



## Our September Baker Wetlands Trip



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



# prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter  
Vol. 52, No. 3, November 2023

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### Upcoming Events

- Nov. 4 - BIRD SEED **PICKUP**  
UFM Parking lot 9 am-12n
- Nov. 7 - Board meeting - 5:30 Public Library
- Nov. 11 - Sat. Morning birding  
Depart Sojourner Truth Park at 8:00 AM
- Dec. 5 - Board meeting - 5:30 Public Library
- Dec. 16 - Manhattan Christmas Bird Count  
More info in Dec. Prairie Falcon



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

At one point Shakespeare has Hamlet say, “There are more things in heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy”. In his compendious book, “An Immense World” [Random House, 2022], science writer Ed Kopp quotes Hamlet, not to encourage beliefs in the supernatural, but to urge people to be aware of the many wonders of the natural world, most of which occur generally unknown.

One of those wonders is the number of people devoting their careers to deciphering how this or that (often obscure) creature manages to live in the world it encounters. From the huge sperm whale hunting the dodging giant squid to the tiniest one-celled organism, their worlds are not the wvone we humans encounter, for they encounter with different methods. And learning how they function can range from the challengingly tedious to the bold and risky.

The author asked one researcher whether it was enjoyable or hateful: trying to work out how the Australian mantis shrimp faces the world with eyes so much more complicated than required by the life it leads, which seems to consist mainly of prey- and mate-hunting. “At first it was super cool,” the researcher began, but ended with, “...you just sit there and wonder why you’re doing this.” (The mantis shrimp gets its name from having appendages like those of a praying mantis, except they end either as knobs or blades, and are used either to punch or slash prey to death.)

For one, less violent, experiment in seeking to understand another species’ world, try going into a familiar kitchen paying scant attention to all your eyes could notice (and edit out), and focus instead on the different smells coming from everything there, not just the stove in general, but the smells still emanating from past meals, and from the handles where different hands have left their scent, and so on around. And be advised that a dog’s smelling apparatus, structured differently from a human’s, accumulates scents, with extra in-drafts by a slit at the end of its nose. In the kitchen it could receive a heavier dose of more varied scents than we might conceive, and have no more natural comprehension of them than a child looking into a electrician’s tool box.

Mr. Kopp draws on 45 pages of listed sources to provide a cornucopia of details of how the world likely appears to creatures of a wide array of different species, and to individuals within those species, including individual humans. I’ve found the book eminently put-down-able, because there is so much information to keep drawing in, and the facts seem to have such a number of unsolved situations, and speculations, that I felt a frequent inclination to pause to absorb and think about it.

The book concludes by pointing out the way humans are, thoughtlessly or uncaringly, interfering with the natural ways of other creatures, and the pleasurable sounds, sights, and silences we are missing by doing so. That’s a highly applicable coda, but a very small part of the whole, which could occupy autumn’s ever earlier nights.

This November’s nights will contain several all night performances. Likely the most notable will be Jupiter’s. And though it will be traveling east to west across the sky from dusk to dawn, at its brightest for the year the 2nd-3rd, it will do its first visiting as it settles down as the nights fade. It will be close to the star, Regulus, in Leo during the first light of the 6th and 7th, and dancing with Venus, now the Morning Star, the 8th-10th, almost holding hands the 9th. Virgo’s Spica has a turn during the first light of the 11th.

Then Jupiter happens to companion Saturn at nightfall the 19th-20th, the Moon the 24th-25th, Taurus’ Aldebaran the 27th, and the Gemini Twins the 30th, albeit closer to the brighter Twin, Pollux. Mars is absent, behind the Sun.

Also pulling all-nighters will be the constellation Taurus, just below Auriga the home-plate-like Charioteer with its bright star, Capella. Leading the pack from closer to the southern horizon will be Cetus the Whale, its body a squashed oval of stars, swimming backwards with a variable star, Miró, midway in its long eastward-extended neck. Actually Cetus will sink from sight in the late wee hours.

The Old Farmer’s Almanac does not expect the Leonid meteor shower to be much of a show on its scheduled date, the 18th and 19th. It has a 33-year cycle; was great in 1966, okay in 1999, with the next big display hoped for in 2032.

Daylight time ends 2 am local time the 5th. The Moon will be new the 13th at 3a27, full the 27th at 3a16.

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## Respecting Soil Dru Clarke



*“The soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destruction of all. It is the healer and restorer and resurrection, by which disease passes into health, age into youth, death into life.”*

Wendell Berry, “The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture”

Soil is also a pantry of pathogens, anaerobic bacteria slumbering in their spores until disturbed into a wakened state, readying to infect, to lay waste to the well-fed and healthy. There in the innocuous-looking soil, lie closeted anthrax, clostridium (tetanus, botulism), SARS (corona virus). An old cow dies, and we bury it, taking soil excavated from a nearby pond to cover its carcass. Within two weeks, we lose three cherished calves, and the diagnosis is Clostridium. The vet says, it is ‘sudden death’ and not a very pleasant one. Vaccination could have prevented this, but we have no history of loss like this, ever.

There is a lot of controversy regarding vaccinations nowadays, in the wake of the coronavirus epidemic, but this has made a believer of me, at least for animals in our care. Many people have strong and often negative and sometimes debilitating reactions to vaccinations, but they usually survive. Considering the alternative, we’ll take the shot. It’s been a three ring circus trying to give the remaining calves and pregnant cows shots (our head gate and squeeze chute are iffy, so we have employed the stealthy ‘lost wallet’ technique to get close enough to jab them) and most are immunized now.

Soil, though, is the foundation of our lives, at least for growing our food. The richest soil on Earth, the chernozems, lie in a belt covering 2/3rds of Ukraine, known as the breadbasket of the world. Podzols cover 1/5 of Ukraine, existing in the west, and chestnut and salinizing (tending to become salty) soils in the east, nearer the Black Sea. It’s pleasant to say these terms aloud as they are not in our everyday lexicon. Since the war began, farmers in the wheat-growing region have had much of their crop diverted to Russia, according to a Ukrainian emigre working in ag economics at KSU. There are twelve orders of soil taxonomy you do not need to know, but Kansas has been blessed with a broad band of good,

productive soil. Harney silty loam, our state soil, found two thirds of the way west of here, stretching from the Nebraska to the Oklahoma borders. (Every state has a state soil.) Our Northern Flint Hills has mostly glacial deposits, but near the Kansas River, is loess, windblown soil, that seems beneficial for vineyards and fruit orchards. Between the uplifted hills, in the ‘bottoms,’ farmers exploit the thick deposits and grow an abundance of row crops.

Green burials, done without chemicals (think formaldehyde, that noxious smelling chemical used to preserve those foetal pigs you dissected in school) or concrete vaults or impervious caskets, seem to be catching on and are environmentally friendlier to the soil, its array of helpful microbes and fungi, and allow a recycling of our spent selves to nourish, say, a favorite species of tree. Our animal cemetery supports a veritable forest of trees and shrubs and wildflowers, and the soil there is happily renewed with each passing.

Soil: “Without proper care for it, we can have no community, for without proper care for it, we can have no life.” (Wendell Berry). The soil is not to blame for our loss, but is mine, for not understanding its capacity for life and death. Soil, while the source of life, is unforgiving if one doesn’t understand it.



# Seasons of Sparrows

## When to Spot Sparrows in Kansas

Knowing when you are most likely to spot sparrows can help reduce the guesswork with these similar-looking birds. This guide sorts these birds by when you are most likely to spot them.

### Sparrows in Kansas all year:

House Sparrow  
Field Sparrow  
Rufous-crowned Sparrow

### Sparrows in Kansas in winter:

Harris's Sparrow  
Song Sparrow  
White-throated Sparrow  
American Tree Sparrow  
White-crowned Sparrow  
Fox Sparrow  
Spotted Towhee  
Swamp Sparrow

### Sparrows in Kansas in summer:

Chipping Sparrow  
Lark Sparrow  
Grasshopper Sparrow  
Eastern Towhee  
Lark Bunting  
Cassin's Sparrow  
Henslow's Sparrow

### Sparrows in Kansas during migration:

Savannah Sparrow  
Lincoln's Sparrow  
Clay-colored Sparrow  
Vesper Sparrow  
LeConte's Sparrow  
Nelson's Sparrow  
Brewer's Sparrow  
Green-tailed Towhee



Photo by Dave Rintoul

NOT A SPARROW!

American Flamingo madness in late summer 2023

YES - a Flamingo in Kansas!

Go to [birdcast.info/news](https://birdcast.info/news) link below for information about the flamingos being blown off course.

<https://birdcast.info/news/in-the-pink-american-flamingo-madness-in-late-summer-2023/>

**IN MEMORIAM of  
BRENT BROCK,  
a great friend...to many  
1962 – 2023**



After enduring a hard-fought battle with aggressive cancer, Brent Brock died on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023, aged 61. He grew up in Topeka but always sought wild places. His earliest memories are of searching for amphibians along a driveway of an uncle's farm. Early education was highlighted by science classes and rummaging through Topeka Public Library in search of scientific books and journal articles. He was a lifelong birding enthusiast and participated in various excursions and counts with several of our local luminaries including the late Dr. John Zimmerman, Dr. Chris Smith, and Clyde Ferguson.

Passions led him to Kansas State University, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Wildlife & Fisheries Biology and a Master's in Rangeland Ecology. Over his 38-year career, he utilized his expertise in GIS and geospatial analysis for ecological and conservation applications. Working with various research teams (including ecologists of the Konza Prairie Biological Station), he investigated different ecosystems and various species such as diminutive cockroaches and cicadas to imposing wolverines and grizzly bears. Large carnivores, such as wolves and grizzlies, held a special place in his heart; and he was elated after hearing recent news of grizzlies reaching the plains of Montana. For as long as I've known Brent and his wife, since 1988, they always had Alaskan Malamutes (and also a purebred wolf when I first befriended them and they lived north of Manhattan); all named using Alaskan Indigenous peoples' languages.

Of those that knew Brent, likely all will fondly remember his wolflike smile and belly-laughter accompanied with bobbing head and bouncing shoulders. His humor and wit were exercised incessantly; part of his DNA.

Around 20 years ago, Brent and his beloved wife, Elizabeth, fulfilled a dream and relocated to Montana where large charismatic wild animals still roam. He worked for non-profit organizations involved with conservation and easily formed friendships and gained colleagues among private, state, and federal wildlife professionals, county and government personnel responsible for land planning, and people of rural communities associated with working lands and their wildlife. For a lengthy tenure, Brent served as the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Northern Rockies Landscape Lead; later with Future West, a prominent conservation NGO of the Northern Rockies; and most recently for INDIGENOUS LED, which focuses on keystone conservation management centered on policy, science, cultural connection, and grounded in an indigenous-led reciprocal relationship with the land.

Brent had worked in northwest MT with the Blackfoot Nation years before, as part of their strategic partnership with WCS in early efforts to develop plans that classified proposed reintroduced herds of non-domesticated buffalo (bison) as free-roaming wildlife able to migrate across federal agency and US/Canada boundaries of mountain front rangelands (e.g., from Blackfoot Reservation onto lands of Glacier National Park and Canada's Waterton National Park -- all traditional Blackfoot Territory). With INDIGENOUS LED, Brent was instrumental in playing the lead role laying the scientific foundation for the recent historic release of bison near Chief Mountain, the first free-roaming wild herd returned to land historically occupied by bison, by a sovereign Indigenous nation, in 150 years. Prior to the bison release, in early June, Brent attended meetings detailing the release plan and used maps to denote areas that he emphasized required diligent focus. At that time, he also attended a medicine wheel building and ground blessing ceremony at Chief Mountain, a sacred Blackfoot Nation location. Because of health issues, Brent was unable to attend the bison release later in June; an absence he ached over. Yet, the collective vision to ecologically restore bison to key Blackfoot lands in MT and Alberta, was now a reality and beginning of a dream realized. And its success established an international blueprint for restoration of wild bison (this project is featured in films by Jane Goodall, Reasons for Hope; and Ken Burns, American Buffalo).

Eccentric at times, an intellectual, and aficionado among multiple passions. Master at many things mechanical, technical, complex in design; Brent's M.O. was thorough deconstruction, reconstruction, and original creation. A few years ago, he fulfilled another dream: completely rebuilding the engine and meticulously restoring a 1973 Model 914 Porsche -- that he acquired in 1984 for \$500 in decrepit condition -- to original mint condition; painted in original metallic silver and sporting 4-spoke Fuch wheels. It was his dream car, as if selected and ordered new from a dealership in 1973.

There are innumerable wildlife and bird encounters that Brent and I shared; on foot, in a truck or his rebuilt VW bus, or while paddling a canoe -- many experiences remarkably unbelievable, all unrepeatably. For October, this year's Audubon calendar highlights the Steller's Jay. In early April, Brent texted me and described what Steller's Jays thought of his new peanut feeder. I shared with him the following:

*"When I saw my first Stellar's jay, the sun created an iridescent blue and green waterfall over its head and shoulders. It sparkled, a jewel against a dark background of evergreens. My breath caught as this new sensation traveled the rivers of my nervous system. That thrill was quite enough. No writing 'bird #367, time of year, type of tree, location, behavior under observation, etc.' No camera, no recorder. ... My only concession to the proper procedure is to carry binoculars and a pocketful of Fig Newtons."* — Parnall, P. 1984. In book, The Daywatchers.

Brent responded saying his pantry stays well-stocked with fig newtons. And personally, I've been eating too many over the last two weeks.

**Email excerpt from Brent, Sept 24, 2021:**

"On Wednesday went to Tom Miner Basin outside the park to film griz and then into the park itself. Highlights of the day were: 10 grizzlies total, 1 black bear, 1 wolf, 3 moose, 4 mountain goats, 2 boreal toads (my personal highlight), and oodles of pronghorn, elk, and bison. It isn't boring here, that's for sure."

**Text from Brent, Aug 22, 2023:** "Had a juvie goshawk fly over the other day."

**Phone call with Brent, Sept 20, 2023:** We talked and laughed together.

I'm extraordinarily grateful for that.

Respected and admired by many -- Brent's personality was positively infectious.

— 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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Also available online at [nfhas.org](http://nfhas.org)

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