



## Green Violet-ear (*Colibri thalassinus*)

A hummingbird feeder near Keats was visited earlier this summer by a rare vagrant. The Green Violet Eared Hummingbird's native range is from Mexico into South America but it has been sighted as far north as Canada. It is a regular visitor to central Texas and has been seen in most of the states surrounding Kansas, excluding Nebraska. If this sighting is accepted by the Kansas Birds Records Committee, it will be a first record for the Green-Violet Eared Hummingbird in Kansas.

Jacque J. Staats

*photos by Dave Rintoul*

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



## prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 40, No. 1 ~ September 2011

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### Upcoming Events

Aug 29 - Board Mtg. 6:00 p.m.  
home of Tom & MJ Morgan

Sept 10 - Sat. Morning Birding 8 a.m.  
Meet at Sojourner Truth Park

Oct 19 - Program "Bats in Kansas"  
7:00 p.m. Manhattan Public Library,  
Auditorium



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

This month, on our calendars, the season changes. Long experience predicts that the sunlight will become briefer each day and by how much; experience is less precise about what the weather will do. Looking to get a better idea of the factors involved in the latter we bought into one of the commercial “Great Courses” – a set of 24 half-hour DVD lectures on meteorology. We enlarged our vocabulary and our appreciation of the factors involved. Robert G. Fovell, the UCLA professor who presented, titled his last lecture “The Imperfect Forecast” and in summing up the course besought our understanding and tolerance of forecasts.

He asks one to visualize the factors involved as a kind of Rubik’s cube. The tiny nodes where the gridlines intersect represent the stations where precise data is collected. What’s going on throughout all the broad blank spaces can be and must be gleaned, if at all, these days from radar and satellite imagery. And a live operator must be able to distinguish, say, the return echoes from a multitude of bats exiting a cave from some weather activity, because the radar might not. Then all this human-read info is fed into computer programs that produce prognoses of varying agreement. If one reads the “Forecast Discussion” section of NOAA’s weather website ([www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov)) one finds the words “I think” and “it depends” candidly well-used.

It’s difficult to predict, for example, that an alfalfa field green today might be aging and will be plowed tomorrow, just before a rain, to produce an area of dark earth, whose absorption of the sun’s heat could cause a parcel of warmed air to rise, cooling as it expands as it encounters less pressure

with altitude, cooling enough that it can no longer hold all the moisture it began with. The moisture condenses on aerosols, if such are available, of course, and they usually are – tiny bits of airborne material, including dust perhaps from the field’s plowing – thus forming visible clouds. At the same time condensation produces heat, so the air parcel in essence warms itself so that instead of merging with the surrounding air, it continues rising, imbued now with what is called CAPE (convective available potential energy), and a storm begins to grow – or doesn’t, depending on what myriad other factors are about. It seems amazing that forecasts do as well as they do, and understandable why they are subject to modification, literally in active situations from moment to moment. How far to the fore does a forecast have to cast to be a forecast?

Astronomical forecasts have a better batting average. Even some ancient ones didn’t do too badly. “Up-to-datedly,” it can be said that Mercury will consent to showing some, naturally brief, prominence within the 30 to 45 minutes before sunrise from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup>. From the 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> it will appear from slightly above to slightly below Leo’s Regulus, being even a little brighter. Another shy being, so reticent as to require binocs, is Uranus. The big planet will be a faint blue glow amid a wide span of faint stars that extends from Andromeda and Pegasus (her head to his tail) down to the southern horizon. Uranus will be in an optimum position to glow about in the middle, in the lower part of Pisces. And *The Old Farmer’s Almanac* snitches that maidenly Virgo will be hosting Mercury, Venus, Saturn, and the Moon on the 27<sup>th</sup>—completely hidden away in the Sun’s glare.

The Moon’s schedule puts it to the right of Antares the 3<sup>rd</sup>- 4<sup>th</sup>, with Jupiter all night the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>, next to Aldebaran the 19<sup>th</sup>, Mars the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and Regulus the 25<sup>th</sup>. Full the 12<sup>th</sup> (at 4a27), new the 27<sup>th</sup> (at 6a09). The equinox comes at 4a05 the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

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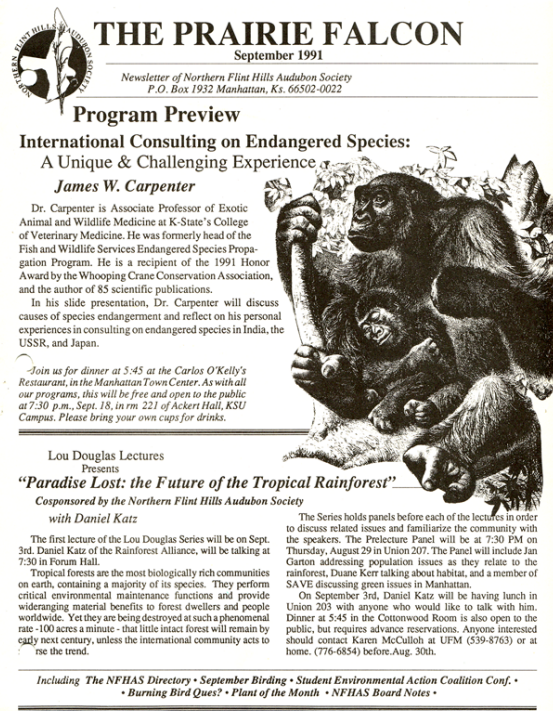
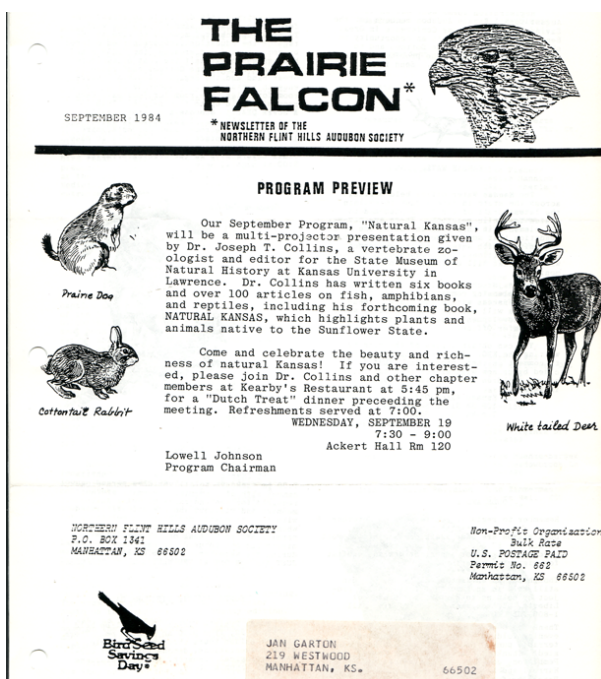
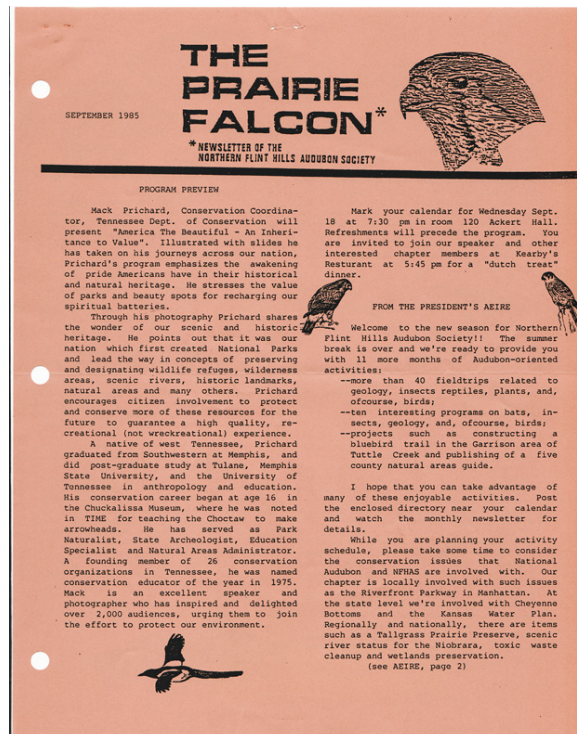
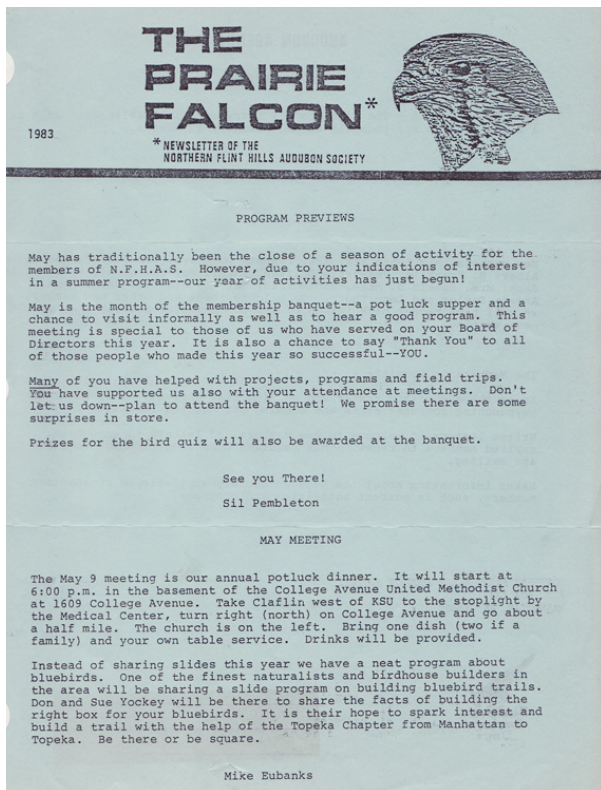
I encourage the readers to stop by the butterfly garden in Sojourner-Truth Park. It surely does serve its primary purpose, as I saw several pollinators today when I took a slow 20-min. stroll around the garden. Peering back at me was a small, thin black wasp, a very small cream colored spider, a small bee, a large insect that looked like a bumble bee but wasn’t and all were surrounded by butterflies fluttering their wings both in flight and feeding. The butterflies I can name were pipevine swallow tail, tiger swallow tail, silver spotted skipper, and monarch. There were sulfurs and a blue and perhaps a tawny emperor. The point is that you do not have to be an expert to enjoy the garden. As I was leaving a young girl from the neighborhood looked at the bush most popular with the butterflies and then peered a little closer. She then sat down on the bench and held out her hand clearly entranced. Should you think the garden needs weeding, please feel free to untangle vines that have a strangle hold on the other plants or remove dead plants that have served their purpose. We have not had enough volunteers to keep this task up this year but the pollinators don’t mind. Please let us know if you would like to volunteer to keep the garden up. Thank you to Jacque Staats who has kept the garden alive by keeping it watered this hot summer.

Patricia Yeager



# the Prairie Falcon 40th

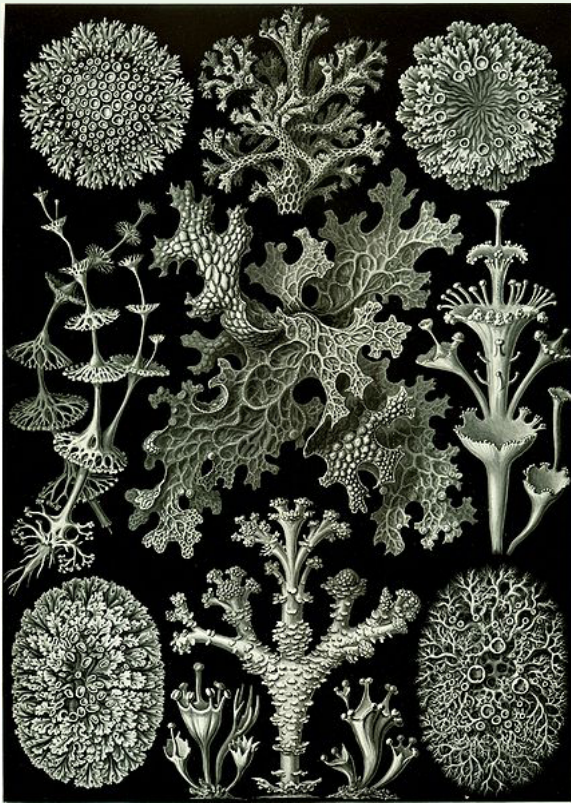
I was in Germany 40 years ago! Where were you? If you were here in Manhattan, and a member of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, you may have read the first issue of the Prairie Falcon. I don't know how many editors, writers, mailers there have been, but it is nice to know that it has continued - unbroken for 40 years. We don't have copies of the first few years, but here are a few:





## The Feelings Mutual

Dru Clarke



Agreeing to paint our one hundred and five year old barn this summer – not the most enlightened decision we’ve made together, considering the high temperatures - my husband took the high places by ladder and left what I could reach from the ground. (He acknowledged and accommodated my unmitigated fear of heights. When my son was about four, he climbed to the very top parapet of Bowman’s Tower, built by Washington’s troops to watch for oncoming British, and refused to fall two feet into my trembling arms as I stood there, refusing to look down. Instead, he chose the sturdy fireplug of a woman standing next to me to trust his descent.) Luckily, the barn’s north side was shaded by ash and oak and I got up close and personal with what time and moisture conspire to change on the face of wood. The lower reaches of tongue and groove sported a velvety coat of luminous green algae that faded as moisture became less available higher up.

Sometimes this or several other species of algae unite with a fungus and a lichen takes hold. The relationship is mutual, as the fungus’ hyphae (thin filaments) take up water and minerals and the alga furnishes food from its ability to photosynthesize. As a young graduate student, I was fascinated by some of these organisms and for a research project in an ecology course I studied how they colonized

an abandoned slate quarry on our summer place in the highlands of New Jersey. One species, commonly called British soldier as it looks like tiny marching stalks with red tips, was abundant, as were several other foliose (leaf-like) and crustose (forming a crust) types. I discovered that when they dried, they curled up, and broken-off bits drifted or washed downhill, re-establishing themselves on bare stone. Lichens are typically slow-growing and a field called lichenometry studies their age to determine how long a previously uncolonized region has been colonized.

People frequently see them on the bark of trees or covering rocks and mistake them for smears of paint as they are often brightly colored: gold or rust or gray-green. Their importance to wild life is ubiquitous: most know of the dependence of caribou and reindeer on the lichens growing in their habitat, but we are less aware of their use as food by deer, antelope, musk ox, moose, sheep, goats, and elk. In the east, when trees are felled, white-tailed deer in the area rush in to feed on the lichens covering their trunks and limbs. The larvae of the Common Footman and Marbled Beauty, butterflies, blend into and feed on their respective lichens. And the declining populations of the desert tortoise may, in an indirect way, be linked to lichens. Their forage plants are enhanced nutritionally by the presence of microbiotic crusts on the desert surface: when these are destroyed the plants are less nourishing and the tortoises suffer from deficiency diseases.

Humans enjoy the products of lichens in dyes (the color of litmus paper comes from a lichen and “cudbear” is a purple dye from the chemical orcin) and some are even edible (for example, Arctic peoples eat the partially digested contents of the stomachs of caribou). Because they absorb particulates that fall on them from the atmosphere, lichens concentrate many times the amounts of radioactive elements (strontium 90, cesium 137) of other plants. Animals that eat these get an even larger concentration than background levels (reindeer meat may be 137 to 280 x that). Oak moss is a lichen yielding a fragrance used in perfumes. Other lichens harbor poisonous compounds that have been used in bait to kill wolves and foxes. (This used to be common in Europe.)

There are places on the barn where I deigned not to slather the red pigment: instead, I left the lichens their place, to live and grow. And, I’m sure, the feeling’s mutual.

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# Old Prairie Falcons



## THE PRAIRIE FALCON

MARCH 1988

NEWSLETTER OF NORTHERN FLINT HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY  
P.O. BOX 1932 MANHATTAN, KS 66502

### PROGRAM PREVIEW

#### ROADSIDE KANSAS

"Travel the highways and see the terrain formed by elemental forces--the cliffs layered by ancient seas, boulders left by glaciers from the ice mysterious sink-holes, everlasting wells--all in this fascinating kaleidoscope of geology, history, pioneer tales, amusing anecdotes, and incidental information about this state."

Zula Bennington Green, reviewing *Roadside Kansas*

Speakers at the March 23 meeting of Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society will be the authors of *Roadside Kansas*, Rex Buchanan and James McCauley of Lawrence. Their excellent book follows, in a mile-a-log format, the highway routes across Kansas. Geology is the emphasis, but biological and historical facts are mentioned frequently. With the vacation season approaching, you should plan not only to attend this presentation, but also to buy your own copy of *Roadside Kansas*.

Beginning at 7:30 PM, the author discusses the making of the book, in which they wrote it, the field work involved, and the things learned in the process. Preceding the program, at 7:15 PM, a social and business session will be held. The meeting is in Ackert Hall. All NFHAS events are free and open to the public.

To complete your Audubon-evening, joining our speakers and others for a treat dinner at Falsetto's on Sat. at 5:45 PM.



### EVENTS:

- March 20, Woodland Appreciation Hike (see page 18)
- March 23, Kansas Wildlife Appreciation Day, State Capitol Rotunda
- March 23, wildlife plant give-away, NFHAS chapter meeting

### URBAN PLAN

Several members of the conservation committee are presently working with city staff to develop an addendum to the Urban Area Plan. The addendum, presented to the Urban Area Plan at its March 7 meeting, will re-evaluate the value of natural areas within the urban area. It is hoped that this will provide a basis for considering natural values associated with urban zoning decisions are being made.

For more information call Ruth Welti, 537-8751, or Duane Kerr, 456-2771.



FEBRUARY, 1986

## THE PRAIRIE FALCON

PROGRAM PREVIEW  
GALAPAGOS ISLANDS

Darwin's visit to the Galapagos Islands helped him formulate his theory of evolution. Join a celebration of the birthday of Charles Darwin! The conservation of the plants, animals and birds of these historic islands is the center of discussion at the monthly meeting of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society. The meeting will be held at the Experiment Station and who research on the islands, will Natural History of the Galapagos 7:30 pm, Wednesday, February of Ackert Hall at KSU. Refreshments served at 7 pm. All are at Dutch treat dinner with the Kearby's restaurant at 5:45 pm.



Manhattan, 39 11th, 96 34th, W. Center Anderson Hall, Kansas State University campus. Habitat coverage: riparian forest 21%, grassland 16%, cultivated fields 14%, oldfields and fence rows 13%, lakes and rivers 12%, upland deciduous forest 12%, coniferous stands 6%, residential areas 4%.



## THE PRAIRIE FALCON

December 1991

Newsletter of Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 1932 Manhattan, KS. 66502-0022

### Program Preview

#### Attracting Wildlife to the Home Landscape

Gus A. van de Hoeven

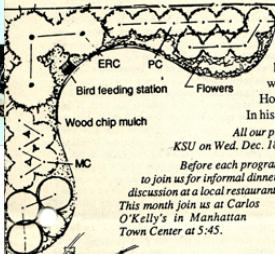
Gus A. van de Hoeven is an Extension Specialist in Landscape Environmental Horticulture at K-State. He will be talking about how to create "places." What are the design principles to attract wildlife, songbirds and butterflies? How do we select plant materials? How do we design low maintenance landscapes?

In his slide presentation, Gus will be answering these questions and more.

All our programs are free and open to the public. It will be held in 221 Ackert Hall, KSU on Wed. Dec. 18, at 7:30 PM. Please bring your own cups for drinks.

Before each program we invite our speakers to join us for informal dinner and discussion at a local restaurant.

This month join us at Carlos O'Kelly's in Manhattan Town Center at 5:45.



The Real Christmas Bird Census, Saturday Dec. 14, dawn to dusk. A 15 mile diameter circle, centered at Anderson Hall on the KSU campus, will be covered by 6 separate roving packs of birdwatchers. The idea is to count all the avian species and individuals in this circle; we will get together (after a chili dinner at the Manhattan High School cafeteria, 6:00 PM) to compare stories and compile the count. Optional owl trips may also be available for early risers. For further information contact the individual group leaders below. BEGINNERS ARE WELCOME: this is a good way to begin birdwatching, and it helps provide avian population data in the process. If you want to know more about this activity, or would like for someone to make a presentation to your civic group or club, please contact Dave Rintoul (numbers listed below) to arrange this. Be forewarned that he will probably retaliate by asking your group to sponsor him for the Birdathon in April, however.

(Cont. Back Pg.)

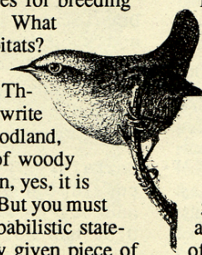
ding • Green Holiday Season • Burning Bird Ques? • rails • Sen. Kassebaum Acts • NFHAS Board Notes •

Birding questions asked anonymously will be answered by the anonymous answer person. Send your burning questions c/o Ruth Welti, Ackert Hall, Biology Division, KSU, Manhattan KS 66506-4901; or call her at 537-0781 (home), 532-5756 (work). All questions are appreciated (even though you may not appreciate the answers), so keep those cards and letters coming in!

### Burning Bird Questions

1. In a recent column you implied that you did not think that ruby-throated hummingbirds nested around Manhattan, or even anywhere west of Kansas City. I was visiting a friend in Manhattan in early July and saw both a male and a female hummingbird visiting a feeder. My host said that these birds were summer-long residents last year and had brought their babies to the feeder in July and August. Is this unusual, or were you just plain wrong about the possibilities for breeding hummingbirds in the northern Flint Hills? What determines good hummingbird nesting habitats?

In answer to your second question, Thompson and Ely (Birds in Kansas, Vol. 1) write that hummingbirds breed "in riparian woodland, cities with trees, parks, and other types of woody situations." In answer to your first question, yes, it is unusual and yes, I was "just plain wrong." But you must appreciate that any scientific fact is a probabilistic statement. I was wrong, but I suspect for any given piece of



2. People who are desperate to have bluebirds often evict chickadees, wrens and titmouses from their bluebird boxes. I consider this to be unethical, but is it also illegal?

If by "evict" you mean the removal and destruction of eggs and/or nestlings of these species, yes. It is illegal. If you can document such instances, they should be reported to the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, since it is also a federal offense).

3. I have seen a lot more mockingbirds locally this year. Lately I have noticed some puzzling behavior from them that I can't divine the purpose of. When the bird is on the ground it lifts its wings about halfway, pauses, lifts its wings some more, pauses, and then lets its wings down. The motion takes about 2-3 seconds. The bird then takes a few steps forward and repeats the motion. Does anyone know why mockingbirds do this? I have seen this behavior in both adult and young birds. The birds are alone when they do this. It seems like they sometimes catch some bugs when they do this, so it may be a feeding behavior. Any ideas?

Wing-flashing, as it is called, in mockingbirds (and other mimics like catbirds) has been frequently observed, but no definitive, that is, experimental, evidence has explained its function. George Sutton wrote a paper in the 1946 volume of The Wilson Bulletin about this behavior - "an instinctive gesture indicating wariness, suspicion, distrust ... occasionally, but more or less accidentally, associated with the capture of food." Such an anthropomorphic statement would not be



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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, 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](mailto:list_serve@ksu.edu)> and join in the discussions.

#### NFHAS Board

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