

Potluck and birdwalk

Join us for a **potluck dinner at Patricia's on Monday evening, July 28th at 6:00 pm.** Birding stroll, also Pott. Co. Lake #2 is only 5 miles away.

5614 Bayers Hill. (turn North off Highway 24 onto Lake Elbo Rd. When the pavement turns to gravel turn into Lake Elbo. Ignore all right turns until you are across the dam, then take the immediate right onto Bayers Hill. 4th house on the right.



Reminder: No Newsletter in August. But deadline for September newsletter is Aug. 15th

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society,
P.O. Box 1932, Manhattan, KS 66505-1932



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 53, No. 11, July 2025

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Upcoming Events

July 1 - Board Meeting 5:30
Manhattan Public Library Study room #1

July 12 - Sat. Morning Birding
Meet at Sojourner Truth Park,
departs for birding at **8:00 am**

July - Wednesdays at Alsop - weeding
9 am

July 28 - Potluck and bird walk 6:00 pm (see above)

Sept 13 - Sat. Morning Birding
Meet at Sojourner Truth Park,
departs for birding at **8:00 am**



Twining Vine

Dru Clarke

trying it.

Vines have since fascinated me, and I am prone to try to train them up the stones of our house and on trellises and makeshift ladders propped here and there. A favorite is bittersweet, which is a true twining vine. Twining occurs when the cells on one side of the stem grow faster than those on the opposite side, causing the vine to begin a slow helical twirl. Often tendrils help it attach to stable supports. Another vine that graces our stones is Virginia creeper, a clinging or climbing vine. Looking closely at how it manages to climb and cling, it has tiny, quasi-sticky structures, that look very much like gecko feet, growing from the stem that tenaciously hold the vine fast to the stone. Prying the vine away often leaves these 'toed feet' glued to the stone. Virginia creeper is gorgeous in the fall as its palmate leaves (five leaflets distinguish it from three in poison ivy) turn a bright crimson, glorifying its surroundings. Bittersweet, too, in the fall is lovely as its orange husks hold lush, red fruits that our bluebirds seem to relish.

Bristly green brier is abundant in the understory but can scale a tree clear to the canopy. Its prickly main stem has bristles as hard as nails, but on the trailing tendril-laden shoots, they are soft and pliable. The leaves are glossy, as if polished. The very tips of the slender stems are tender and easily picked, making a wild, mini-salad to sample when exploring. In spring, I have encountered a mysterious delicately sweet fragrance along the roadside and wondered about its source. On close inspection of the plants growing nearby, I found that it came from green brier blossoms and was as ephemeral as the flowers themselves. Last spring I found a newborn calf nestled in a tangle of the previous year's green brier stems: she was well protected from any predator.

Poison ivy is ubiquitous here, and while we might abhor it, its fruits are edible by many species. It produces a growth of aerial roots that resemble coarse hair that allows it to cling to a support. Pipevine is another vine found in Kansas, and like kudzu in the South, it can take over and choke out other, more desirable vegetation. It is growing on our dog pen's fence and hosted a population of pipevine swallowtail larvae a few years ago. Its scientific name, *Aristolochia*, means 'the best delivery', given to it as it is purported to have medicinal properties. We think, however, our dog is allergic to it.

One vine that is considered an invasive species is black swallow wort. I found a few plants deep in our woods and it was blooming at the time. The flowers are star-shaped, smokey black, and quite beautiful. But the plant is toxic and is harmful to both animals and humans. Whenever found, it should be destroyed.

Lianas, like the one Tarzan used to swing on, are neotropical vines, and this generic name encompasses several hundred species of clinging, climbing, twining vines. An ongoing study in Panama (Barro Colorado) of the ecological effect of lianas has shown that where lianas were allowed to dominate, other species had difficulty thriving. Where they were removed in a study plot, native vegetation did well - even produced fruits and seeds in abundance - and diversity was augmented.

Friends had a non-native vine, a *Euonymus*, struggling up a mature tree. It resembled a strangler fig in its growth habit, spreading clutching fingers around the compliant tree, growing thicker and more ominous each year. While lovely in fall, it was not appreciated and was thought to not be especially good for the tree. They throttled it, slicing it away from its sustaining roots. But today, years later, it still clings to the tree, as a desiccated wooden mummy, testament to its former life.

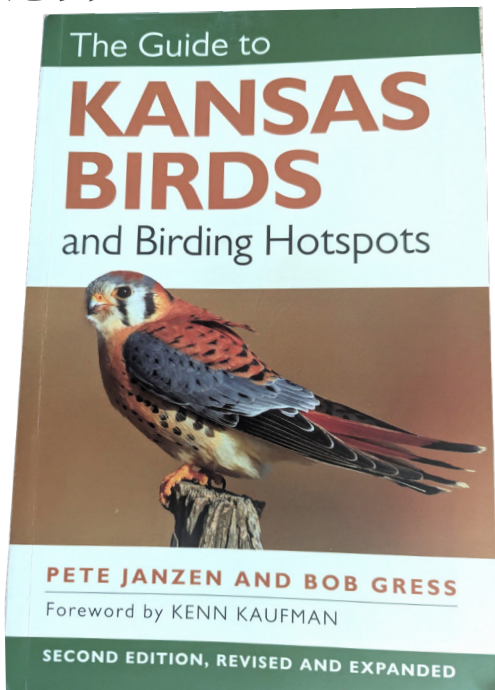


Photo by Ed Pembleton

Dru Clarke June 2025

NEW

Books you might need!

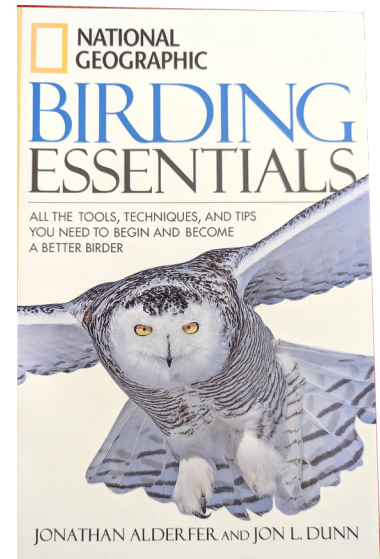


Save the DATE!
Wed. Oct. 15, 7 pm

Book signing:

Pete Janzen and Bob Gress will join us at the Manhattan Public Library to present their latest book.

This is a wonderful addition to your "birding" library. If you have the first one, you know how good these two authors are. Check out this one!



Great source for beginning birders and experienced birders too.

Understanding binoculars, distribution, parts of the bird, how to identify, variations, and more.

Missed captions in last issue!



Bewick's Wren
2nd time found



Blackpoll Warbler –
1st time found



Water Pipit – 2nd
time found

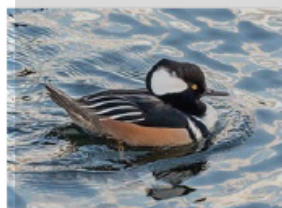


Wilson's Warbler – 2nd
time found

Best Birds of 2025



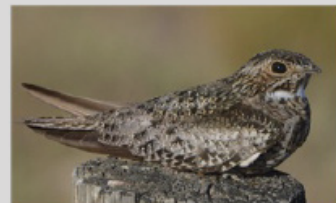
Yellow-billed
Cuckoo



Hooded Merganser –
3rd time found



Short-Billed Dowitcher –
2nd time found



Common Nighthawk – 2nd
time found

Biggest misses this year: Vesper Sparrow, Green-winged Teal, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Pectoral Sandpiper

GOLDEN ENCOUNTERS - River Bend Golden (Part 3)

By Jay Jeffrey

"I loved the adventure of it all, the thrill of overcoming obstacles and the challenge of staying safe." -- Harvey Butchart (1907-2002), *in* Grand Canyon Treks, 1998; H. Butchart considered the undisputed king of extreme and obsessive Grand Canyon hiking (Backpacker Magazine).

A long time ago in canyons far, far away...

Early summer, 2000, Jon and I met while conducting bird research on the Colorado River, traveling in backcountry using a whitewater raft with a week of provisions. Survey segments were comprised of transects along riparian areas of the river, beginning near Moab, Utah, and leap-frogging downstream to different survey stations. Much of the study area was within Canyonlands National Park, ending just below the confluence with the Green River; a river also surveyed for riparian birds within Canyonlands NP.

After morning bird surveys were finished, we embarked on epic remote canyoneering journeys. First, we scrutinized USGS topo maps to discern esoteric geologic features, potential freshwater springs, and possible Anasazi ruins amongst favorable desert canyon walls. We were mesmerized, enchanted, and enriched with the raw natural beauty of this place. Incredibly diverse and dynamic: geologically, hydrologically, topographically, culturally, and biologically.

We were in excellent shape, each of us frequently trail-running 12 to 15 miles in a single effort. These post-morning canyon explorations started with CamelBak hydration packs loaded to maximum with water, electrolyte packets, and minimal snacks. We often hiked substantial distances in open exposed desert with temperatures, at times, exceeding 100 degrees. We took few rest breaks, sitting under the rare mid-day shaded rock alcove. We talked little, allowing body temp to drop and maximizing recharge for continued adventure; I've fond memories of sucking on Jolly Ranchers, sitting while leaning against cool rock, eyes closed.

We were fearless, but kept environmental and situational awareness high; we were not just physically in great shape, we operated mentally with almost unconscious real-time risk assessment based upon years of experience working and exploring in areas exposed to forces of nature and hazards; without any nearby protection and amenities (and lacking Emergency Contact devices, including cell and smartphones).

The canyons were our dream playgrounds. We were in heaven: ancient indigenous petroglyphs and inhabitations, red-spotted toads, midget-faded rattlesnakes, gopher snakes, leopard lizards, black-throated sparrows, black-throated gray warblers (in pinon-juniper islands), white-throated swifts, violet-green swallows, crepuscular bats, peregrine falcons, golden eagles, mountain lions, scurrying bighorn sheep, etc. And Jon and I formed a tight bond; he was as they say, a "brother from another mother."



Owyhee River, middle reach; canyonlands. Photo by Jay Jeffrey

Fast forward to Owhyee Canyonlands, Owhyee River trip number two, summer 2007. Another escape from civilization, intentionally unconnected without any tech and phones. Much like our 2005 trip, we were completing a marvelous self-supported multi-day trip in provisioned sea kayaks; paddling with smiles and souls aglow from days filled with hiking arroyos, rocky hills and canyon bluffs, soaking in hot springs, and metaphorically overfilling our naturalist cups. Another trip of a lifetime, it couldn't have been any dreamier. Or could it?

GOLDEN ENCOUNTERS

We could see the far river bend, where just around the corner was the take-out location at a seldom-used jeep trail, with my faithful beat-up pickup waiting; proud with its well-used and weathered custom self-fabricated kayak rack. The steep basaltic rock slope on the left riverbank was rimmed high-up with vertical cliffs, much of its eastern slope in shadows because of late afternoon sun. A clear sky, its color a light cobalt. Unusually calm with scant breeze, the afternoon heat stable, the summer's warm river water providing little temperature differential to that of air – stalling potential zephyrs or winds; warm temps in the shade of shadows too. Serene.

We were slightly “pumping the brakes” while paddling on the river, to stretch the time of this magical day. Our paddle strokes were not lazy, remaining deliberate, but at moderate speed as we visually savored the gorgeous land-, river-, and skyline. I paddled roughly a third of the river-width from the left bank, Jon paddled about a third from the right bank; traveling downstream we meandered a bit, maybe 20-30 yards separated us at any given time, we kept roughly abreast so neither of us was much ahead or behind the other. There was only the sound of our dipping and dripping paddles, amplified slightly by the rocky slope on my side, with only the faint rhythmic background pulse of insects on Jon's side, coming from the adjacent old-growth Big Sagebrush which dominated the steppe there, yet interlaced with mixed forbs and grasses. And occasionally, random calls of Chukar Partridges; we'd seen or heard them seemingly everywhere during our trip.

Chukars are very vocal, with mixed repetitive chuck calls both quirky and you could say “chukar'ing.” They're not native, initially being sourced from Afghanistan and Nepal, they were stocked in the US in late 19th Century, and since early/mid-20th Century have become wild with feral populations providing a popular gamebird for sport hunting. They're exotic looking: zebra-like striping on flanks, with the grays, creams, and mask of Loggerhead Shrikes; that attire then overlaid on a small chicken with a red bill – exotic.

Jon barks out, “Golden!” while pointing straight ahead. And adds, “A big female!” Directly ahead at the river bend, about 100 yards away past the bending right riverbank, a large eagle gracefully flaps and glides less than 40 yards above the gently rolling grassland-sagebrush steppe, focused on what lies below – hunting.

There's a slight undulation to her flight over the shallow hills, with flapping occurring during ascent and then a long gradual gliding descent; keeping about the same height over the ground at any given time. Minor altitude changes, seemingly with little effort, even without significant breeze and wind; maintaining maximum flight-efficiency with minimal energetic costs.

We smile bigger, souls glowing even brighter, what a way to end a trip – “Icing on the cake!”

But it was a double-tiered cake...the trip wasn't done.

“The golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) is the quintessential capital-E eagle, the Platonic ideal of a bird of prey...”

– Stephen Bodio, *in* An Eternity of Eagles, 2012.

[TO BE CONTINUED...the description of an electrifying encounter with a hunting golden – a different eagle, but only moments later while watching the female in this account – will be described next time in Part 4, as repeatedly promised! Also see Part 1 in Feb newsletter, Part 2 in March, Series Interlude in May]



Owyhee River, middle/lower reach. Jon paddling, Eagle Peak top left in background. Photo by Jay Jeffrey.



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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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