

Golden-crowned kinglet

Spotted towhee

Yellow-bellied sapsucker

Winter wren

American tree sparrow

Brown creeper

Swamp sparrow

Harris's sparrow

Northern harrier

White-breasted nuthatch

Red-breasted nuthatch

Chickadee

Some favorite winter birds:

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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Inside

pg. 2 At Home
Dru Clarke

pg. 3 THANK YOU!

pg. 4 Avian Flu
Michael C. Tincher

pg. 5 Christmas Bird Count Highlights

Upcoming Events

Jan. 6 - Board Meeting 5:30
Manhattan Public Library Study room #1

Jan.10 - Sat. Morning Birding
Meet at Sojourner Truth Park,
departs for birding at 9:00 am



At Home

Dru Clarke

A dreary day, overcast and never above freezing, with no attractive nuisance outside to draw me to investigate. From the couch, I can look out one of three narrow and long windows and see the shrub and tree-clothed hill to the south. A Rose of Sharon bush just to the left of the middle window has some attraction for a black-capped chickadee who spastically hops from branch and twig, up, then down, zigzagging and picking at – to me – invisible edible motes on the bark. A book I recently read on oaks revealed how overwintering stages of certain insects sustains our similarly overwintering bird species who glean these morsels from on and under the bark of trees. Fallen leaves that so many landowners consider a bane on the beauty of their meticulously kept lawns provide cozy cover for more insects who will emerge in spring and morph into adults of their kind. What one considers of value determines whether those leaves stay put or not. Ours, and the rotting black walnuts nestled within, stay. Some of the nuts are cached by our resident fox squirrels whose leafy nests high in the crowns of the towering trees stand out in stark contrast to the bare limbs, shed of those leaves that now sustain life on the ground.

The past few nights we've experienced a super moon, spectacularly bright and looming beacon-like directly overhead – in a path that won't be repeated until 2042 – so luminous that its light suffuses the east room of our old house, so that I can turn off the table lamp. In the morning, before sunrise (after it has traveled all night, accompanied by one lone planet), veering slightly from overhead, it illuminates the woods northeast of our bedroom, reflecting off the still pools of water in the creek winding through the trees. Some animals seem disturbed by the light: the barred owls have called in concert repeatedly, raucously. The dogs have to go out more often, not to eliminate, but to watch and listen. They may hear the coyotes singing.

On the high pasture, in the new fallen snow, I followed a track with a long drag mark from the horses' hay bales all the way into the woods bordering the north creek. The wind had blown the sugary snow into the main track, obscuring the exact outline, so I couldn't positively identify the animal who had made the trek. A coyote? A long way to walk for a drink.

Next door, a few hundred yards away, in our son's front yard, four deer "play" in the mornings. "Play", as in circling one another, butting heads, frisking and jumping, you can imagine them chuckling as they romp. We were concerned that new construction on that piece of land would disrupt the wildlife's traditional territorial routes (an expansive woodland and wide creek are just across the road) but a gap deliberately left in the fence is faithful to their original path, and they seem unfazed by the change.

"Oikos" is the Greek word meaning 'pertaining to home, taking care of home, family, community.' From it, the prefix 'eco' has evolved, and so, ecosystem, ecology. Taking care of, understanding, learning about, examining our world. It begins at home, maybe even on dreary days when it doesn't seem as if there is much to appreciate. When life seems to be on hold, in abeyance, waiting for something, anything, to happen. And then a small bird arrives and demonstrates through its earnest gleanings that life is persistent and ongoing, despite the dreariness of the day.

© Jan. 2026 Dru Clarke



Thank you!

Thank you to Merry Bower for keeping our mailing list current and coordinated with the National Audubon's records.

Thank you to Mark Mayfield for coordinating the Manhattan Christmas Bird Count.

Thank you to Dru Clarke for writing fun educational articles for the Prairie Falcon newsletter every month. We learned about mother trees, freshwater mussels, melanism in squirrels and more. Articles are always a reminder that we live in a magical place called earth.

Thank you to Steve Kramer and Merry Bower who joined me to work weekly at the Alsop Bird Sanctuary garden resulting in keeping a bit more urban green space in the ever developing Manhattan.

Thank you to Greg Wurst for replenishing and maintaining the bird houses on the 12 house bluebird trail at Carnahan Creek Recreation Area.

Thank you to the hardy volunteers that cut Bush Honeysuckle out at the Michel-Ross Preserve to maintain the trail and add to the effort to control this invasive species.

Thank you to the KSU Bird club who helped out weeding the Alsop Bird Sanctuary and generally boosted our moral birding with us.

Thank you to Jacque Staats and Dick Oberst for maintaining and growing plants for the Butterfly garden in Sojourner Truth Park. Sharing plants with the Alsop Bird Sanctuary including planting them is also appreciated.

Thank you to Jay Jeffery who delighted us with stories of his adventures. We learned about Golden Eagles and learned to take enough drinking water as he took us along in our imaginations. Thank you for your vivid inspirational tales.

Thank you to Jim Koelliker for fundraising and tallying the birdathon. Also, for filling the bird feeders at the Butterfly Garden at Sojourner Truth Park and the Alsop Bird Sanctuary at 17th and Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

Thank you to Jacob Riggs for serving as Treasurer.

Thank you to Cindy Jeffery who takes our varied interests and activities and makes sense of them. She edits our beloved Prairie Falcon newsletter and thus coordinates us all. Also, she maintains our website nfhas.org which is a wealth of information of interest to birders and nature lovers in the area.

Thank you to my fellow board members who meet monthly to determine what's next for Northern Flint Hills Audubon. They are Cindy Jeffery, Kevin Fay, Merry Bower and Jacob Riggs.

and thank you Patricia Yeager for all your work as President and also your dedication to the Alsop property!

HPAI Avian Flu

by Michael C. Tincher

I am a licensed wildlife rehabilitator in Colorado and would like to share a little of what I know and have experienced with avian influenza since it arrived in our area in 2015.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is surging all across the lower 48 and the Front Range of Colorado. The virus is carried by wild waterfowl with ducks being the primary asymptomatic hosts. Wild geese can be asymptomatic, but also experience variability in debilitation and mortality. Red-tailed hawks and Great horned owls are particularly vulnerable to the virus due to their sheer population numbers in the wild and their foraging habits. In general, the time from infection to debilitation/death is quick with birds succumbing within 72 hours. HPAI is also lethal to backyard fowl and domestic felines (house cats). Humans can also contract HPAI, but generally only manifesting typical flu type symptoms. However, individuals with underlying health conditions can be more seriously impacted.

Another key component with the HPAI virus (H5N1) is its persistence in the environment. Survivability of the virus is highly variable with cool/cold and wet/humid being the most favorable. This virus does not do well in hot, dry temperatures as we experience in Colorado during the summer. The virus is primarily shed in the feces of infected birds, but also can be shed through mucosa and respiratory droplets. Please consider anywhere outdoors with high concentrations of wild waterfowl as a veritable reservoir of HPAI and your footwear as an effective delivery system.

If you come across an obviously neurological wild bird or a raptor that looks like it fell out of a tree, please do not contain the bird. Contact a local rehabilitator, animal control or wildlife agency immediately for guidance on what to do next. The CSU Veterinary Teaching Hospital will not accept sick wild birds as these animals are a biosecurity risk to their client animals. Also, please don't risk your health or the potential of transmitting the virus to animals at your home by capturing the animal and taking it home.

I know it is distressing to see these sick birds, but please understand that there is very little that can be done for most of them other than humane euthanasia. Out of 91 HPAI patients admitted to our facility since 2022 only 3 (with milder infections) survived and were released.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Michael C. Tincher

Rehabilitation Coordinator

Rocky Mountain Raptor Program

Fort Collins, CO

For more information, check out these websites from CornellLab and the National Audubon Society and Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

<https://www.audubon.org/magazine/bird-flu-blazes-amping-concerns-wildlife-and-human-health>

<https://ksoutdoors.gov/Hunting/Migratory-Birds/Avian-Influenza-Bird-Flu>

<https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/search/?q=avian+flu>

Photo by Dave Rintoul

White-faced Ibis

Three were seen on Olsburg CBC,
Dec. 22, 2025



Manhattan Christmas Bird Count Report

by Mark Mayfield

This was the 77th Manhattan, Kansas Christmas Bird Count (initiated 1949).

We had 43 participants and logged around 85 hours of field observation among 20 daylight field parties, plus 3 hrs nocturnal and 3.5 at birdfeeders. The weather was mostly clear and relatively mild with a low of 29 degrees and a high of 53 and winds of up to 15 mph. All surface water was open and there was no snow on the ground.

We tallied 95 species (high end of average for the last few years, hour high was). We added 4 count-week species the day after the count and a total of 5 CW birds--frustrating but typical.

We had no "first records" for the count this year, but some of the "best" records were probably Orange-Crowned Warbler, Marsh Wren, and Brown Thrasher. Each of these has been detected at least once in the last 15 years, but the OCWA is most unusual, having been detected in only 3 previous counts scattered over the last 4 decades. Marsh Wren is a bird that can probably be flushed from the right habitat during most years. Brown Thrasher is also shy and elusive in the winter-credit first time CBC counter Zara Koehn with that incredible sighting from Washington Marlatt Park.

Bewick's Wren is not unusual overall, but it has been rare since 2008, having been found in only 6 of the previous 16 counts, whereas the median was 2 birds over the 43 count years immediately prior to 2009 (starting 1966).

The highlight for me was a single Loggerhead Shrike. To put this into perspective, the species had been recorded on 39 of 76 previous count days since 1949, but this was the first year since 2011 it has been found. At the same time, sightings of Northern Shrike are more regular for the last 2 decades.

Lastly, I think the most conspicuous missed species for this year is Greater Prairie Chicken. We've had pretty good luck detecting those over the years by sending experienced "chicken-finders" into the field, but they never come easily.

Other things that would be considered "misses," at least in recent times, are Am. White Pelican, Am. Coot, Am. Widgeon, N. Shoveler, Lesser Scaup, and Ruddy Duck (waterfowl!). In addition, Rusty Blackbird, Common Grackle and Lapland Longspur are worth a mention in the "missed" category. Notably, among blackbirds, we only found one Cowbird and 85 Red-winged Blackbirds (Rusty BB was found by someone a day after "count week").

After the count we had a large amount of fantastic chili, and only a handful of observers attended. A huge THANK YOU!! for the efforts of those who provided food and helped to prep and clean the space we used.

Lastly, next year, the count will most likely be held on Saturday, the 19th of December. Thanks again to all who participated!

Photos by Dave Rintoul



Orange-crowned Warbler



Marsh Wren



Brown Thrasher



Northern Flint Hills
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The purpose of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society is to teach people to enjoy and respect birds and their habitats. NFHAS advocates preservation of prairie ecosystems and urban green spaces thus saving the lives of birds and enriching the lives of people.

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WE NEED YOU! PLEASE consider joining our NFHAS Board.

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