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<http://ksbirds.org/kos/2018CBC.htm>

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 47, No. 4 ~ December 2018

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Dec. 3- Board Meeting 6 p.m. Friend's Room,
Manhattan Public Library

Dec. 15- Manhattan CBC (see page 4)

Dec. 21- Olsburg CBC

Dec. 30- Junction City CBC



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

As did nature around us this fall, I now follow a focus on drought with one on rain. In doing so I've come upon a rather compact yet compendious treatise on

the subject titled "Rain", by Cynthia Barnett (Broadway Books, N.Y., 2015).

She begins away back when millions of years of rampant meteor bombardment brought water to the newly formed Earth, while keeping the new planet so hot that the water vaporized and went off into space, until the meteor supply spasmodically eased and things cooled enough for the vapor to rain in oceanic quantities that were re-heated and boiled off and restored in diminishing sequences until the "blue marble" we live on resulted, where "more water rushes through its atmosphere than flows through all the world's rivers combined".

And today's raindrops, it's noted, do not resemble those of tears or leaky faucets, but are umbrella-shaped because of the resistance of the air they fall through. To my thinking this concentrates the force with which they strike, increasing their strength at eroding.

Human history bulges with accounts of the effects of rain, of the weather that brings it, of the environments it produces.

On the gentler side, the author reports that New York and Miami receive five inches more of it a year than does Seattle, but in the former two it comes and goes, while in the latter it comes overall more peacefully and lingers longer. This is significant as she refers to studies concluding that inclement weather, by inclining more people to stay indoors, produces more literature. At the apex of this phenomenon is Iceland, whose capital is cloud covered 90% of the time, and where "it is said that one in ten Icelanders will publish a book."

Less gentle is her description of Europe's soggy and cold Middle Ages whose people did not understand the natural causes of their crop-failure famines and diseases, so began to point the blame in such a way that, as calculated by a German historian, Wolfgang Behringer, there occurred some 50,000 legalized executions for witchcraft. Making the Salem, Massachusetts affair seem, quantitatively, but an asterisk.

And there's apparently been a particular evolutionary effect, one that enabled our much older ancestors to do better in the wet surroundings of their day. The book tells that in 2008, Mark Changizi, a neurobiologist in Boise, Idaho, wondered why the skin of his hands and feet wrinkled when wet, but not the skin on the rest of his body. It being the same with other primates, but not with people who had certain nerve damage, whose skin did not wrinkle. When he asked a grad student for a suggestion on what might be the advantage of such a healthy-limbed situation, Romann Weber came up with "road treads". The wrinkles allowed for better grips on wet tree branches, the same way tire treads let water flow through, reducing the chance of hydroplaning. And that advantage, rooted in our autonomous nervous system, is still ours.

One could go on, revealing much more interesting information, which is what the book is for. And since it deals also with effects when rain is missing, ombrophobics (folks with a fear of rain) may not find it distressing.

When clouds, with or without rain, are absent, Venus will be a brilliant Morning Star this month, at its brightest before dawn on the 1st and 2nd. It will neighbor the Moon the 3rd and 4th, with Virgo's Spica to its upper right on the 4th.

Mercury and Jupiter will be sort of Mutt-and-Jeff neighbors (Jupiter being so much the brighter) in the pre-dawn sky from the 5th to the 23rd, closely side-by-side on the 21st, the night of the equinox, which will have occurred at 4p23.

Other close companionships to be include that of Saturn and the Moon after sunset the 8th and 9th, though Saturn may be hard to find amid the twilight glow. Mars will be in speaking distance above the Moon the 14th, and Taurus' Alderbaran will glow somewhat reddishly from the Moon's lower left to upper right the 20th and 21st. Leo's Regulus has the same kind of visit with the Moon in the late evening of the 25th and 26th. And Spica will have another lunar visit, to the Moon's lower right, the 30th.

Meanwhile the Geminid meteor shower, curtesy of an asteroid known as 12 Phaeton shedding particles of rock and dirt that will be in the Earth's path the 13th, is expected to provide a good show after the Moon sets about midnight. The Moon will be new at 1a20 the 7th, full 11a49 the 22nd.

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Leaf Fall Dru Clarke



A small twig of oak leaves lay in a winding path in Riga's (Latvia) park. I had just past a marvelous 'insect house' near the Bibliophile restaurant built to lure bugs away from structures inhabited by humans. Nearby was a canal with ducks and tour boats and, at the end, of the park, the stately opera house. I

was missing fall at home, but it had begun in the Baltic States. Later, in Parna, Estonia, I found multihued maple leaves. These and the oak leaves came home with me.

Most of the Baltic States have climax forests of pine and fir, evergreens, so do not offer up the sun struck colors of deciduous trees. Back home, I propped up the twig in a glass jar and pressed the maple leaves under a jug. Then I took a walk, and later a long couple of road trips to enjoy the change of season. Our son had not been back in three years and was up early to catch the early morning light that illuminated our land, then accompanied us on some back roads to take home some visual memories.

Early in autumn leaf fall, the walnuts drop their compound leaves first, their naked shapes shivering in the brisk air. Poison ivy turns crimson and Virginia creeper everything from pale pink to merlot. Our Osage orange and mulberry trees held on to just before the first significant snow, littering the ground with neon green and sunny yellow. The chinquapins hold on often until spring, the abscission layer between petiole and twig unrelenting in its grip.

Some say that the early droughty conditions in summer and, then, sunny days and chilly nights contribute to this spectrum of color this fall. The red hue (anthocyanin) is produced when chlorophyll, the green in leaves responsible for sugar production, breaks down. Yellow (xanthophyll) and orange (carotene) are pigments present already and are revealed as chlorophyll dissipates. Whatever combination of factors cooperate, they outdid themselves this fall. Even normally sedate adults have been caught playing in piles of raked-up leaves.

As snow falls on this November morning, the fallen leaves are being blanketed by fleecy white flakes. A few days ago, I discovered a diminutive maple tree on the hillside behind our summer kitchen. How it got there I have no idea. (We did not plant it, and there are no other maples on our land.) But in a few years, if it survives, it too will give up its green and cheer us with a burst of brilliant red. I can hardly wait!

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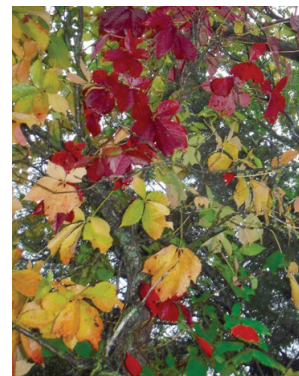
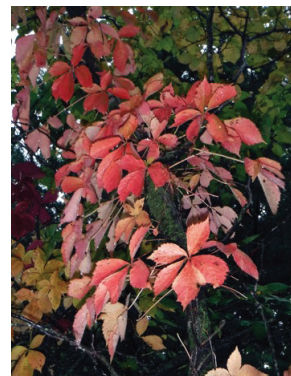


Photo by Dru Clarke

Manhattan Christmas Bird Count

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Six teams of bird watchers will look for birds on December 15th in the Manhattan Christmas Bird Count circle (see map above, 7.5 miles in radius and centered at Anderson Hall). New participants are always welcome and expert birding skills are not required! If you would like to participate, please contact Mark Mayfield (see contact info above) he will assign you to a group that needs extra help. If you live in the area and wish to join a group in one of the six sections, you can also contact the group leaders by phone or email.

The count will start at dawn and end at dusk, unless you are part of a dedicated group looking for owls in the dark. The count will be held in sun, rain or snow, but arrangements can be made if you can only participate for part of the day. We would also like to invite folks who live within the count circle to count birds at their feeders on December 15th as part of the surveys. If you would like to help with feeder-watching, send me (Mark) an email for instructions and a checklist.

Count numbers and number of species will be compiled for all groups and participants at the end of the day at the chili supper. Please join us to hear reports of the day's sightings and stories from the day's adventures!

If you have bird records to provide and cannot attend the compilation, please give those to the sector coordinator for the area prior to the compilation if at all possible. If you don't know who to send them to, please report them to me, Mark Mayfield. We also encourage all participants to submit their observations to eBird and can provide assistance if anybody wants to learn more about this important resource for birding in Kansas!

Manhattan Christmas Bird Count- Compilation and Chili Supper

Join the NFHAS and fellow birders after the day of birding for a potluck supper at 6 p.m. on December 15th, at the Seniors Service Center, 412 Leavenworth, Manhattan, KS. A few volunteers will prepare chili but please feel free to bring a side dish to share. Free-will donations to NFHAS are also welcome. We encourage you to bring your own tableware to help us reduce the amount of trash. Enjoy good food, good companionship, and find out how this year's count compares to previous years! If you have any questions on what to bring for the supper or can help with setup, please contact Kevin Fay by phone 785-776-4765 or email ktf90@hotmail.com

History of Christmas Bird Counts

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, hunters engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas “Side Hunt.” They would choose sides and go afield with their guns—whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won.

Conservation was in its beginning stages in that era, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an early officer in the then-nascent Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition—a “Christmas Bird Census” that would count birds during the holidays rather than hunt them.

So began the Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to the inspiration of Chapman and the enthusiasm of 27 dedicated birders, 25 Christmas Bird Counts were held that day. The locations ranged from Toronto, Ontario to Pacific Grove, California with most counts in or near the population centers of northeastern North America. Those original 27 Christmas Bird Counters tallied around 90 species on all the counts combined.

The data collected by observers over the past century allow Audubon researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife agencies and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how the continent’s bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years.

The long term perspective is vital for conservationists. It informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat, and helps identify environmental issues with implications for people as well.



Defend the Endangered Species Act

Urge the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to reject proposals that weaken the Endangered Species Act.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA; 16 U.S.C. § 1531 et seq.) is one of the few dozens of US environmental laws passed in the 1970s, and serves as the enacting legislation to carry out the provisions outlined in The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)



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PLEASE consider joining our NFHAS Board.

The Board meets on the first Monday of each month. The meetings usually last about an hour.

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