

Alsop Property Progress



It's fall planting time!

Soil has been prepared and is waiting for plants.

Help us in the next surge of planting at the Alsop Bird Sanctuary

Saturday afternoon, Sept. 9th starting at 3:00 p.m.

Rain date will be the next day same time.

Come by and help or stop by and encourage the workers. Share your extra garden produce if you like. Coffee and Lemonade will be on tap. Cookies welcome.

Patricia Yeager

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 46, No. 1 ~ September 2017

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Elements of an Eclipse
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Upcoming Events

Aug. 28 - Board meeting 6 p.m.
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

Sept. 9 - Planting at Alsop Property (see page 5)

Sept. 20 - "Earth's Survival" movie - 7 p.m.
Manhattan Public Library Auditorium
(pg.4-5)

Sept. 23 - Chuck Otte evening bird walk titled
"Birds of the Night" Discovery Center

Oct. 2 - Board meeting 6 p.m.
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

To write here about this past month's eclipse with a deadline that pre-dates it would be like reviewing a book unread, a game unseen, etc. At this point it's whatever was, was. But it might not hurt to contemplate in retrospect some things about one of the celebrities of the event, viz.: the Moon, with the help of Joe Rao, a columnist of Space.com.

For one thing, the Moon's diameter is a little over 2000 miles, about 1/400th that of the Sun, while the brightness of the Sun to the Moon is about 400,000 to 1. Which means if one filled the entire dome of sky above us with full Moons--it would take about 100,000--one would still have only a fourth the brightness of the Sun to see by. Yet that l'il ol' Moon brought a little bit of extra, mid-day night in a swath about 70 miles wide across our entire continent.

And one needn't stop juxtaposing interesting figures there. For I'm told that two or three days before or after a full Moon, when 95% of the Moon can seem to be reflecting only a little dimmed from full, we're actually having only half the full Moon's light sent down to us. Which means to me that a little light can go a long ways, even to us diurnals, who don't have those tiny built-in reflectors in their eyeballs that some nocturnal creatures have, which our vehicle headlights ignite at night. I'm reminded of being under the stars and planets and the pleasant sensation of realizing, as my eyes adjust, how much luminescence those tiny sparks provide.

It's transition time among those sparks as the summer array slides away westward as the fall contingent becomes more prominent rising. Pegasus the Flying Horse leads that oncoming parade, the four corners of his big body forming a huge diamond as they rise before turning forward into being a square, with scarcely any other stars within it. He's upside-down, alas, and soaring without his wings. His forelegs and the upward curve of his neck and head are to be imagined amid the pinpricks of lights that travel westward ahead of the square.

He used to have hindlegs extending eastward from the square's upper trailing star, but the International Astronomical Union has more recently designated them--two gradually separating arcs of stars--as Andromeda the Maiden, whom Pegasus carried away from the Sea Serpent's jaws. Following behind Andromeda is Perseus the Hero who, happening by, freed her from her seaside chains, a charming story that at least ended well, at least from her point of view. Others had not wished her well. Anyway, Perseus is a group of stars, several quite bright, in the Milky Way, resembling, some say, a Greek letter pi; others see a tricycle. It's viewer's choice.

If you look below Andromeda toward the southern horizon your gaze will pass west of Hamal, the bright star of Aries the Ram, and through the two tethered fish, Pisces, to reach the long oval of the body of Cetus the Whale. His neck and head--a shorter, rounder oval--stretch eastward as he swims backward. He's sometimes considered a jolly old "fish", sometimes regarded as the sea serpent referred to. However, there are a couple other serpents among the constellations, in spring and summer, so best not to be judgmental.

And the planets in their orbits will be briefly in view, with much of the activity for early risers. Mars and Mercury will basically be keeping their own company low in the dawn time of the 16th, with Mars on top but seldom seen Mercury the brighter. On the 17th-18th they'll form the bottom of a vertical line with Venus and the springtime star, Regulus in Leo, making a quick wink before disappearing into the daytime sky. And those two times the Moon will come passing by all four, leaving Venus and Regulus the main attractions toward the morns of the 19th and 20th.

For the evening crowd, Jupiter will shift from the left to the right of the Moon the 21st and 22nd as it keeps its current early to bed schedule. On the 25th, Saturn, staying up a little later, will be to the left of the Moon as they form a triangle with Antares below as Scorpius lingers from its summer showing.

The autumn equinox occurs at 3p02 the 22nd, while the Moon is full the 6th at 2a03 and new the 20th at 12a30.

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A Tenuous Hold

Dru Clarke

Photo by Dan Whiting



A wing lay, bedraggled and limp, caught between the rocks by the side of the stream. Its primaries were open, fanned, as if ready to take flight. But the bird it had belonged to was nowhere to be seen. A few other feathered parts lay about, witness to a wild but natural death.

We had seen the young heron in the shallows a few days before, upstream from this grisly scene, and had startled it into flight as we approached the flow tube that allowed the stream to continue downstream to join Rock Creek, to the Kansas River, into the Missouri, then the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico. Some of its elements may have dissolved in that water and been carried downstream, to be absorbed by other life, though most of it stayed local, nourishing a young bobcat or coyote.

Today we saw the adult heron who overwinters here, in the same spot where the young heron was. The young one who had died may or may not have been its offspring. There is no heron rookery nearby, so their continued presence remains something of a mystery.

We've witnessed predation closer to our cottage. In our implement shed on a narrow ledge above the door was a nest of wrens, with five gangly, naked chicks. One afternoon they were peeping loudly so I checked to see if anything was bothering them. I hadn't seen the parents all day, but when I left, one flew in under the rafters. The next morning all was quiet: all the chicks were gone. We have a resident black rat snake – all five feet of it – that may have been the culprit. We saw it last year climbing, zigzag, up the trunk of a black walnut tree next to our lane.

This year, a pair of tanagers had nested somewhere in the trees near said walnut, and one afternoon they set up the most distressing racket that went on and on and on.



In retrieving the mail, I found a baby bird lying dead in the lane. I moved it out of sight of the tanager pair, and they eventually quieted down. We haven't heard or seen them since.

It's not only birds that have suffered losses this year. We've asked the county not to spray along our property line, primarily to protect the cardinal flower that grows along the stream bed, and they have complied with our request. But we have no control over what gets sprayed north and south of us, so the choke cherries southward were hit hard as well as, to the north, a beautiful bouquet of Solomon's Seal, a flowering plant that I have seen only rarely in the Flint Hills. Last year its floral display of ivory-colored pairs of bell-shaped flowers hung in profusion from the base of the leaves. Its stems of long, parallel-veined leaves



Photo by Dru Clarke

arched gracefully toward the ground. This year, evidently mistaken for an invasive or undesirable plant, its leaves have been wilted and yellowed by herbicide. Behind it, just inside the fence, is a lush and abundant stand of ragweed and marijuana, protected I presume on private land. Food for quail?

All of this is sad. But, seeing flocks of (possibly post-breeding) lark sparrows and dickcissels along the grassy stretch of the road, hearing the calls of woodland birds and newly fledged red-tailed hawks in the sycamores near the creek, catching a glimpse of blue-grey gnatcatchers flitting among the branches, even a hummingbird on a bellflower, reminds us of the freshening of life despite a sometimes-tenuous hold on it.

© 2017 Dru Clarke, August

Movie Review: Earth's Survival - Decoding Science" I

Wed. Sept. 20, 7 p.m. at the Manhattan Public Library Auditorium

We will show the movie "Earth's Survival - Decoding Science"

The NFHAS has purchased this film and donated it to the library.

Made in consultation with the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) and world leading climate scientists, this documentary explains how we may be in the middle of the most crucial moment of Earth's history. It moves across the globe from the Himalayas to Antarctica, the Amazon Rainforest to the High Arctic. It explains what we most need to understand, decoding thousands of pages of data into simple truths.



Here are some of the topics:

Understanding Climate Change

For 10,000 years, civilization has flourished--but the population boom is pitting economic viability against ecological survival. This film will decode the scientific evidence for global warming and examine why we are at a crucial point in Earth's history.

Water Crisis

Climate change is impacting water resources, including the Himalayas, polar caps, and the Greenland Ice Sheet. A scientist compares freshwater reserves to a dwindling bank account.

Droughts and Floods

Half of humanity could be suffering freshwater shortages within 25 years; poor communities are the most vulnerable. Parts of India already rely on external drinking water, while other areas of Southeast Asia have tropical storms. Water distribution will be a development challenge.

Human Health

Extreme weather and rising temperatures provide a new vehicle for disease; both drought and floods increase contamination risk. A European heat wave exposed vulnerable populations and a Madagascar locust plague destroyed crops in 2013.

Biodiversity Threats

Two thirds of global species form a web of life in tropical forests; it's unknown how they will react to climate change. Warming temperatures and ocean acidification are impacting the coral triangle—threatening to have a domino effect on other ecosystems.

Rising Oceans

Rain forest and marine ecosystems are threatened by climate tipping points. Scientists are measuring rapid changes in the Southern Ocean that indicate a compromised CO₂ storage capacity. The Arctic region's temperatures are increasing up to eight times faster than other areas.

Visions of the Flint Hills

Visions of the Flint Hills

October 2—November 17, 2017

OPENING RECEPTION

First Friday, October 6, 2017 6pm—9pm

Art Benefit for



BUTTONWOOD
ART SPACE

3013 Main Street

Kansas City, MO 64108

© Brian Schoenfisch



© Bruce Hegle



© AK Dayton



Visions of the Flint Hills Art Show and Benefit fundraiser for Friends of Konza Prairie (FOKP). This is an art show and sale, with funds split between the artist and FOKP. The FOKP portion is used to help fund science education activities of the Konza Environmental Education Program (KEEP). Buttonwood Financial Group and Buttonwood Art Space provide the gallery space and logistical support, but retain none of the profits.

The show opening is Friday, October 6 at the Buttonwood Art Space, 3013 Main in Kansas City and coincides with the Kansas City First Friday Art Walk. Appetizers are served, including samples of regional bison dishes and other tasty tidbits. Tallgrass brewery and a wine vendor are providing beverages. George LeRoux and The Buffalo Wingnuts will provide the music.

The Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society has endorsed this program, acknowledging its value in supporting the arts and environmental education. If any of members plan to attend the opening, please contact Karen Hummell (karenhummel@yahoo.com) so you can be recognized in the opening remarks for the event.

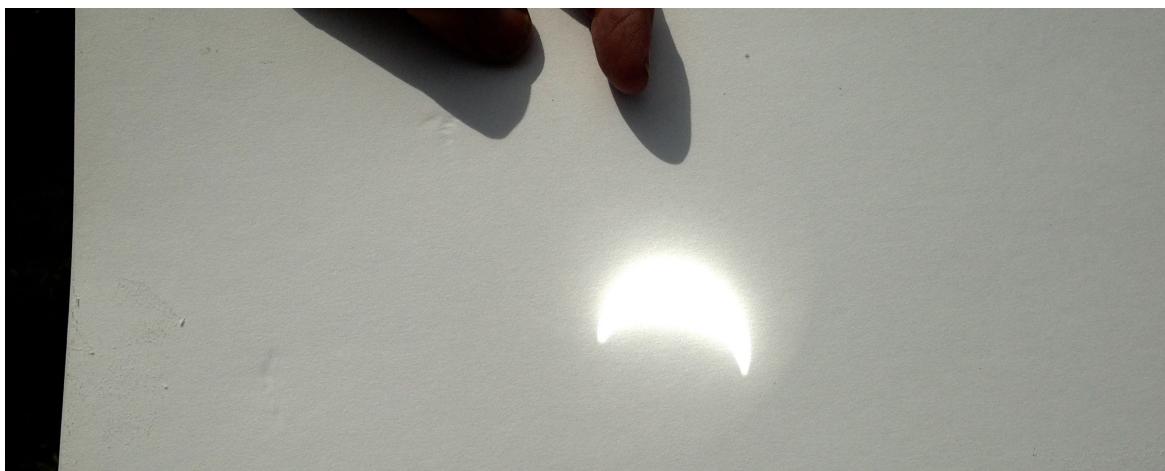
Shadow Chasing Light: Elements of an Eclipse

Fingers were crossed for clear skies for that Monday: 30% chance of rain, but the clouds that morning were a mix of cumulus and cirrus, spread in a froth from northwest to southeast across a lightening sky. Our friends Ed and Sil were to meet at our house to drive the 50 miles to Alcove Springs, to picnic, then walk up to the open summit where one could see the 'shadow chasing light' across the landscape as the moon, moving at 1800 miles an hour, eclipsed the sun. I found a partially shaded place to insert the truck next to a sleek black pickup at the edge of the parking lot, next to a rise overhung by bur oak and hickory branches- a perfect spot for a picnic. Ed had brought his spotting 'scope and set it up at the edge of the parking lot, and busied himself with that task as we set up chairs and spread out foodstuffs.

Soon, a trickle of people pooled around Ed and his 'scope. A tall florid man with a bright yellow t-shirt emblazoned with "Don't Tread on Me" and a suitably menacing coiled snake held out a metal object to Ed and said, "Here, try this!" It was a solar filter and it worked like a charm: a community was building. The man, from Texas, had brought his entire extended family, from a chubby 18 month old granddaughter who spent most of her time silently toddling about the parking lot, to his elegant wife who moved slow, like a drawl, keeping watch over her kin. The man, to pass the time and cement his new bond, began to spin almost believable tales that, of course, ended with a funny zinger (e.g. ""Naw, I wahn't skeered: I ride wiv mah wife!")

It was warm and muggy, then began to noticeably cool a bit. The wind freshened and the leathery leaves slapped together like chaps against a saddle. We ate fitfully, took turns at the 'scope to see the changing face of the sun, shared welding helmets and goggles with our new friends, and ate some more. The middle childhood girl probably around 8 to 10 years old- a pretty and slim brunette and future man slayer – edged her way toward us and finally got up enough nerve to ask if she could borrow Mike's goggles. He, already smitten, handed them over. Ed has somehow sneaked a piece of white cardboard into the truck and now used it to project the sun's image onto it from the 'scope. The young girl whipped out her phone and took a surprisingly clear photo of it. She proudly showed it around.

Sil and I decided to climb to the summit as total eclipse neared: it was steep and we had to negotiate a narrow and stone-strewn path, so we stopped at brief interludes to catch our breath and survey the countryside. Had it been any more breathtaking we would have succumbed right then and there to nature's allure. (Some, in the past, have succumbed to fright at the moment of total eclipse.) Reaching the summit, we felt cool and somehow refreshed by taking in the greens of the woodland contrasted with the prairie, the distant Blue River. Suddenly, overhead a flock of swifts - or were they swallows, it was hard to tell- wheeled and dove, triggered into flight by the darkening skies. And, it was getting darker! In the northwest was a rosy edge to the fading sky, like a prairie sunset. Looking at the sun, only a thin spill of coal-like embers edged the now obscured disc of the sun – the moon had overrun its astral ally.



Shadow Chasing Light: Elements of an Eclipse

The swifts- or swallows- had moved away to the east, still seeking those elusive insects, maybe trying to outrun the moon. An enormous, multi-hued and shimmering sundog haloed the rare event, as if giving its blessing and marking this moment in time. The sundog's ice crystals eventually would melt, turn liquid, and perhaps fall as rain over the hill we now stood on. Picking our way down, we eagerly rejoined our new friends to share our experience and perspectives.

We heard yet another tale from our tall Texas compadre, shook hands and exchanged pleasantries, and Ed showed him a way home through the Flint Hills. They had come up from Wichita Falls to Topeka, but changed their original destination to follow westward the sky's clear blue openings to avoid the pockets of rain that threatened to dampen their quest. Waving goodbye, we decided to at least pay homage to the spring that had watered those first settlers on the Oregon Trail and walked the trail to the rocky outcropping where it was now just a trickle. Along the way we ambushed folks less familiar with the history of the place who listened at first politely then with growing interest as they heard from Sil of intrigue, murder, banning, death and survival. All thanked us and seemed to feel simply fortunate to have encountered our graying band.

We drove home along with a long line of vehicles heading south, drowsy with warmth and good feelings of conviviality. It was the unexpectedness of things that surrounded the eclipse that will stay with us: the camaraderie of folks who, through serendipity, gathered in an obscure rural place along a pioneer's trail; the enormous, sky-embracing sundog; the freshening breeze; the spontaneous emergence of a flock of birds. And the shadow chasing light.

*Dru Clarke
Aug. 22 2017*





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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 Audubon Society, and mail to: Treasurer, NFHAS, P.O. Box 1932, Manhattan, KS, 66505-1932

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