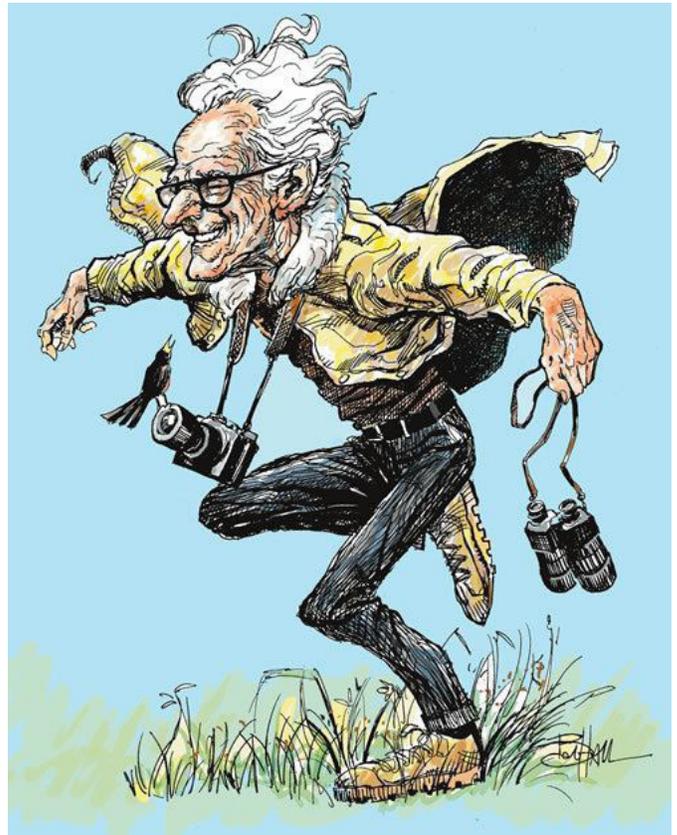
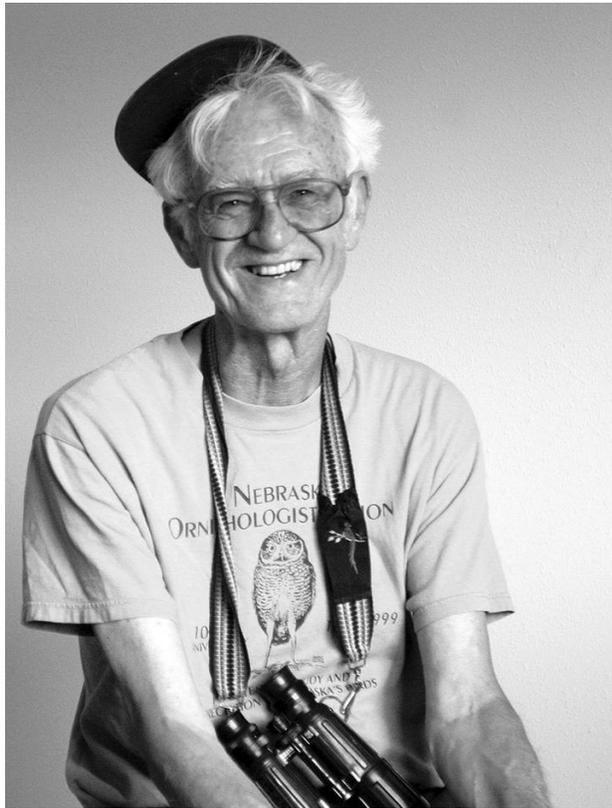


This issue is dedicated to Paul Johnsgard



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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

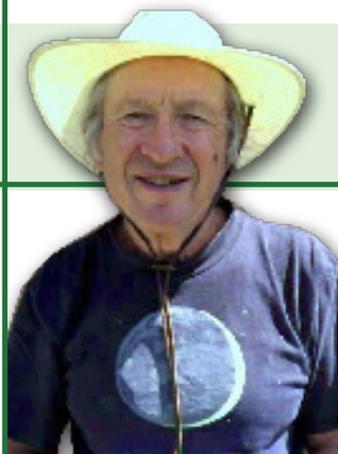
Vol. 49, No. 11 July/August 2021

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50th COUNTDOWN
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Upcoming Events

- July 4 - Independence Day
- July - 6 Board Meeting - 6 p.m.
- July 13 - NEW Monthly Bird Walk SEE PAGE 6
July 13th at 8:00 a.m.**
- Aug 3 - Board Meeting - 6 p.m.
- Aug 14 - Monthly Bird Walk Manhattan City park
Meet at Stage 8 a.m.**
- Sept 7 - Board Meeting - 6 p.m.



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

For the summer,
Ballad of the Walk-Behind Mower

Mowing, mowing, what is there best to do
than striding behind a gnashing machine
that's slashing the grass for you.

I prefer the affair in the morning air,
though there's usually too much dew.
and there's little fun 'neath the midday sun;
like being stirred in a stew.
So I grow more bold as the day grows old:
"Time to mow," I'll say, and it's true.

Well, philosophers may sing
of the wonders of the spring,
a season in which mowing has a part,
while the wonder that I feel
when I hear spring's thunder peal,
is if last year's machine will deign to start.

Mowing, mowing, all of the summer through.
back and forth, or around and around,
then into the corners, too.

The same bumps and dips adjust your hips
'cause you're looking for something new.
You're scanning about as you tromp your route;
so familiar is the view.
Or you're singing a song to march you along
with words that can be impromptu.

It's the battle of the blades:
the metal ones versus grass.
Your private one-float parades;
oh, how the times do pass.
Till winter intervenes;
making growing and mowing hard.
It ends those battle scenes;
peace comes to lawn and yard.

Special motions will be the reasons for several effects overhead this summer, though one might be more interesting than it gets noticed. On July 5th Earth on its elliptical orbit will be at aphelion, its farthest distance from the Sun, seven per cent dimmer than it was in January, despite the temperature differences, which will be more easily defined.

More noticeable will be Mars and Venus sliding past each other, with the Moon hanging around to watch, the 11th-13th. Even that will take a bit of attention, for Mars is dimming from its sparkling run the past two years. The two planets will be about an extended fist high westward in the early evening. Eastward, two other planets, Saturn and the much brighter Jupiter, will be rising ever earlier starting in the late July evenings, and the Moon will be in their vicinity to form a triangle with them the 24th, Saturn to right and Jupiter to the left.

As for those two planets, they have been traveling companions for some time, but are growing apart as Jupiter is taking twelve Earth years to orbit the Sun while Saturn speeds about it in ten. They will each become at opposition in August; that is, in a Sun-Earth-planet alignment, at which time each will be thus visible all night and showing full face. Saturn's will be August 2nd, when we'll be at an angle so that our view will include its north pole but not a full display of its rings; Jupiter's will be the 19th, a night after it slyly retrogrades into Capricorn. Saturn will be rising about an hour ahead each night.

Absent clouds on the 11th/12th, the Perseid meteor shower should have a clear field as Old Man Moon will be going to bed early. Also in July he'll be above Taurus's star-eye, Aldebaran the 6th-7th, and above Leo's brightest, Regulus (at the base of the backward question mark) the 12th, and above Scorpius' red eye, Antares, the 19th-20th.

He'll help locate Aldebaran again in the same way August 3rd, and Antares the 16th, as well as being above Spica, the lonely bright star of Virgo the 12th. But Saturn will be above him the 20th, and Jupiter the 21st. Venus, who is quite identifiable on her own will be to his left on the 10th. He'll be new the 9th in July at 8p17, and on the 8th of August at 8a50; full the 23rd of July at 9p37, the 22nd of August at 7a02.

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Broken Terrain

Dru Clarke



“I’ve always been drawn to broken, wild terrain. The oldest tongues come from such places, and the strangest mythologies, and the oldest cities, and the most barbarous religions...”

Donna Tartt, “The Secret History”

Early morning, tucked in a hollow in the northern Flint Hills, on our farm we venture out to do chores early, to enter a narrow window of coolness before the oppressive heat of the day. Then, we hear awakening birdsong, some of which sounds ancient, as if the bird from which it originates is exploring the world of sound for the first time. A



Photo by Dave Rintoul

cautionary, slow cadence like wooden clogs tentatively tapping on a tin roof, the yellow-billed cuckoo calls. It is a jarring and primitive sound, heard only after mid-May (usually here on May 22, this year, though, on May 19) and continuing through the torrid days. I recently learned it comes from the Grand Chaco in South America, landing here after a long and arduous (to me) journey. The Bolivian Plains chiefly, Grand Chaco extends into western Brazil, Paraguay, and northern Argentina.

This cuckoo seems to like our shrubby south slope that rises up from our lane, although it sometimes calls from woody growth that encircles our outbuildings. Last summer, after a strong storm with high winds, we (or rather one of our cats) found a fledgling flopping on our lane, apparently blown from its nest (which I never did find). I rescued it and tried to feed it red worms from the manure pile but it was recalcitrant and decidedly unwilling to be ‘helped’ by a mortal. It was slope-headed and long-bodied with a fierce and hard beak (which it used to repeatedly stab at my fingers) and distrustful eyes, so unlike the tufted titmouse I had lifted out of the cow feed trough weeks before. The titmouse sat on my arm and shoulder, its favorite perch, for the week I held it captive, but this cuckoo fledgling wanted ‘out.’ I carried it up the slope, dense with shrubs, and placed it on a limb where it promptly dove into the underbrush. I recovered it, and it did it again. So I left it, hidden by the lower leafy branches. Cuckoos typically lurk in the underbrush, so it was doing what came naturally. It seems a very primitive bird.

Our land is all up and down, so walks are challenging but always leading to a surprise, a revelation, or stirring a memory. An expanse of moss in a shady reach takes me back to a hemlock grove and a velvety stump where

I used to ‘worship’ (really, just sit quietly) not a remote god but some presence we feel when immersed in nature. The stump was probably used by ruffed grouse, as their ‘pulpit’, to drum with their wings in a courtship ritual carried on annually. I used to hear the staccato thumping from our summer house in the New Jersey Highlands and I’d find bits of green hemlock twigs scattered about on the forest floor litter. (That grove is threatened now by the woolly adelgid, an invasive insect from Asia that has no known predators here in North America.) Drumming we know was practiced by the Chinese from 5500 BC, and the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman cultures, in religious ceremonies. Native African peoples drummed, a tradition reverently carried on here by our brother Richard Pitts, beloved founder of Wonder Workshop. Maybe we learned to drum from a bird.

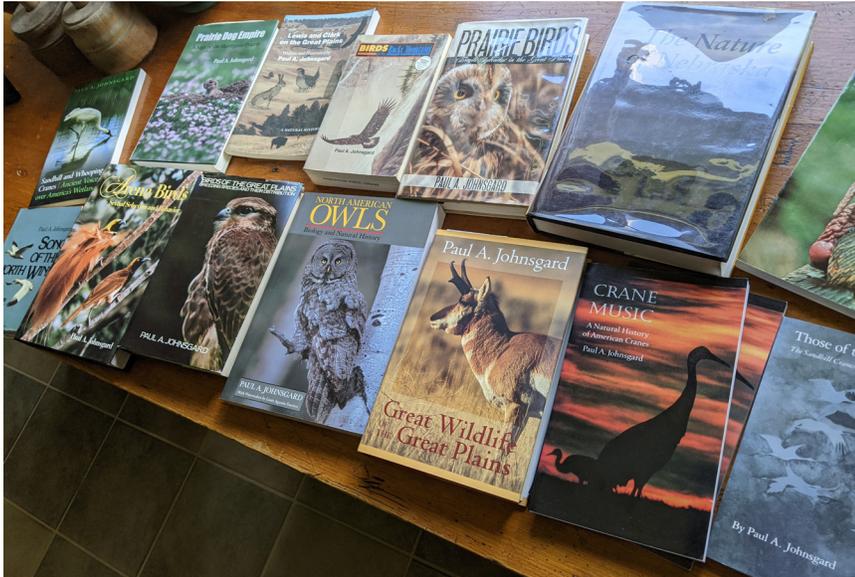
A trail cam anchored at the base of a tree by a pool created by a transverse thick root of a giant cottonwood on our south creek recorded a doe, then the doe again with a newly born fawn, then the fawn alone, its growing image captured some time later. Its russet coat with silvery spots was satin. The area around this cottonwood is about an acre in size and is strangely devoid of understorey or ground cover and is like a natural amphitheater. Animals may be drawn to it, like this doe and her fawn. This is where a murder of crows staged a while back. I’m drawn to it as I was to the hemlock grove of my childhood. There is no stump but several large limestone pieces along the creek are perfect for sitting. So, I sit, with the new pup, usually in motion, quietly beside me.

Some have eschewed organized religion or claimed none at all, denying any supreme being, or, when pressed, voicing skepticism. Others have turned to nature, more now than before the pandemic. Perhaps it took that requisite lock down to free us to experience that ‘wild, broken terrain’, for some not a piece of land in the Flint Hills, but maybe a rare abandoned lot or a flower growing from a sidewalk crack in a cityscape. Some have heard birdsong for the first time.

When my husband and I were in Brooklyn for a conference one summer, a violent thunderstorm ruptured the skies over the tall buildings. The thunder echoed frighteningly among the skyscrapers, bouncing boisterously back and forth against the corridors of cement. Rain lashed every surface. Flatbush Avenue was at a standstill. This was a ‘wild, broken terrain’ revealed in all its ferocity and glory. It was enough to make even the most skeptical among us believe.

© 2021 Dru Clarke June

Paul Johnsgard ~A legacy



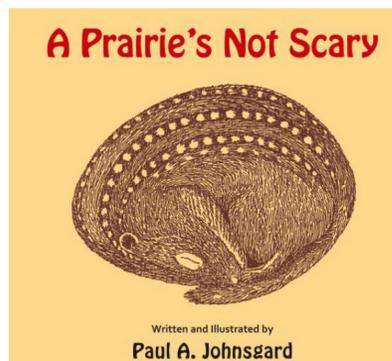
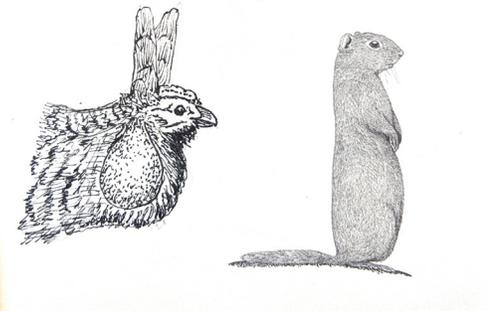
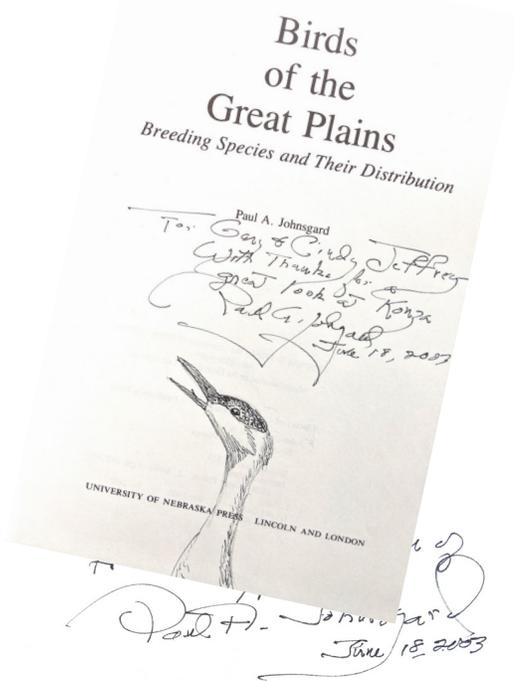
Paul Johnsgard - one of the greats. He left an incredible legacy as an author, mentor, teacher, friend and artist.

His sketches in most of his books I find almost personal. Not just anatomical or for identification (there are many) but they have life in them too, a personality.

Louise de Kiriline wrote in a letter to Dr. Johnsgard:

“Because you see a bird you do not know it. There is something more which you have caught... that makes the bird alive and fulfilled.”

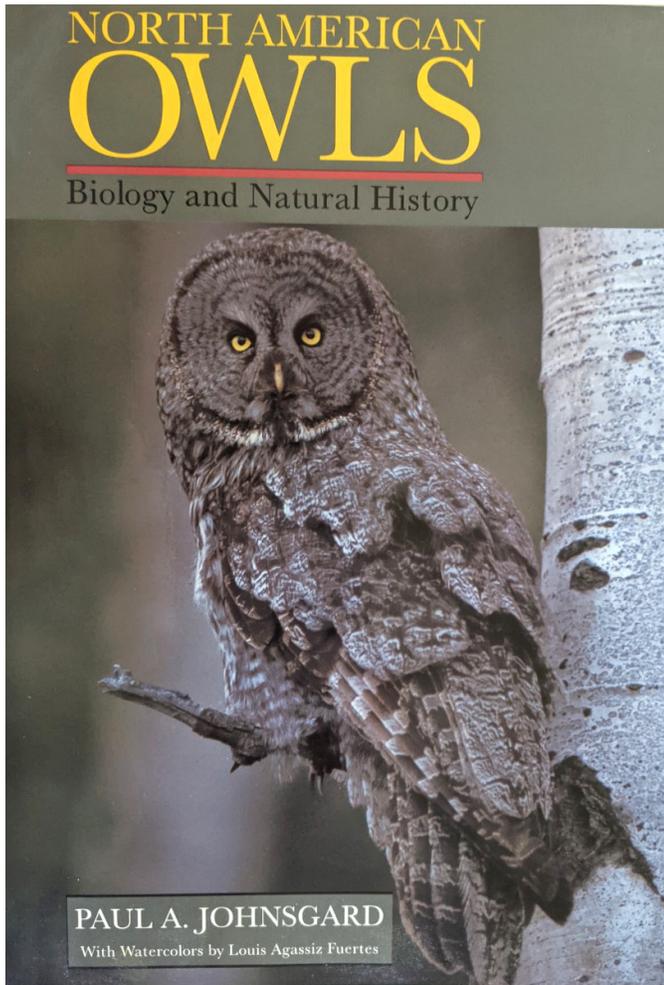
Indeed his books are “alive.”



In 2012 he publishes the children's book "A Prairie's not Scary"

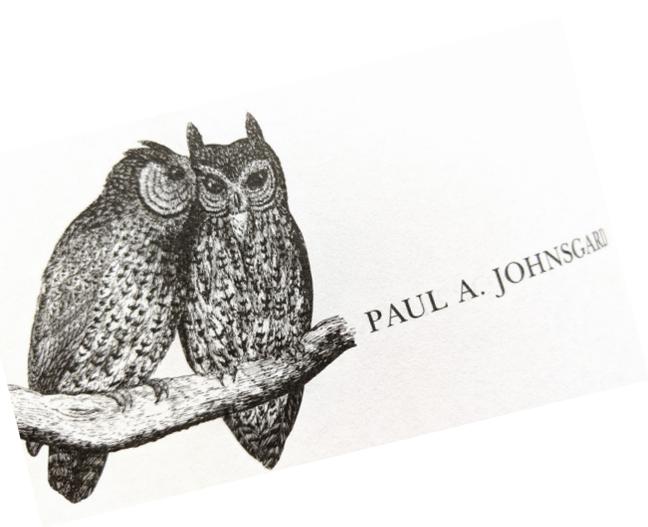
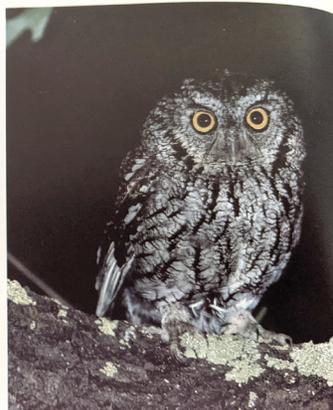
“20 poems and 23 drawings from Nebraska's renowned author and ornithologist, illustrating the integrated habitats and denizens of the American prairies: mammals, birds, insects, and plants. Dedicated to our children, who will eventually replace us and have to decide if our remaining prairies are to be preserved.”

Paul Johnsgard ~A legacy



This is a marvelous book - myths, behaviors, anatomy, flight patterns - not only all this information about owls, but images by Louis Agassiz Fuertes, and a photo by Dave Rintoul.

Plate 17 (right). Whiskered Screech-owl. Photo by David A. Rintoul.
Plate 18 (below). Great Horned Owl. Photo by author.



Post-covid 19 Monthly Bird Walk (revival)

Patricia Yeager

Rather than carpooling for our regular monthly bird walk, in the coming year we will feature a different park each month. I (or another leader) will meet you at the featured park for that month. The leader will commit to being at the designated location from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. for teaching and sharing. Of course, you can come earlier and stay later as the birding and your time schedule warrants. If you need a ride to the park, call Patricia 785-776-9593. Check the Prairie Falcon (or our website) each month for meeting location details. This month we shall tally birds in Sojourner Truth park and linear trail nearby on Tues. July 13th at 8:00 a.m. This approach will supplement our project for the year. That is, listing the birds that can be found in each of the Manhattan city parks.

2021-2022 Project for Northern Flint Hill Audubon:

We want to **develop a current list of birds in the Manhattan city parks** and it will take all of us to make the list complete. This will be a worthwhile contribution of Northern Flint Hill Audubon to the city and spread the joy of birding. It will also add value to parks in our city and help persuade city commissioners to keep and consider preserving green spaces as the city grows.

Here is how to participate:

Pick a city park in Manhattan. Bird it a minimum of once a month and keep a list of the species that you see or hear. Please let me (pyeagerbirder@gmail.com) know that you have taken on this project and which park(s) is your choice. If you are unable to make this large of commitment, please submit your bird list any time you are in a city park. All lists are helpful.

Label the list thus: Your name, the park name, date. Send your list to my e-mail please and I will submit it to the blog on our website nfhas.org.

NFHAS 50 years COUNT DOWN 5 months till Dec. 5, 2021

Plans are underway:

1. Presentation by Perry Conway, the first President of NFHAS
2. Dinner/ venue in the works
3. Birding outing in the morning of the 5th, and possibly on Monday the 6th, with brunch?
4. **Still need to hear from anyone that is / was a member in the past 50 years! Photos, old newsletters, memories of field trips, programs, are all welcomed! Any history you have we will treasure.**

Don't delay, do it now. December will be here before you know it.

We will try to keep you updated on our website as well.

nfhas.org



SPARK BIRD

Here is how Paul Johnsgard became “hooked” on birds.
An excerpt from Paul Johnsgard’s book “Earth, Water, and Sky: A Naturalist’s Stories and Sketches

Earth, Water, and Sky: A Naturalist’s Stories and Sketches (Corrie Herring...

there were still remnants of prairies, and associated prairie flowers. By the time I was five I would make regular walks out along the tracks, searching for wildflowers to bring home to Mother. I knew the names of only a few, but Mothers books helped. I was badly nearsighted, and had difficulty seeing and identifying birds at any distance. This being the Depression, the thought of being tested for glasses never occurred to anybody, and the nearest optometrist would have been in Fargo, 20 miles and in those days a virtual light-year away.

At some time during the period I was in first or second grade, Miss Bilstad recognized that I was fond of nature, and invited me to stop at her house and see a stuffed bird that she had. I had never seen a stuffed animal of any kind and was eager to do so. When I stopped, she led me to a bell jar, inside which was a mounted male Red-winged Blackbird. It was perched on a branch, with its wings spread enough to see its red epaulets. I was entranced; I had never seen anything so wonderful in my life. Even today, more than sixty years later, I can remember that moment of childhood epiphany.

It must have been at that moment that I became permanently hooked on birds. When I got home I asked Mother about using an antique brass telescope she had brought from her family’s farm when she was married. It

students in my first-grade class: two girls, another boy, and myself. Our teacher was Miss Hazel Bilstad, a person I remember as being wonderfully beautiful, and apparently quite new at teaching. I also remember that she sent me a picture postcard from Yellowstone Park the summer after first grade, which I cherished greatly. I was extremely shy in those years, and slightly speech-impaired, so I said very little. I was extremely fond of Miss Bilstad, and when I learned several years later that she had died of a brain tumor when only twenty-nine, I never fully recovered from that sadness.

WHO IS NEXT?

What is your
“SPARK BIRD” story?



Photo by Dave Rintoul



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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.

Also available online at nfhas.org

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Membership Information: Introductory memberships - \$20/yr. then basic renewal membership is \$35/yr. When you join the National Audubon Society, you automatically become a member of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society. You will receive the bimonthly Audubon magazine in addition to the Prairie Falcon newsletter. New membership applications should be sent to National Audubon Society, PO Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250. Make checks payable to the National Audubon Society and include the code C4ZJ040Z. Questions about membership Call 1-800-274-4201 or email the National Audubon Society join@audubon.org. Website is www.audubon.org.

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

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

WE NEED YOU! PLEASE consider joining our NFHAS Board.

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