

We successfully planted 58 new plants at the *Alsop Bird Sanctuary* on Sat. the ninth. We enjoyed a nice breeze, satisfaction in a job well done, and a sandwich and pasta salad dinner with pleasant conversation on location.

Thank you to those who joined me.

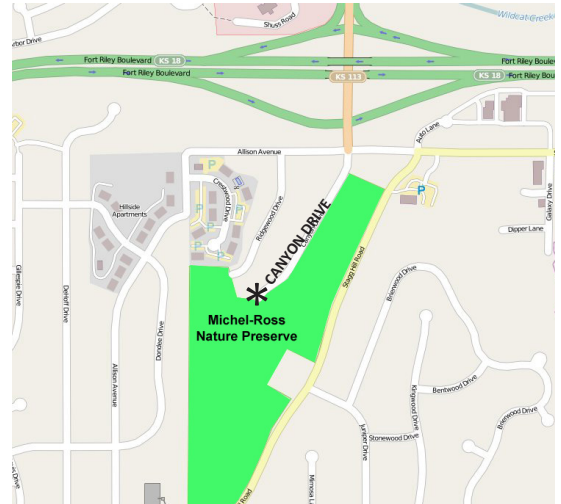
They were Jim Koelliker, Kevin Fay, and Debbie Marshall. Debbie brought some Iris divisions from her yard and my husband, Kent, made the sandwiches and salad. It was a good time and at this writing all new plantings are looking good. We planted Wild Geranium, Golden Ragwort, Whorled Milkweed, Anemone, Goat's Beard, Bleeding Heart, Sihene Stellata, Barrenwort, and Iris.

*Patricia Yeager*

**Sunday Oct. 15th at 10:00 a.m.**

Let's explore our own **Michel-Ross Preserve**. Bring your binoculars and something to trim a few branches blocking the trail.

Meet at the trail head at the end of Canyon Dr.



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



## prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 46, No. 2 ~ October 2017

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### Upcoming Events

Oct. 2 - Board meeting 6 p.m.  
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

Oct. 14- Saturday Morning Birding 8 a.m.-11 a.m.  
Departing from Sojourner Truth Park

Oct. 15 - Explore Michel-Ross Preserve  
Bring your binoculars and something  
to trim branches blocking the trail!

**NOTE: Birdseed Sale Form will be in NOV issue**



# Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

At the time of the autumn equinox in September the Sun bid good-by to the North Pole, not planning to peek back up there again till the spring equinox. However, there's still some refracted twilight lingering there a week or two into October, to reappear in advance of

the Sun's return come spring. (Midway between times, its northward reach at the winter solstice marks the Arctic Circle.)

Some 1300 miles, and 20° of latitude south, Barrow, Alaska, above the Arctic Circle will have from mid-November 67 days of darkness. On a slightly angled beeline, 500 miles farther south, below the Arctic Circle, at 64.8° N. lat., Fairbanks will continue enjoying sunrises and sunsets; three hours and 42 minutes apart on December 21st, the shortest day.

That still leaves a lot of darkness, though one estimate opines that what with the twilight glows and a climate friendly to clouds and fogs, of the six months between the equinoxes, in sum about two months' worth of clear dark sky becomes available, offering perspectives differing from those of the lower Forty-eight. For example, Vega, one of the Lower 48's Summer Triangle of stars, becomes circumpolar, i.e. never setting.

On over 300 pages of fine paper a book titled *The Arctic Sky: Inuit Astronomy, Star Lore, and Legend*, assembles a lot of research into the Inuit responses to the stars of the polar sky. For one thing, it provides in what seems complete detail the different names that the many different Inuit, or Eskimo, groups that are spread across that vast region apply to the same stars; that how, while the words may differ, their meanings are often the same. For example, the various words for the two stars that are elsewhere called Castor and Pollux, in the Gemini constellation, all refer to those stars as representing a collar bone. Sometimes, depending on the interpretation by the reporting ethnologist, they are part of a spine in connection with Capella in the constellation Auriga. As another example, the Hyades (Taurus the Bull's V-shaped jaw in western sky maps) are generally regarded, whatever the name, as a pack of dogs, with the nearby bright star Aldebaran (Taurus' red eye) as a hunted bear.

There are also differing responses. When the Orion constellation is seen in full, Rigel, the star of Orion's left foot, depicts for some a hunter stooping for a dropped mitten, while the stars of his belt represent three other hunters climbing toward the poor beset Aldebaran. Yet to others those three belt stars indicate sequentially rising hilltops. It is mentioned that no limned outline of an individual is anywhere conceptualized. There is no Orion-the-Hunter. The constellation of Cassiopeia-the-Queen seems recognized sometimes as a container,

sometimes for a triangle it contains. Individuals, such as the hunters, appear only as points of light, the essences of their spirits.

*Nuuttuittuq*, is one name for what is known in the mid-latitudes as Polaris (nine other Inuit names are listed), but none of the indigenous individuals interviewed held it in the same regard as it is held down south. Some responders did not mention it at all. The notice and names it is given way up north, where it shines nearly overhead, is not so much for being a "north star", but as a "star that never moves", or "something to aim at", thus by uniquely holding to one position it does still retain some use as a guide-on. The planets, by wandering in and out of the sky at different times, by contrast, seem to have aroused less attention.

As to the book, there are sketchy diagrams and specific references to when and where certain stars appear, yet I find one has to work to piece together a picture of what is overall on display over the polar world. But there is much more addressed than just the stars. The book comprehensively contains many accounts of both practical and purely fabled lore, involving not only the stars, Sun and Moon, but the winds and the tides, the sometimes-life-or-death task of telling direction on and amid shifting ice floes, and of telling time--regarding both hours and months (the Moon adds to the latter challenge by lingering aloft longer in some years than in others). Lore that is gradually fading as community lampposts blur the sky and snowmobiles remove the tale-telling times of sled journeys. It is published by the Royal Ontario Museum/Nunavut Research Institute, with dates of 1998, 2000. The author is John MacDonald, whose is not identified further.

As to October skies above the lower 48, they contain this year's Harvest Moon on the 5th. (The title of "Harvest Moon" is bestowed on the full Moon closest to the autumn equinox, that's usually in September, but not this year.) But as it sets in the west it will find Venus and Mars competing for attention in the dawn light, across the sky, low in the east.

Venus will be much the brighter (250 times) though Mars can be found by its reddish sparkle. Venus will be using the month to gradually withdraw from its current Morning Star role, appearing lower each day.

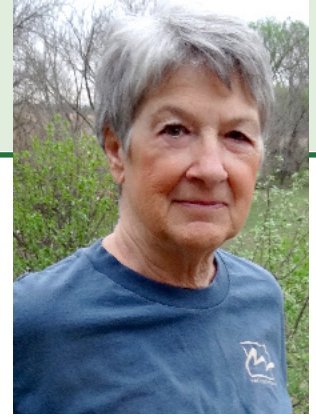
Meanwhile the Moon will visit Taurus' red eye, Aldebaran, to its upper right the 8th and 9th, and having totally blocked out the Sun in August will have little trouble eclipsing Leo's brightest star, Regulus, on the 15th. It gets close to Mars in the dawn light of the 17th a little above Venus, and slips below Venus on the 18th.

For those who like to take in meteor showers, it will obligingly be a non-interfering crescent the 21st and 22nd for the Orionids, then pass from right to the left of Saturn at nightfall of the 23rd and 24th. Having been full at 1p40 on the 5th, new a 2p12 the 19th.

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# Falling Out

Dru Clarke



When my brother Hil died in 2010, I went to NE Florida where he lived south of Palatka, in tiny backwater Satsuma, on a tributary (Murphy's Creek) of the St. Johns River, to make the necessary arrangements. He lived in a small community of retired folks, many of whom were 'crackers', or natives who talked funny and had strong ideas about the best place to live: of course, "Flahdah" (read Florida). One wiry, unshaven guy at the wake, in finding out I lived in Kansas, said, with incredulity, "WHY would you choose to live where there are TORNADOES?", and he walked away, shaking his head. I think about this now, as Hurricane Irma barrels toward the peninsula, with Jose in hot pursuit.

I wondered, too, in light of the mandatory human evacuations and those diehards who hunkered down, unwilling to leave their property, what effect these tempests have on wildlife, especially birds who, on the surface, seem to have the most to lose. For birders, tropical storms provide the best times to look for unusual birds. (E Bird has an extensive list of sightings associated with specific storms.) In a National Wildlife Federation (Aug. 27 2011) source online I found the following: "Shorebirds often move to inland areas. In a unique effect of cyclonic hurricanes, the eye of the storm with its fast-moving walls of intense wind can form a massive "bird cage" holding birds inside the eye until the storm dissipates. It is often the eye of the storm that displaces birds, more than its strong winds." So, it is not the winds but the eye that moves them from their normal habitat and range to nether lands.

I remember seeing above our pasture two Kiskadee flycatchers in an aerial jousting match with a smaller bird a few years ago: normally found in extreme southern Texas (the lower Rio Grande Valley) to South America, I was baffled by their presence until I was told by a knowledgeable birder that the storm that had pummeled Texas' coast had probably driven them north. Another time I spied a caracara on a chinquapin oak branch along Lake Elbo Road. It was later confirmed in a county north of here. Errant species, 'falling out' or moving ahead to avoid the buffeting storm winds.

Hurricanes usually occur in late summer or fall, after the sea surface has heated to its maximum for the year, but occasionally one occurs later, like the "Storm of the Century" of 1950 (also called the "Appalachian Storm") that blessed us Easterners on Thanksgiving. A tree in our yard that I always wanted to climb was toppled by the winds, and I was finally able to scale its height, once it lay horizontal. Somehow, it wasn't very satisfying then.

Hurricanes that coincide with fall migration can wreak havoc on many species, delaying their flight or moving them to unfamiliar territory where their normal food might not be available: an oceanic bird would find lean pickings transported to a freshwater habitat, unless it is really fat. In this case, the fat ones survive and can resume their migration. One tale of a bird surviving a severe tropical storm (Maria) only to die at the hands of a hunter on the Caribbean island of Guadalupe is especially heartbreaking. Machi, a whimbrel, tagged on a Nature Conservancy reserve by the Center for Conservation Biology at William and Mary College in Virginia in 2009, at the time of her death had traveled more than 27,000 miles, with seven nonstop flights of over 2,000 miles from her breeding ground on Hudson Bay to Sao Luis. Machi normally would not stop on Guadalupe but may have been forced down- called 'falling out'- by bad weather. On Guadalupe, Martinique, and Barbados hunting shorebirds is legal, and in the Bahamas, it used to be unrestricted but bag limits and hunter education, including involving hunters in banding and population counts have promoted a conservation ethic. Species of high concern like the red knot and the American golden plover, hunters have agreed not to hunt, so it seems that the non-confrontational collaboration between them and the conservation community is paying off.

It was June when my brother died, and I remember vividly the heat given off by his alkaline ashes as I held them in my hand, letting them sift through my fingers into the oily waters of Murphy's Creek. Still hot, like his temperament when he fought the dams on the Susquehanna, like the heat liberated over land, carried from the ocean by moisture-laden tempests. A woman brought a basket of rose petals that she tossed on the water where they mingled with his chalky remains. Her kind act upstaged the cracker's hostile denigration of my choice of places to live. I'm grateful that today my brother won't have to evacuate and leave his beloved river: he'd instead hunker down and wait it out, falling out like the birds, to survive another day. And maybe our cracker friend will rethink his view of Kansas as a place to live.

© 2017 Dru Clarke, October

# Book Review: The Enigma of the Owl

*An illustrated history*

Perhaps no other creature has so compelling a gaze as the owl. Its unblinking stare mesmerizes; its nocturnal lifestyle suggests secrets and mystery.

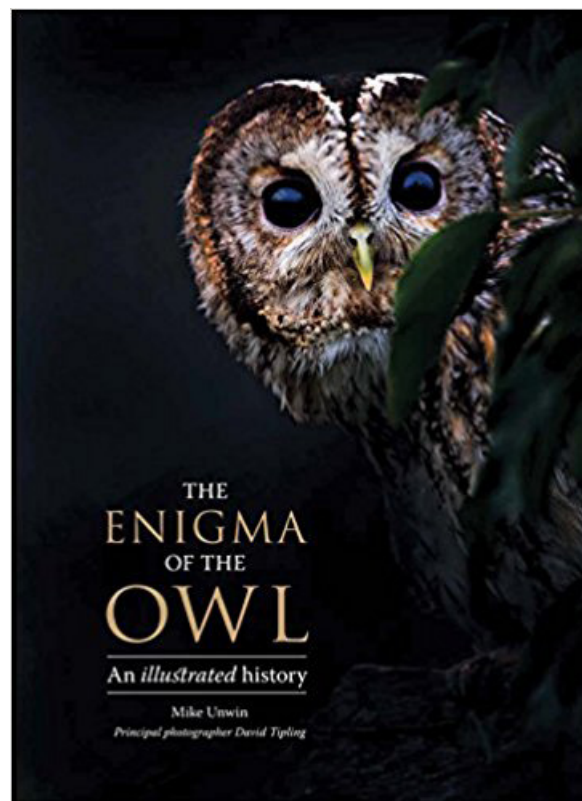
This lavishly illustrated book celebrates owls from every corner of the world and offers abundant details on fifty-three of the most striking and interesting species, from the tiny Elf Owl of southwestern American deserts to the formidable Blakiston's Fish Owl, the largest of all owls.

This book is available at the Manhattan Public Library!

Owls are intriguing birds that easily capture the attention and curiosity of birders. These facts may help clear up a bit of their mystery and reveal what a hoot owls really are.

1. Many owl species have asymmetrical ears. When located at different heights on the owl's head, their ears are able to pinpoint the location of sounds in multiple dimensions. Ready, aim, strike.
2. The eyes of an owl are not true "eyeballs." Their tube-shaped eyes are completely immobile, providing binocular vision which fully focuses on their prey and boosts depth perception.
3. Owls can rotate their necks 270 degrees. A blood-pooling system collects blood to power their brains and eyes when neck movement cuts off circulation.
4. A group of owls is called a parliament. This originates from C.S. Lewis' description of a meeting of owls in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.
5. Owls hunt other owls. Great Horned Owls are the top predator of the smaller Barred Owl.
6. In fact, owls are insanely good hunters. Check out this video to learn why:
7. The tiniest owl in the world is the Elf Owl, which is 5- 6 inches tall and weighs about 1 ½ ounces. The largest North American owl, in appearance, is the Great Gray Owl, which is up to 32 inches tall.
8. The Northern Hawk Owl can detect—primarily by sight—a vole to eat up to a half a mile away.
9. In fat years when mice are plentiful, usually monogamous Boreal Owls are apt to be promiscuous. Because easy prey means less work for parents feeding their young, males have been caught mating with up to three females, while females have been seen with at least one beau on the side.
10. Barn Owls swallow their prey whole—skin, bones, and all—and they eat up to 1,000 mice each year.
11. Northern Saw-whet Owls can travel long distances over large bodies of water. One showed up 70 miles from shore near Montauk, New York.

<http://www.audubon.org/news/11-fun-facts-about-owls>





# ELF OWL

*MICRATHENE WHITNEYI*

## APPEARANCE

*Tiny, with round body and large round head with no ear tufts; faint facial disk, strong white eyebrows, and yellow eyes; upper parts brown, with pale blotches and scalloping that grades to barring on flight feathers, and strong white scapular line on shoulder; breast pale with soft, broad, rufous-brown streaks; in flight, shows short round wings.*

## SIZE

*length 4.9–5.7 in. (12.5–14.5 cm)  
weight 1.4 oz (40 g)  
wingspan 10.5 in. (27 cm)  
females larger than males*

## DISTRIBUTION

*Southwestern United States, from Arizona, New Mexico, and southeast California south to northern and central Mexico; separate population in southern Baja California.*

## STATUS

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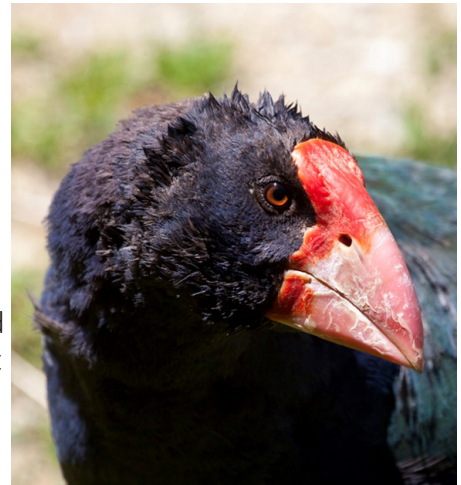


Left: Madagascar Red Owls have adapted to hunt around banana plantations and other cultivated land.

OCEANIC ISLANDS

## Behind the Fence

Elizabeth Dodd



**Takahe** photo by Dave Rintoul

“The bumper stickers make a direct fundraising appeal: *Save Our Babies: Get Behind the Fence*.” I have one on my car, even though the fence in question is, literally, half a world away. It stretches 9 miles long, plunging over steep terrain, to encircle 1700 acres of New Zealand forest just outside the city of Nelson on the South Island. And the forest is splendid—“pristine,” the New Zealanders say, meaning “old-growth.” Southern beech trees filter the light with their coin shaped leaves while the slender leaves of rimu finger the wind. Tree ferns cast shadows that feel ancient, Jurassic-like, and in season the manuka and kanuka blossoms scent an entire hillside.

The Brook Waimarama Sanctuary is the latest entity to preserve the forest. For decades it was spared from the ubiquitous clearcutting and sheep pasturage because the valley housed the water supply for the adjacent city. The brook itself is story-book gorgeous: waterfalls, riffles, pools, sudden rills knifing into the steepest hills, spilling into the main valley. Volunteers have cut a system of trails that wind up towards the biggest trees—the totaras, the rimus—and loop back down to the pleasant glades near the old reservoir pools. Those volunteers have also followed a series of lighter paths that transect the slopes, almost invisible to the casual hiker. These are the trap lines, with which, over the last decade, the Sanctuary Trust has controlled invasive predators. More than 30,000 individual mammals (stoats, weasels, possums, rats, primarily) were removed from the landscape by trapping, one after another. Dedicated hunters also removed feral pigs, deer, and goats. All that pest removal—an enormous undertaking, performed almost entirely by volunteers—has aimed to give the indigenous wildlife a fighting chance to hang on in their ancient habitat.

Because there were no mammals in that forested world for millions of years—none but bats, that is—all mammalian quadrupeds are invasive, every last one. Hence the fence. Once in place, it will make the sanctuary a real place of refuge, where birds, amphibians, and insects can reproduce and actually begin to gain ground in their race against extinction.

But first, of course, the space inside must be genuinely free of pests. One pregnant rat can whelp more than 200 infants in a year, and, as the offspring breed as well—they reach maturity at about three months of age—the lineage could swell by an order of magnitude, reaching up to 2000 descendants in just twelve months.

Throughout September and October (the end of winter in the southern hemisphere), the sanctuary is undertaking the final stage in pest eradication. It’s a difficult task, logistically and emotionally, but one that has been essential in clearing rat infested seabird colonies throughout the Aleutian Islands and the South Pacific. Once rats, weasels, possums, and mice are gone, nesting success soars and populations begin to rebound. In New Zealand, the pest-free refuges can then receive some of the more gravely threatened species.

*Brodifacoum*, an anti-coagulant rodent poison, replaces traplines as the new control agent. It’s applied aurally, bait pellets painstakingly laid down as a helicopter traces stripes in the air above the landscape. Then the volunteers, shifting focus once again, will install tracking tunnels—long tubes equipped with ink applicators and cards to record any tell-tale footprints. The Sanctuary Trust must document two full years of no mammalian presence. After that, they’ll be eligible to reintroduce threatened species.

Probably not the most perilously endangered: not the kakapo, of which there are only 150 left on this earth. They squeezed through a genetic bottleneck nearly as fine as mouse-proof mesh, and inbreeding has led to fertility problems in the tiny population. They’re possibly the most managed wildlife species in the world. Probably not the takahe, whose numbers are twice those of the night parrot but 306 individuals,



## Behind the Fence

Elizabeth Dodd



**Kaka** *photo by Dave Rintoul*

occasionally in the area). Stitchbirds, fantails, maybe even tiny riflemen, might come and go, flying freely from the forest where they'd safely breed, to visit the yards and parks of the town.

The effort not simply to preserve suitable habitat, but to make it predator-free, is expensive and logistically-demanding. In this case, it means that Nelsonians gave up the easy access they had to the picturesque trails, the chance to pop up with the kids to wade in the creek. The sanctuary's business plan requires admission fees, and the land's aspect will shift from a public commons for all people to a special refuge for indigenous nonhumans. People are giving up their rights of access to further their keen sense of responsibility, something almost unimaginable in the United States right now.

But there are connections between the Brook Waimarama Sanctuary and the US, even Manhattan, Kansas. Which brings us really back to the fence itself. During the capital campaign to fund the project, you could sponsor a fence post. One, purchased by Dave Rintoul, is dedicated to Jan Garton, longtime Audubon activist. In her leadership to compel the state to enforce water rights at Cheyenne Bottoms, her slogan was "Save Our Bottoms." She and Sil Pembleton once showed up at the statehouse with bright orange cushions emblazoned with the phrase to hand out to the legislators. Jan's post is far in the backcountry, on a high hillside near the top of the ridge, looking north, into the valley, and to the ocean beyond.

Hudson Dodd is the Brook Waimarama Sanctuary Trust's General Manager



Hudson Dodd

*Photo by Elizabeth Dodd*



*Photo courtesy of Brook Waimarama Sanctuary Trust*

<http://www.brooksanctuary.org/>



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The Little Owl

Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society.  
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Also available on-line at [www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html](http://www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html)

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, PO Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250**. Make checks payable to the National Audubon Society and include the **code C4ZJ040Z**. 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, 66505-1932

RARE BIRD HOTLINE: For information on Kansas Birds, subscribe

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