

Dave Rintoul took some amazing photos on his trip to South America.
Here are two of them.



Crimson-crested Woodpecker



Slender-billed Kite (Rio Negro - Brazil)

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 39, No. 11 ~ July 2011

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Upcoming Events

July 9 - Sat. Morning Birding 8 a.m.
Meet at Sojourner Truth Park

July 17 - ANNUAL PLANNING
Meeting 4-6 p.m.
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

NO newsletter in AUGUST



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

For those new, I've been looking back 200 years to focus on the significance of certain events of 1811:

its long-lingering comet, its tremendous mid-continental earthquake, and the first passage of a steamboat down the inland rivers. I've left the *New Orleans*, in mid-voyage from Pittsburgh, battling down the Mississippi through the quake's aftermath, and will now report that it safely reached the city of New Orleans a few days into 1812, appropriately greeted on the lower reaches by a rare Louisiana snowfall. The comet that had been superintending the project from low in the twilights since spring, apparently satisfied, went on its way at the same time.

Immediately remaining was the economic hardships of the high cost of traditional muscle-powered transportation west of the Appalachians. They continued though one scheme to use the resulting political discontent from that distress to separate the region from the seaboard states and create an independent inland empire had been aborted. And the *New Orleans* was never intended to return upriver. Its hull and engine were designed for the relatively easy (thus likely more profitable) deep water commute between New Orleans and Natchez, in which it engaged till 1814 when nonetheless it struck a stump and sank. No matter its fate, its arrival had immediately inverted the skepticism about the possibility of steam power on the big rivers. Earlier efforts had gone begging for investors.

Other mechanics began more innovating and building. Thus steamboats had a significant presence in the victory over the British in the 1815 Battle of New Orleans, and it became possible to move numbers of troops with relative speed to maintain the nation's western sovereignty.

However tensions had ignited again because Fulton and his well-connected eastern associates obtained a charter granting them monopolistic control of all steam traffic on the lower Mississippi, which meant in effect on the entire inland system. But Henry M. Shreve, a hero of the 1815 battle, steered into New Orleans defying the monopoly, had his boat sequestered then demanded bail in the amount of its value pending the outcome of the lawsuit he would file. The Fulton group was not prepared to tie up that kind of money in a boat they could not use, so released it, and with that and other court actions the monopoly was thus blunted and eventually voided by the Supreme Court 1824 decision in *Gibbons v. Ogden*.

Regular travel, though then having ever more boats to choose from, improved slowly because of the risk from those partially sunken trees. In 1830-1, using a specially

double-hulled "snagboat" invented by the same Henry Shreve, several thousand snags were pulled between Louisville and Natchez. (See Louis C. Hunter's *Steamboats on the Western Rivers*). Captains could then more reasonably run at night wherever the snagboats had been and commerce literally flowed much better.

Even in New England a faction urging secession was strong enough to bring on the 1814 Hartford Convention. In 1836 numbers of formerly restlessly dissatisfied Americans who had moved westward, and encountered grievances, then having successfully taken on bloody fighting, proclaimed an independent Texas. It seems to me possible that the same might have occurred, earlier on a larger scale, led by some other Burr or Houston, if steamboats had not arrived westward and been adapted quickly enough to ease a tinder box situation, starting with that one lone, earthquake- and comet-attended voyage of 15 persons, plus one born along the way, in the year of 1811.

(Lydia Roosevelt was the daughter of Benjamin Latrobe, the architect for current U.S. Capitol, rebuilt after the prior one was burned by the British in the War of 1812. She and Nicholas became the great aunt and uncle of TR.)

Now we must paddle through July and August this issue. In July Saturn is still engaged, teaming with Spica to give the Moon horns on the 7th-8th, Saturn on the right. Venus fades away as the morning star though Mars is to the left of Taurus' Alderan in the 12th's dawn, and Mercury is to the lower right of Leo's Regulus at the 19th's nightfall. The Moon joins Jupiter at first light the 23rd-24th, then passes the orange gleams of Aldebaran and Mars the 26th-28th, is new the 1st at 3a54 and the 30th at 1p40; full the 15th 1a40.

In August, the Perseid meteor shower meets a bright Moon the 11th-13th, after it soars past that notable southern duo, Scorpio and Sagittarius (with its Teapot) for several nights. It will be below Saturn the 3rd, with Jupiter the 20th-21st, to the right of Mars and the Gemini Twins the 25th and form a troika with Saturn and Spica the 31st. Jupiter will be rising a little before midnight. The asteroid Vesta (average diameter 330 miles) will be dimly visible the first week of August, best seen about midnight in Capricorn on the 5th, and the best chance for the next decade. Moon full the 13th at 1p57, new the 28th at 10p04.

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Migratory Bird Day Results

Jim Throne

International Migratory Bird Day Results

Saturday, May 14, was a cool, windy day for the count. The temperature at 6 AM was 47° and it was windy, and we hit a high of 60° by late afternoon. And, it stayed windy all day. But, despite the weather, we still had a good count.

It seemed that this year, the cool spring may have kept some of the birds that pass through in winter here longer, and some of the birds that come during warmer weather weren't here yet. I've been compiling the count for five years now, and there were several species that we saw for the first time this year: **a bald eagle, a prairie falcon (usually gone by this time of year, so a nice sighting), a yellow-bellied sapsucker, ruddy turnstones, and black terns.**

Also, some of this year's counts were the highest that we've had for some species during the last five years: 3,519 barn swallows, 326 cedar waxwings, 285 eastern kingbirds, 219 lark sparrows, and 27 wood ducks. The wood ducks were very interesting because we had a flock of 24 of them that flew out of a creek into a corn field, landed for a few minutes, and then flew back to the creek. They did this several times over a period of about 30 minutes. Presumably, they were coming out to feed on corn, but it was odd to see so many wood ducks together.

Sparrow counts continue to be good with a number of species counted: 230 chipping sparrows, 9 clay-colored, 4 field, 3 vesper, 219 lark, 13 grasshopper, 13 white-throated, 9 Harris, and 1 white-crowned. We counted 61 indigo buntings, which are beautiful birds with a nice song that are pretty sociable so we get to enjoy looking at them for a while. And, we saw three painted buntings, which are certainly one of our most colorful birds.

Total number of species counted was 111, with a total of 8,141 birds – our highest total number of birds since I started compiling the counts.

We had 4 groups participating: Clyde Ferguson, Joe Hawes, Jim Koelliker, Barry Michie, and Michael and Nikki Strobe; Jack, Peter, and Susan Oviatt with Mark Hollingsworth; Jim and Janet Throne; and Patricia Yeager, Kevin Fay, Anne Marchin, and Donna Roper. **I want to thank everyone who participated this year,** and please contact me if you'd like to participate in one of these groups or form your own group next year. It's a great excuse to spend a day out birding.

Jim Throne, jim.throne@sbcglobal.net

And thank you, Jim, for coordinating and compiling.



Canaries in the Creek

Dru Clarke

Kansas Anuran Monitoring Program

A troll-like, balding, but somehow wise-looking gentleman approached the microphone under a castle of tent on a summit of tall grass prairie. When he began to speak, the crowd went completely silent.

Joe Collins, adjunct professor and herpetologist at Kansas Biological Survey, threw down the gauntlet at Symphony in the Flint Hills during his talk on the anuran (frog and toad) monitoring program: These amphibians, not endowed with abilities of flight to wing southward during winter months, endure our harsh conditions of that frigid season by hunkering down home here on the prairie and emerge in early spring to begin their calls of courtship that, under ambivalent conditions, lead to new generations of frogs and toad to inhabit our occasional and dispersed wet places in the Flint Hills (and other landscapes in Kansas). That *they* are our true harbingers of the arrival of spring – and not neotropical avian migrants – better known as songbirds, may be a bitter pill to swallow for hardcore birders, but if we consider them – the anurans – precursors of a more sublime cohort of song, then we might embrace them more lovingly, or, at least, with more respect and humility.

Here at home the toads have had a successful early spring as our wood walkway surrounding the southwest/west of our house is alive with lumbering toad folks (whom the cats love to tantalize but do not kill and eat). A few concave pottery fragments, a low-lipped, ground level “bird (toad?) bath,” and shallow flowerpot saucers, give them access to a steady source of water, necessary for moist skin (and auxiliary respiration). If we leave a porch light on, they are opportunistic snackers, picking off clumsy junebugs and frenetic moths drawn to the brightness.

At night, I like to leave the bedroom windows open (must to my husband’s protests) so I can hear the anurans’ calls, as I just like to hear the

repetitious chorusing, inducing a meditative somnolence like a natural mantra. After all these years, I should know the difference among them, but I still don’t.

Birders as well as others engaged by natural subjects might want to become part of the Kansas anuran monitoring survey program. Sponsored by Kansas Wildlife and Parks (Ken Brunson is the contact person), there is a protocol online that is fairly simple to follow and fill out. It involves a 15-mile stretch of road, easily driven on a starlit evening, and requires attention to surrounding environmental (as well as meteorological) conditions. The sounds of each anuran can be accessed online as well, and a tape recording of these may be a handy tool to carry on these forays.

Frogs and toads are our “canaries in the creek,” as Collins expressed earnestly to us, as their presence, absence, and/or disappearance from where they used to be can alert us to disturbing changes in our environment. When we do hear them, we should rest – at least for now – content that our environment is intact.

©Dru Clarke June 2011

See: kenb@wp.state.ks.us
(Ken Brunson at Kansas Wildlife and Parks)

Or jc@ku.edu (Joseph Collins at Center for North American Herpetology)





Take note

Warning!!

We have had no response for a volunteer to take over the Bird Seed Sale since announcing that Annie Baker has “retired.” If no one comes forward, we will be forced to suspend selling birdseed this coming fall and winter.

WELL - Annie is the only person to respond -

‘If no one comes forward to do bird seed sales, and the Board wishes to continue to offer it, I will continue as coordinator. (I can use the 2011-2012 season to recruit / train someone new.)’ **Surely someone out there will step up?**

Don't forget - Our annual planning meeting will be held **July 17th**, beginning at 4 p.m, followed by a potluck. The meeting/potluck will be at the home of Tom and MJ Morgan, 1440 Beechwood Terrace, Manhattan, KS. Please bring a snack or treat.

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 Jacque Staats - staats@wildblue.net





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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, 66502-1932

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> and join in the discussions.

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