prairie just north. Since the great horned owl became a more frequent sight, we don’t hear the barred owls up on the creek any more, and miss their raucous calls. (Hoogy Hoogheem says they are still there, just very quiet because of the great horned’s presence: how intimidating!)

My brother witnessed, in broad daylight, a great horned owl stalking upstream in a shallow creek in New Jersey, “fishing” or capturing some aquatic creature! If the birds—back to the red-tails—reach adulthood, they’ve survived a gauntlet of adversity. They have been here for several years (or, at least, a pair that looks like them) and we have grown to look for them on our walks and feel let down when we don’t see them.

In the “Age of Misunderstanding,” pre-ecological awareness time, red-tails and other raptors were regarded as vermin and termed chicken hawks. (If you were careless enough to expose your chickens, that *might* have been an apt epithet, but more than likely it was a skunk or an owl or bobcat worrying your hens.) Thousands were shot, laid out on the ground or hanged on fences (the Scalp Act of 1885 passed by the Pennsylvania legislature, paid a bounty of 50 cents per bird), then sometimes photographed with the terminator. Advocates, such as the Audubon Society, and subsequent laws (and repeal of laws) halted that scenario. But discrimination against them continues. My cousin hated hawks, calling them “horrible,” as one (perhaps a sharp-shinned, Cooper’s, or merlin) came into her feeders and picked off her beloved songbirds. She didn’t even regard them as members of the bird clan, and wished them all dead (or at least gone). At least she never let her cat outside, so she had some appreciation of the web of life.

We see birds of prey often on our back road drive to town. A cherry chocolate-colored raptor (either a juvenile or adult dark phase red-tail: I can’t see the eye color when driving) perches patiently on a limb or utility pole along one road, scanning the nearby fields for rodents or occasional rabbit. This particular uniformly dark morph of red-tailed hawk has staked out a clearly defined territory and

probably does not have to share it with the resident badger anymore: I saw it (the badger) killed on the road last week. Evidently, hawks have been seen following badgers that flush prey that the raptor then opportunistically seizes.

We see American Kestrels less often than we used to several decades ago, and the data regarding populations are confusing. These tiny, fragile-looking falcons, when sighted, are cause for great joy. Occasionally, we see them on the same road sitting on wires, then plunging to snap up a grasshopper or dragonfly. In fact, their migration coincides with the green darner dragonfly migration in the fall!

Coming home on the road passing by our lane, I glimpsed a Northern Goshawk, statuesquely perched on a tree branch. (S) he was a polished steel blue color, an elegant, although robust, bird. I drove by it slowly, somewhat stunned by its beauty and size, not wanting to frighten it into flight. (I really need to keep a pair of binoculars and a camera in the truck.) According to Sibley’s Guide, the tiny green dots in our region indicate this is a rare sighting, as does the Pocket Guide to Kansas Raptors, but it surely was there. Is it possible that there is a population decline of its favored prey to the north, as when snowy owls descend to our latitudes when the snowshoe hare and lemming populations plummet?

When my husband was in grade school in Kensington, Kansas, he used to daydream, looking out the classroom window to a line of cottonwoods along a creek where a pair of red-tailed hawks nested every year. Those birds kept him enthralled even when class work left him unengaged. Drama unfolded daily in Central Park, NYC when Pale Male and his mate nested on a building: how many became avid birders stimulated by that?

Interestingly, falconers in the U.S. use primarily young red-tailed, or “passage,” hawks to train for their sport. “Passage” hawks are those who have fledged, left the nest and struck out on their own, but are not yet a year old. They are preferred in that they are easier to train, not having begun to behave yet like an adult bird. The commitment is one not many are cut out for. The Air Force mascot during this year’s bowl game provided some tense moments for both trainer and the onlookers. Luckily, the bird was recovered unharmed.

The red-tailed hawks circled and joined one another, flying westward. But they will be back and we will be glad to see them again.

*Dru Clarke - Dec. 2010 / Jan. 2011*



*photo by Dave Rintoul*



On Valentine's Day, I received two messages. The first (from National Audubon Society) stated:  
"Back in medieval England and France, people believed that February 14 was when birds chose their mates. The date made sense because it was right around when the first birds would start their joyful song after a long, cold winter."

The second (from my sister, Kathy Marshall) stated: "I know my Valentine card to you did not yet arrive in the US postal mail. Therefore, I will e-mail my latest picture of a cardinal. This is a female cardinal, but she does have enough red on her to be called a Valentine bird." She mentioned the joy she felt watching the cardinal. Her photograph was slightly modified in its parameters of brightness & contrast as well as color saturation, temperature & tint to illustrate the joy.

*Tom Morgan*

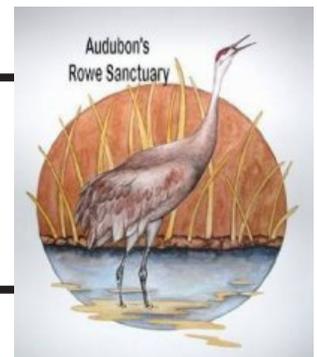
## The Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Exploring and Conserving Nature

All About Birds - identification, life history, photos, audio and video

[http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Sandhill\\_Crane/id](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Sandhill_Crane/id)

<http://www.rowsanctuary.org/>  
<http://outdoornebraska.ne.gov/wildlife/guides/migration/sandhill.asp>



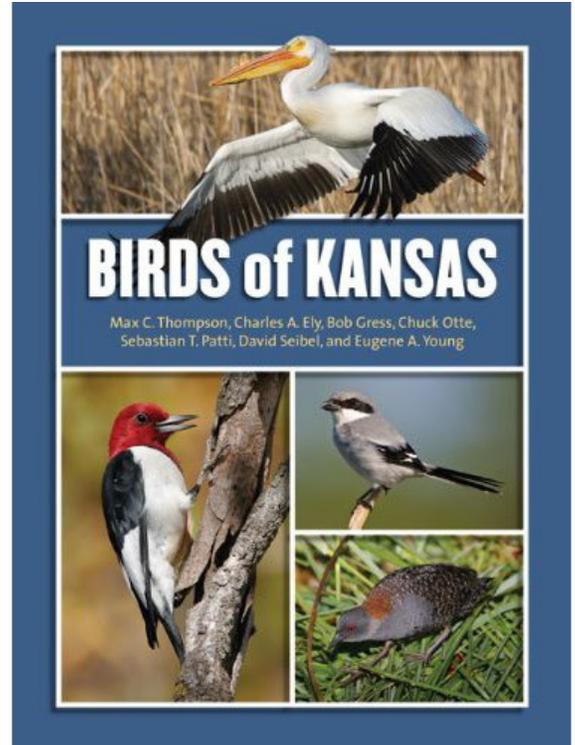
International Crane Foundation  
<http://www.savingcranes.org/sandhill-crane.html>

## OWLS in Kansas

About 60 people packed into the Groesbeck room for Chuck Otte's presentation. No one was disappointed - and to top it all off, Chuck invited Vanessa Avarra from the Milford Nature Center. She brought a screech owl that was completely unaffected by the crowd, giving us all a good look at a bird that's hard to see in the woods.

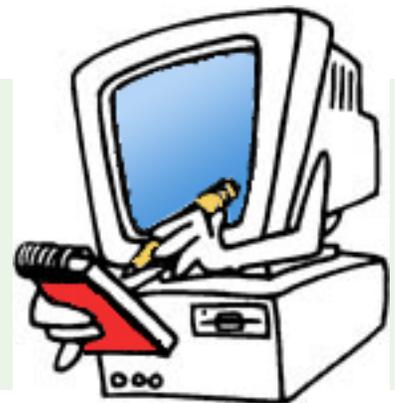
We also got a preview of a new book **"Birds of Kansas"** by Max Thompson, Charles Ely, Bob Gress, Chuck Otte, Sebastian Patti, David Seibel, and Eugene Young.

**Thank you** Chuck and Vanessa for a great evening.



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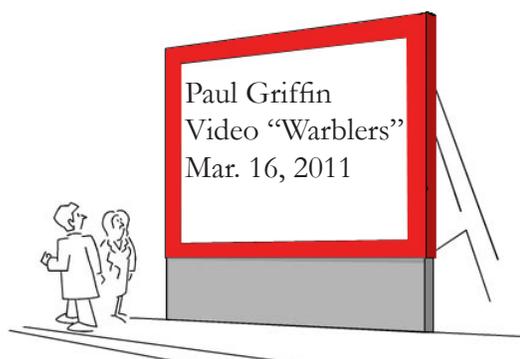
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Membership Information: Introductory memberships - \$20/yr., then basic, renewal membership is \$35/yr. When you join the National Audubon Society, you automatically become a member of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society. You will receive the 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, 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.

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