

Recognize anyone? or the event?



ICE CREAM and STORIES - Sept. 16th, at 2:30

- Sojourner Truth Park.

Yearly Ice Cream Social - and memories. Share your "memorable" stories and photos about birding and the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society! We would like to compile as many as possible - and perhaps make a book about the NFHAS. Start remembering now! You may send them ahead of time to MJ Morgan (tom.morgan@juno.com) or bring to the event. We also will have an update (and visuals) on the progress of Alsop Bird Sanctuary project.

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 41, No. 1 ~ September 2012

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Upcoming Events

SEPT 5 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

SEPT 7 - Weeding Blitz 5:30-6:30
Butterfly Garden, Sojourner Truth Park

SEPT 8 - Saturday Birding 8 a.m.
Meet Sojourner Truth Park

SEPT 15 - Deadline for Prairie Falcon articles

SEPT 16 - START of the YEAR event 2:30 p.m.
Ice cream, NFHAS stories, Alsop update,
Sojourner Truth Park



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

As official summer approached autumn in 1862 Venus was passing between the Earth and the Sun, affecting what is known

as its inferior conjunction (as distinct from its superior conjunction when it's on the far side of the Sun from us). There was to be no transit across the face of the Sun, so some astronomers were busy sharing notes on how with their telescopes they were able to see the planet, then relatively near, reflecting brightly even during daylight.

On another level, on that September 22nd, President Lincoln publicly announced that if the territories then in rebellion didn't rejoin the Union by January 1st, he would issue a proclamation freeing their slaves. So the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation will be coming up New Year's Day. Limited by a president's constitutional powers, and by the political realities of the times, it is a military order, justified by wartime necessity, declaring forever free only those blacks in the rebelling territories, but also enabling the enlistment of blacks in the Union forces. I've read figures saying that perhaps nearly 200,000 were enlisted, and were highly useful. Total emancipation in the U.S. occurred politically, when Georgia became the 27th of the then 36 states to ratify the 13th Amendment, December 6, 1865.

Though the five pages of the Proclamation, *per se*, survive, the event they represent, like the sightings of the 1862 astronomers, exist in a past we can encounter only through representations and by imagination. By comparison, the star named Gamma Tauri, right at the base of the Bull's V-shaped face, we can see as it actually shone about 150 years ago. It has taken its light that long to reach us. I've found one source telling me that the light of Muscida (read, *muʒʒɪle*), the star we see now at the tip of the Great Bear's (Ursa Major's) nose is 150 years old, but then another source says 185 years. One apparently can't be too exact about these things (and though we can

date the Proclamation precisely, a lot of what we call history is up for debate, too).

Time and distance can be deceiving. In *A Skynatcher's Year* (Cambridge University Press, 1999) Jeff Kanipe gives the example of the "Summer Triangle" whose stars are moving from overhead to westward during the mid-evening hours this month. Deneb, the tail of the Swan, forms the Triangle's northern point. Vega, bluish in the Lyre is to the west; Altair in Aquila the Eagle is to the east. They seem to form a figure of plain geometry, but Altair's light is calculated to have taken 16 years to arrive, Vega's 25 years, and Deneb's 1500 years. Thus, their positions and innate brightnesses are quite different, but we'd never know it by just looking.

If you happen to be looking up in the early morning from South America on the 8th, a clear sky will let you see the Moon pass in front (i.e.: *occulit*) Jupiter; a jealous act perhaps, as Jupiter will brightening by half this month. Viewed from North America the two will seem to almost bump fenders. The Moon comes closest to Venus, now in its role as the Morning Star, during the dawn of the 12th. On the 19th the Moon is just to the right of Mars in the evening. The next night it gets between Mars and its rival for redness, the star Antares in Scorpio. Makes it easier for one to judge the competition.

As *StarDate* points out, occultations can be accomplished by most any cosmic body. As the edges of the occulter passes in front of the occulted the time used can help calculate the latter's size. And effects upon the light coming from the occulted can reveal whether there's a single central bright spot, or a tight cluster of separate objects. Apparently the presence of the rings of Uranus were found by such an occasion.

And one does not have to be cosmic to be an occulter. Anyone trying to see against a rising or setting Sun generally takes up the trade.

The autumnal equinox comes here at 9a49 on the 22nd. Moon is new 9p11 the 15th, and at its Harvest fullness at 10p19 the 29th.

© Sept. 2012 Peter Zachary Cohen

The Keeper Dru Clarke



Early in the morning the pond is smooth, with only a few old posts and the occasional turtle head protruding. The turtles sense a disturbance as I slide the poke boat, with Archie, the terrier, in the bow, through the mud into the still water. Down an arm of the pond is an anomaly: a round, russet brown wet head peers without moving at my slow approach. It seems to look, to assess, for a very long time, then slips beneath the surface. The keeper is back.

We haven't seen beaver on the pond in a decade, and then they had a twiggy lodge on the neighbor's side of the pond (a barbed wire fence divides it) where they raised their kits. We could hear them chirping and twittering if we were very quiet and waterborne. Today, the lodge has evolved into a much larger shrub-covered island and folks would never know how it was created unless they had lived in this place for a long time.

My boat slid over the spot where the beaver had submerged, and bubbles pocked the water, popping up through the bushy pondweed. We don't see it again today. But we see evidence of its feeding all along the bank: the water level had dropped since April and a band of now-exposed bank was littered with twigs from the indigo bushes along the shore. A burrow in the bank had been excavated and the entrance showed some sign of recent use. But, on the opposite side of the pond were several burrows, one along the water's edge, a second up higher on the slope, hidden by a dense growth of shrubs.

I assume this beaver is alone. Males set up scent markers to attract mates, and perhaps to ward off competing males. The castoreum, a sweet-smelling oil, can be smelled from very far away, and I have detected a fragrance in the air, but have not found a scent post yet. (*Castoreum* is used as a base for some perfumes.) This beaver may be one from the lodge that was abandoned years ago; they live ten

years or more, and it may have returned to its birthplace.

I call the beaver "the keeper" because of a very strange and unexplained experience I had when they lived here years ago. I had been walking the dogs on the edge of the pond and a large shadow in the shape of an enormous beaver passed over me: the dogs scattered and began sniffing madly along the bank. There was nothing in the sky above me to cause this shadow – no clouds, or large birds, nothing. When I related my experience to a Lakota Sioux woman who shared my classroom with me, she asked me if I felt fear when I saw it: I hadn't, just a rush of excitement.

She nodded knowingly and explained about keepers, how they are responsible for the care of a particular place, and that while we are not supposed to "see" them, if we do, we need to thank them

with an offering. I took some tobacco and placed it at the base of some posts near the pond and mumbled a few words of thanks. Her explanation was as good as any rational one I could conjure, and it was infinitely more satisfying.

Some folks don't appreciate beavers and their remarkable engineering of the environment, but some states are now reintroducing them to help prevent erosion, slow the runoff of water and retain it in mini-catchment basins of their making. I doubt that if they return to our pond that they will build a lodge or one of their astounding dams as we hired a contractor to rebuild our dam last winter. If this immigrant had just come back a year earlier, we might have saved a lot of money. At any rate, welcome home, keeper.

© Dru Clarke July 2012



Never does nature say one thing and wisdom another. ~Juvenal, Satires

Alsop UPDATE



Above: From west to east
Below: From south to north

Photos by Jim Koelliker



Jim Koelliker is a retired engineer and his specialty is hydrology. Jim has volunteered to coordinate this project! And we are so grateful to have someone with his knowledge and experience!

Originally, the board felt that it was desirable to accept what the city offered to do for us in compensation for their taking some of the property (see July Prairie Falcon). The Board voted and passed this approach.

Jim, on the other hand, is educated in these matters and is excited about coordinating all of our ideas to create the garden/bird sanctuary. He suggests we can do more with a cash settlement. With Jim as the coordinator, the board has decided to go with the cash settlement rather than “work” by the city.

Patricia Yeager, NFHAS President

“My dad and I drove by the Alsop property today and it already looks like a sanctuary. If I were a college kid walking by that property every day of the semester with my headphones on, one day I would notice the charm of it- that it’s a green patch of trees and shrubs and birds- bursting from a little corner on the block of a hotel, bar, and parking lot, and I’d probably walk into it and look out at the passing cars and sit down or lie down and wonder how it got to be that way.”

-- Ned Epps, former student and Manhattan resident, visiting town, July, 2012



Check out the explore.org website - great streaming video “live” cams
<http://explore.org/#!/live-cams/player/puffin-loafing-ledge-cam>



photo by Matt Binter

Take Note



Reports of bald-headed Northern Cardinals come in every year, but they seem to be more common this year. I've got two of these "reverse vultures", a male and a female, visiting my feeders this summer as well. So the question is – What causes these birds to lose all their head feathers at this time of the year?

The time of year is important; most of our resident and migratory birds don't molt until the end of the breeding season. So if a bird loses feathers in mid-summer, especially from an obvious place like the head, there must be another reason besides the regular molting cycle. Those possible explanations include

- 1) high temperatures (we've certainly had those) – The hypothesis is that birds can lose more heat if part of the body is not as well insulated by feathers, and a bald head would help a bird dump metabolic heat during the hottest days.
- 2) illness – Perhaps sick birds lose feathers and don't replace them, although it is unclear why they would only lose head feathers and not tail, wing, or body feathers.
- 3) feather mites – Birds can't preen their head feathers, and a bird with a lot of head feathers (e.g. crested birds like cardinals) might have a lot of mites up there, safe from preening activities. By molting the head feathers, a bird would shed those mites as well. The remaining mites on the body feathers would be unable to seek refuge on the head, and thus could be removed during preening.

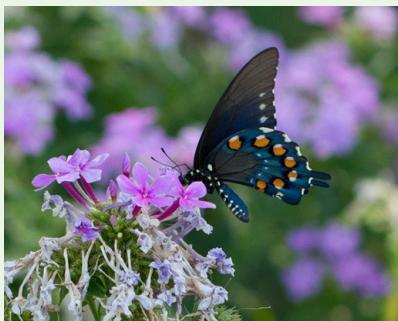
It's possible that there are other explanations, of course. Read more about this phenomenon at <http://www.hiltonpond.org/ThisWeek030701.html> or <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~insrisg/nature/nw98/baldbirds.html>

Dave Rintoul

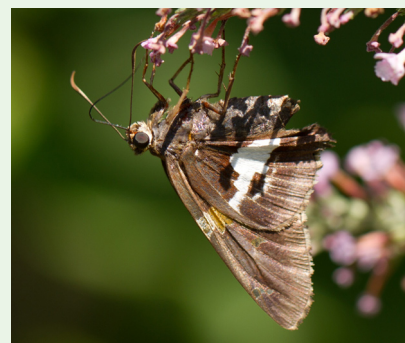


Great-spangled Fritillary

Butterfly photos by Donna Roper



Pipevine swallowtail



Silver-spotted skipper

ONE-hour Weeding Blitz of the Butterfly garden
Friday Sept. 7th, 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 Jacques Staats - staats@wildblue.net





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SEPT 16 - 2:30 p.m. Ice
cream, NFHAS stories,
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Truth Park



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- \$20/yr., then basic, renewal membership is \$35/yr. When you
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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
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RARE BIRD HOTLINE: For information on Kansas Birds, sub-
scribe to the Kansas Bird Listserve. Send this message <subscribe
KSBIIRD-L> to <list_serve@ksu.edu> and join in the discussions.

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