

*Annual Planning Meeting
June 16, 2012
Sojourner Truth Park*

People, Planning, Potluck!!

*Meeting 4 p.m.
Potluck 5:30 p.m.
Help us plan for the next year.*

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 40, No. 10 ~June 2012

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Upcoming Events

- JUN 8 - Butterfly Garden "Weeding Blitz"
5:30-6:30
- JUN 9 - Saturday morning birding
- JUN 16 - PLANNING Meeting & Potluck
Sojourner Truth Park
4 p.m.
- JUL - 14 Saturday morning birding





Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

It seems likely that if some deity or mere astronomer had seen fit to place a beaver among the constellations, the Milky Way would have soon become a solidly glistening dammed-up pond. There is reason behind the “eager-beaver” phrase, and folk I’ve known have damned them for causing fields and roads to become flooded, though it was humans, with their dynamiting reactions, who were intruding into natural beaver activity.

The beavers living with the creek that passes through our place think outside the box of the general beaver image, being just as eager to build with stone, a very common commodity in the stream bed. Years ago, when the Flaming Gorge dam was imposed on Wyoming/Utah’s Green River, we were amused to read how biologists there were amazed to learn that beavers can become masons as well as timberjacks.

“Our” beavers are not averse to adding wood and/or mud trim, but the minimal amount of trees being gnawed in the creek-side woods seems scarcely enough to provide a food supply, though they supplement by “gnawing” on nearby field crops when available. But to us there’s a mystery as to how they keep sufficiently fed, and their ever-growing teeth worn down. If there’ve been any flakes of dentine on the stones, the creek has washed them away.

Nevertheless, while there are no beaver among the stars above, it’s nice to there are some rippling star reflections in the water below.

As to the Milky Way, it’s now beginning to emerge from the latest “dry spell” it endures every spring and autumn. During those two seasons, as was recently mentioned, our view outward into space is at right angles to the plane of our rather flattened galaxy. Thus there are much fewer nearby stars to be seen and the celestial stream thins out, to thicken

again as we spin to face into the more densely occupied galaxy’s plane. It’s just because of the way the world turns. Beavers cannot be blamed.

Speaking of ‘thin’, there will be a rather thin (i.e.: partial) eclipse of the Moon just before dawn on the 4th. And a very tiny dot--Venus--will move visibly (with essential eye protection) across the Sun, taking about six hours starting about 5a05 on the 5th. It will be Venus’ last transit till 2117.

StarDate tells that the first predicted transit occurred in 1639, and astronomers, by viewing at separated locations, became able by triangulating on the timing of that movement to determine the distance to numerous celestial bodies, while more modern wizardry has supplanted such occasions.

More prominent this coming month will be the evening arrivals of the summer constellations, of particular note in the east being Cygnus Swan in the Milky Way (Deneb is its bright tail light), with bright blue Vega in Lyra just ahead, and Altair in Aquila the Eagle just behind, while Scorpio and Sagittarius occupy the south, all as background to the planet-and-Moon show.

That show opens within a bright Moon’s glow as Mars gets ever a little closer to Leo’s Regulus from the 3rd to 7th, before shifting into Virgo later in the month. There it will form a party with Saturn, Spica, and the Moon the 26th and 27th; Mars being the reddish one, Saturn the golden, the star Spica dressed in pure white.

Mercury primps up as a low evening star between the 12th and the 21st, on the latter date lining up (and a little brighter than) the twin stars of Gemini, the trio to the right of the Moon. Jupiter, very present but very low, is expected to join the Moon in the dawns of the 16th and 17th.

The summer solstice will occur at 6p09 on the 20th. The Moon full the 4th at 6a12 and new the 19th at 10a02.

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Night Sounds Dru Clarke



When I was a kid growing up in New Jersey, we had a place in the piedmont where I spent most of the summer. The house, which was tucked into a hill in the midst of a deciduous wood and fronted by a narrow stream, was “field stone” quarried right there on the property; even the ground floor was laid with slabs of this stone, a treat for bare feet in summer. My attic bedroom with its low, sloping ceiling lay to the west of a hallway reached by a winding staircase, and it had two small windows whose sashes were left open to let in fresh air and, coincidentally, the sounds of nature. The most intriguing were the night sounds, most especially the katydids.

For years, I imagined that the katydid rasping noise – a rapid and rough rubbing of a scraper against a serrated file on the forewings – was produced by tree frogs because it didn’t seem to me that a mere insect could be so energetic and persistent in calling. Each morning I would find, scattered on the picnic table and chairs, tiny greenish-black turds – colored by the leaves they consume and almost seed-like in size – that turned out to be the frass of these noisemakers. After moving to Kansas in the ‘70s, I no longer heard this sound of summer until I was camping in the Hill Country of Texas with a bunch of teens on our way to the coast. As I pretended to sleep, after the talkative kids drifted off one by one, I was back in that childhood summer bedroom, listening fondly and smiling to myself.

The Flint Hills has its own night sounds: the proverbial coyotes, song dogs who raise the hairs on our necks with their yipping and yelping and dissonant descending notes, sounding for all the world like a hundred when there may be only a few; the sharp bark of a red fox, heard one evening as we sat around a

fire pit, toasting marshmallows; the variety of owls – the hilarious barred, the mournful great horned, and even the screech owl, with its breathless whinny, like a timid horse; and the amphibians, both frogs and trilling toads, the most alarming croak emanating from a tiny tree frog who hangs out on an air conditioning unit outside our west door. (One of these remarkable creatures made it all the way to Trading Post, KS, on the Missouri border, riding tight on the door latch of our horse trailer. It had turned an iron gray color and I didn’t see it at first, until it leaped onto the pavement. I managed to catch and release it in a grassy area surrounding a pond. Hopefully the other tree frogs in the neighborhood speak the same dialect.)

Then, there are the whip-poor-will and the chuck-will’s-widow, both heard incessantly calling at night. The stuff of legend, the whip poor will is mentioned in over forty songs and appears often in literature: it is said to sense the departure of a soul and is able to capture it as it passes by. It captures our attention, for sure, when it calls. We argue sometimes over which one we are hearing, but the calls are different enough for us to be certain that both birds are here in summer. Both are on the decline, but the exact reasons are uncertain, although loss of suitable habitat and widespread use of pesticides are probable contributors.

Why in Kansas there are no large populations of katydids to serenade us in the evening hours I don’t know. Maybe they need large expanses of deciduous tree corridors, yet they are in Texas’s Hill Country where the oaks’ (and other trees’) canopy is discontinuous. Yet, we do have crickets, and they are cheering enough. Sweet dreams.

©Dru Clarke
May 2012

In June as many as a dozen species may burst their buds on a single day. No man can heed all of these anniversaries; no man can ignore all of them. ~Aldo Leopold

Alsop UPDATE

Tom Morgan reports from last board meeting

The design for the Alsop Bird Sanctuary will use native plants supporting birds by providing cover, nesting areas, and food. This design will need relatively little maintenance - such as:

- 1) Security to prevent disturbance of birds in garden or guests in neighboring hotel. The design could prevent required addition of a security light or gate.
- 2) Repair of damage; removal of trash.
- 3) Watering.
- 4) Pruning.
- 5) Mowing (if some conventional lawn is present).

New plantings will use native species (unless exceptions are approved by the board). Many of the existing trees (native & non-native) will be kept, and a few may be removed. One or more of the female mulberry trees will be kept. Invasive species (native or non-native) will not be planted.

A plaque on a bench will honor Inez Alsop. Signage may acknowledge contributions to the garden and will identify some of the native plants.

A plaque may honor Jan Garton as a symbol of peaceful resolution. Jan was very active in our Audubon Chapter for a number of years. Her important work for Cheyenne Bottoms seems disparate from an urban oasis, but urban contact is part of our lives, whether we are activists for wildlands or not, and that consoling breath of nature in the city's heart is something we are sure Jan treasured.

The design might include a walking path and one or more benches. A receptacle for cigarette butts might be provided. Types of use which might be encouraged include:

- 1) Watching & listening to birds.
- 2) Observation and discussion of practicality, beauty, and benefits of native plants.

The design will be compatible with the current plan for widening 17th Street (which includes removal of a sycamore and other trees and construction of a sidewalk).

A water spigot that utilizes the city's water system might be added.

Partnerships for creation and maintenance of the garden might focus on costs of materials and labor for design, landscaping and path construction, plantings, watering during establishment, a bench, and maintenance. Responsibilities should be clear for selection and approval of the materials and for the performance of creation and maintenance. Possible partners might include:

- 1) Landscape Architecture students.
- 2) Owner of neighboring hotel.
- 3) Native Plant Society.
- 4) Department of horticulture, forestry and recreation resources at the university.

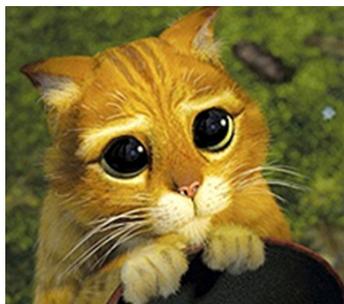


A year ago in the spring and again in the fall (because last summer on three occasions heavy construction trucks found it convenient to "borrow" our space for the duration of projects), we planted annual rye on the lot and topped it off with prairie hay. The plan was that the annual rye would green up fast and keep the property from becoming a mud pit and then die off and serve as mulch for the prairie seedlings. Well, as luck would have it, the extraordinarily mild winter was just perfect for growing annual rye and it grew a foot a week and refused to die off as planned. When hot temperatures arrive it will die and help keep the soil in place while our design for the lot takes shape. ~ *Patricia Yeager*

Interested in helping with this project?

**We surely could use the skills, talents, and energies of our membership on this one!
Contact Patricia Yeager or Tom Morgan.**

NEW Treasurer



thank you

Welcome back to the Board, Dolly Gudder!

A few years ago, Dolly was the Board Secretary. Now she will be our Treasurer. We greatly appreciate her volunteering for this job. So when you see her – tell her THANKS!

We still would like a couple more members to join the board. New ideas and perspectives are always welcome. And don't forget about our planning meeting on June 16th, Sojourner Truth Park, 4 p.m. and potluck at 5:30 p.m.



**Please help us - 1 hour weeding blitz of the
Butterfly garden on Friday June 8,
5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.**

Visit us online
nfhas.org

E-Newsletter: If you wish to opt out of the “paper” Prairie Falcon newsletter and get it on-line as a pdf - send your name and email address to
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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. Website is 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 to the Kansas Bird Listserve. Send this message <subscribe KSBIRD-L> to <list_serve@ksu.edu> and join in the discussions.

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