

## TWO GREAT GUYS!



Join in the annual fundraiser and fun birding BIRDATHON!

It is usually beautiful weather. While it is always birding weather, spring is hard to beat. Migratory birds and year-long residents abound. *(And birding can be done alone, self-distancing)*

Clyde Ferguson has chaired this event for years

**THANK YOU CLYDE!**

and the last few years Jim Koelliker has helped him, THANK



Jim has also been keeping the birdfeeders filled at NFHAS's Alsop Bird Sanctuary!

THANK YOU JIM!

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



## prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

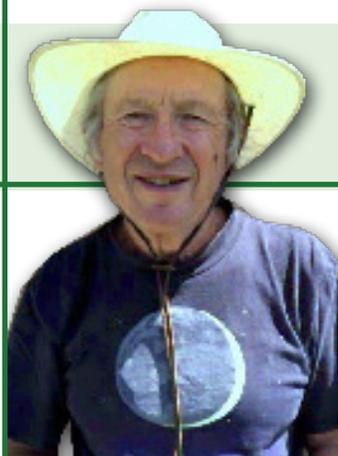
Vol. 48, No. 8, April, 2020

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### Upcoming Events

- Apr. 7 - TUESDAY Board Meeting- 6:00 pm,  
via conf call or email. Contact a board  
member if needed.
- Apr. 11- Sat. morning Birding 8 am,  
Depart Sojourner Truth Park.(physical  
distancing will be maintained.)
- Apr. 25- 26 Birdathon see page 4-5



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

We left off last month referring to a book by the late British biologist, Lyall Watson, titled "The Secret Life of Inanimate Objects", stating that he didn't assert that such objects had sensate feelings, but did believe them capable of acting in ways that ranged from the merely interesting to the consequential.

His reference to the inanimate has several themes. One begins by recalling the 19th century novelist Samuel Butler's observation that a shovel becomes an integral part of the shoveler. It 'enables' the user to do more than he or she could do otherwise and is modified by wear as well as the material being shoveled. One can say it goes through various experiences, and life is composed of experiences.

This, by itself, could be regarded as idle wordplay, yet it led to several channels of futuristic thought that seems to me worth pausing to note. Continuing with this viewpoint of a shovel, he noted that tools have gone through evolution, the same as animate beings. They began, say, as shaped stones. Then they were mutated into being made of iron, and he envisions someone accidentally or by curiosity adding sticks (that is, carbon) into the melted ore and the result was steel. Steel's hybrid vigor gave its possessors advantage over those with weaker materials. And what began as single tools have had their own paths of evolution into the variety of machines of today.

The 'secret' that he saw following from this is, like Edgar Allen Poe's "Purloined Letter", in plain sight. It becomes a 'secret' because in his view we don't think enough of how the inanimate demand service from us as we demand action from them. In particular, he reminded how electricity is part of so much that we have become so dependent on unseen inanimate electrons. If they should fail or be caused to fail (perhaps by a solar event), to responsively zip around spending their time supplying our needs, we could not now sufficiently substitute for them. Unfortunately he didn't say what to do about it.

Another theme points out that if what we call 'life' originated from an amalgamation of things that were, by definition, non-living, the evolution of increasingly complicated inanimate objects could continue to eventually produce (as sci-fi writers already have) machines that

could reproduce, and independently create—without aiming at any intended results—various kinds of "inventions" that we may or may not find desirable.

He also left that possibility hanging, with no offer of how it might be responded to and turned next to a consideration of how we impart something of ourselves onto or into every inanimate thing we come in contact with. There has to be some truth in this, or there would be no fingerprint files and no work for tracking dogs. I read that modern science is expanding exponentially on abilities and ideas of having effects on, or with, nature. Watson had his own vision of that, and there is not enough space left here to consider it. I'll table that in order to consider the wonders presented by those inanimate objects in April's night sky, whose secrets astronomers are still seeking to plumb.

April starts off busily on the morning of the 1st with rising Saturn crowding close enough above Mars in the wee hours to have a conversation that Jupiter, also rising, can't hear.

It's the time of year when, except for Taurus the Bull's red eye (Aldebaran), the bright stars of winter have vacated the evenings but the Pleiades, riding on Taurus the Bull's shoulder, are also still above the horizon just prior to midnight, and this year for the first few nights of April they provide a lightly glittering accompaniment to Venus, as she ends each brilliant performance as the Evening Star. As StarDate reports, they are also known as the Seven Sisters, the daughters of Atlas in European mythology. Actually, only five or six are easily seen, while many other siblings are part of a cluster that is 445 light years away. Though Venus seems to pass right through them on the 3rd, they are 45 million times more distant. The Bull's V-shaped face, also known as the Hyades (about 150 light years away) begins going down seemingly more-or-less alongside Venus starting at sundown the 9th. The Moon joins them the 26th.

By then the Moon will have joined with Jupiter and Saturn before dawn the 14th-15th, Saturn again having to be content with third place in brightness.

On other nights, Leo's Regulus will have shown beside the Moon in the evening of the 4th, with Virgo's Spica being the bright spot nearest the Moon the 7th-8th. Scorpius's Antares will have had a similar role, but before dawn, the 11th, and Mars might have been glimpsed above the Moon ahead of sunrise on the 16th.

A Lyrid meteor shower will reach whatever peak it can the 21st, aided by a darkened Moon which will be new the 22nd, at 9p26. It will have been full the 7th at 9p35

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## Frog in February: A Victim of a False Spring? Dru Clarke



The slender frog lay, partially submerged, belly up, in a still pool of the hardly moving stream. Its limbs were splayed in a backstroke pose, as if it were going for a leisurely swim. But it was motionless, and its ivory underside made it look incredibly vulnerable. Its shamrock green back, anatomically, its dorsal surface, created a bright margin of color to its paleness, giving a notion that it might right itself and breaststroke away. But it remained still. It seemed quite dead.

When I later returned to photograph it, it was gone, either eaten by a resident crayfish or a passing bird or raccoon, or, perhaps, it escaped to live another day. But that was doubtful.

The previous few days had been unseasonably warm, but the temperatures had dipped back down to below freezing again, creating one of those freeze-thaw cycles that some amphibians and other animals had adapted to, to survive unpredictable weather changes. Some Arctic mammals, endothermic or warm-blooded, achieve a zombie-like state during the frigid winter, and others, like seals and whales, have thick blubber to retain heat and forestall cold. And some fish and insects have antifreeze in their blood to lower their freezing point. But it seems some frogs (and perhaps some other amphibians who have not been closely studied) have evolved even more sophisticated mechanics to deal with, and survive, freezing temperatures.

In addition to 'cryoprotectants' – glucose and glycerol, types of sugars – which lower the freezing point of tissues and decrease the degree that cells shrink, water normally found in and surrounding cells is shunted to the coelom, the body cavity holding internal organs, and the lymph system. Studies on the wood frog have proved revelatory. When held in below freezing conditions in both the lab and in nature, the frog's skin becomes crispy. When thawed, which takes a while, the heart and lungs begin functioning after about twenty minutes post-thaw.

In our watering tanks that are about a yard deep, goldfish have lived all winter. Daily replenishment of the water drunk by our cows and horses kept the bottom water unfrozen, although a thick layer of ice had to be broken each morning. Water is at its densest at 39 degrees Fahrenheit, which is seven degrees *above* freezing. The fish, while sluggish, survived. And, because their metabolism was way down, their nutritional needs were negligible. On warm ice-free days their orange slipstream shapes hovered just beneath the interface of water and atmosphere.

In the stream where the frog had lain, small fish darted, then hid under the detritus of last year's leaves. Water striders were already oaring across the surface in reaches where sunlight struck. Life was continuing as expected, awesome in its resilience, and raising hopes that true spring would soon arrive.

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# 2020 BIRDATHON

## Clyde Ferguson

It's time for our annual fund-raising event, the NFHAS Birdathon. This year's event will be held on:

Saturday, Apr. 25 - Sunday, Apr. 26, 2020

### HOW DO YOU DO IT?

It's simple. Collect pledges from your friends, contacts, or enemies to pay so much for each bird species that you can count within the 24-hour period of April 25- Sunday, April 26, 2019. The pledges do not have to be large; dimes, quarters and dollars add up quickly when many participate. Encourage your sponsors to pledge 20 or 25 cents per species spotted and you'll be surprised how much money you can raise with five or ten sponsors. If your sponsors want to pledge a set amount, that works great also.

We encourage you to make this a family outing. Go out and bird for 24 hours beginning sometime on April 25<sup>th</sup>. It's OK, for example, to bird from 10:00 a.m. on April 25<sup>th</sup> until 10:00 a.m. on April 26<sup>th</sup>. Report your findings to your sponsor and collect your pledges (often the difficult part). Send the money, names and addresses to Clyde Ferguson, 2140 College Hts. Rd., Manhattan, KS 66502. You just might surprise yourself with how many species you can identify. If you do not want to go out alone, or don't feel you can ID birds well enough, call Jim Koelliker (785-776-4915) and we will put you with a group.

If you cannot join in the fun of going out yourself, you can still collect names and pledges and one of the members who will be going out can be your "designated counter." We call this a super-sponsor (not that any of our sponsors aren't super in our eyes). If you have a friend that is going out to count, ask him or her to be your eyes.

If you do not know anyone going out, contact Jim Koelliker at 785-776-4915, or any NFHAS board member (see the back page of your newsletter for contact information), or just send a note to: Birdathon NFHAS, PO Box 1932, Manhattan KS 66505, and we will find someone to count for you. We'll provide a list of the species counted and you can collect the pledges based on that list. On average, we see between 90 and 110 species on a good trip.

Don't forget you can be a sponsor yourself. Make your pledge to a friend or relative who is going to be a counter or super-sponsor. If none of our counters or super-sponsors contacts you, send a note or this form with your pledge and we will add you to our list of sponsors. If you prefer, send a lump sum donation c/o of the Birdathon to the address above. We're easy, we accept donations in almost any form.

Those donating \$15 or more may receive a one year's subscription to the Prairie Falcon (if requested on the form). Our normal subscription price is \$15 and the purpose of the Birdathon is to raise additional funds. Your donations and the donations of your sponsors are a tax-deductible contribution.

Please join us if you can and if you can't, please help us support and protect the wild things.

Clyde Ferguson,  
Birdathon Chair

Jim Koelliker  
Co-chair





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

Return Service Requested

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Manhattan, KS 66502

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.

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

Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society.  
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## WE NEED YOU!

PLEASE consider joining our NFHAS Board.

Contact Patricia Yeager if interested, and watch our website and newsletter for time and day of meeting.

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**Birdseed Chair**

### NFHAS Board

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AOK Representative: Cindy Jeffrey

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