

## SPRING FLOWERS



Spiderwort

White-eyed grass



Fringed puccoon



Dakota verbena

Prairie groundsel



Wavy leaf false dandelion

Plains wild indigo



NORTHERN Flint Hills Audubon Society,  
P.O. Box 1972, MANHATTAN, KS 66505-1972



## PRAIRIE FALCON

NORTHERN FLINT HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY  
NEWSLETTER

Vol. 36, No. 10 ~ JUNE 2008

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### Upcoming Events:

JUN 1 ALL MEMBERS NEEDED to help us  
PLAN THE COMING YEAR SUPPER AT  
PATRICIA YEAGER'S HOME - 4 P.M.  
(SEE PG. 5 FOR DIRECTIONS)

JUN 7 MONTHLY BIRDING  
MEET AT 8 A.M. SOJOURNER TRUTH PARK

July 10 BOARD MEETING, 6 P.M.  
TOM & MJ'S HOME

July 12 MONTHLY BIRDING  
8 A.M. MEET AT SOJOURNER PARK



## SKYLIGHT PLUS PETE COHEN

It's that time of year when daylight rules and wildflower-gazing rivals star-gazing most vigorously. The cosmos of course does its best with the darkness it's allowed. There is the gradual night-by-night ceremony as the summer constellations replace those of spring. When observed in mid-evening Auriga the Charioteer and the Gemini Twins are waving good-bye with just their brightest stars still showing: Auriga's Capella on the far NW horizon, and Castor and Pollux (the 16th brightest star) of Gemini a little more southward.

Leo the Lion is the most prominent whole figure of those leaving. His large sickle-shaped head and forequarter, and trailing triangular haunch, make a clear dive for the mid-western horizon. Virgo the Maiden follows closely and faintly, lit mainly by Spica (15th brightest). Corvus the Crow follows too, closer to the southern horizon. To see the outline of a crow seems a bit of a stretch, and so it seems one is rationally free to describe his four main stars as depicting a mashed square, a baseball diamond too hurriedly arranged, or a small hand-fan. Ironically, Leo, while he presents an unmistakable resemblance to a male King of Beasts at rest in the veldt (or at the entranceway to the New York Public Library) nonetheless can just as sharply be seen differently. The rear triangle becomes the pointy-nosed head of a mouse or rat, and the upward curve of the sickle becomes the rodent's raised tail. A celestial Jekyll-and-Hyde. (Regulus, the sickle's bottom, is the 20th brightest star.)

Even lower than Corvus along the southern horizon, and beginning halfway eastward toward Scorpio who will be just appearing, while extending westward to far enough to get in front of Leo, is the long irregular line of spaced-out stars comprising Hydra the Water Snake, slipping silently away.

Yet we won't lack for a serpent. Moving into summer position above the steadily appearing Scorpio will be tall and broad Ophiuchus. Since he is seen only from the waist up, his stars, though dim, outline what seems to me a northward pointing nose-cone tilted eastward. He is the Snake-Bearer because another irregular line of stars passing his belt

line from a gentle upward slope to his east, and then sharply zig-zagging northward to his west, represent the Serpent he is holding. He is the medicine-man of the sky, because serpents, by tradition, possess healing powers. Thus, two of them wound around the rod of Mercury (the messenger god, not the planet) form the caduceus icon of the medical profession.

Now for the other more noticeable members of the arriving summer team:

Just above Ophiuchus and just slightly westward is a keystone-shaped quartet of stars with antenna-like strings of faint sparkles extending from each corner. This is Hercules, and definitely westward from him is the backward-c, half-circle known by today's officialdom as Corona Borealis, the Northern Crown. The adjacent area westward is occupied by the large kite known as a man: Bootes the Herdsman (by some accounts the nearby Big Dipper once represented a group of cattle). The 3rd brightest star, Arcturus, highlights the kite's narrow tail.

Now scan back past Hercules to where a bright blue star Vega (the 5th brightest) marks the tiny glittering of Lyra the Lyre Bird, then on northeastward into the Milky Way to where Cygnus the Swan with his widespread wings can hardly be missed gliding southward downstream. A little further south, on the eastern edge of the stream, a bright silvery star, Altair (12th brightest), is midway at the top of a large south-pointing arrowhead of stars that make up Aquila the Eagle. And just above where the stream meets the southern shore is the group of stars (technically, an 'asterism') that form an angular Teapot from whose sharp stubby snout the Milky Way seems to rise like steam. The constellation Sagittarius the Archer surrounds the Teapot. So to vary a song from *The Mikado*: 'The flowers that bloom in the spring, tra-la, breathe promise of changing star-shine; so notice the changes they bring, tra-la, from evening to evening at nine.'

Meanwhile, Jupiter will rise gleaming by late evening and have a duet with the Moon on the 19th. Mars goes down with Leo, Saturn with Gemini. Venus and Mercury are on leave. Moon new on the 5th, 7a18; full the 19th, 9p11.

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## NONPAREIL DRU CLARKE

*pabu\_2004 Dave Rintoul*



In February, 32 hardy birders visited our humble cottage, and the feeders they came to see were equal in status to our chosen way of life – simple and few in accoutrements. A few months passed, and our feeders are still unimproved except for a new hummingbird glass “sipper” and a new thistle tube to replace one that we found fractured through the middle. (We think a cat leapt up to snag a feeding bird and failed in its airborne attempt, instead getting toothsome plastic. The new tube has been unassailed – let *that* be a lesson!) As simple as our feeders are, we have had some of the most extraordinary good fortune in visitors to them. One highlight has been a painted bunting, the first I have ever seen clearly and in the open (although I suspect that they have been lurking in the underbrush all this time). This bird looks as if it has rolled and dipped itself in a palette of primary - the indigo blue head and red breast- and secondary -the green cape- colors, being not quite pleased with its original choice and trying on new coats. Nonpareil – “no equal” – is a fitting nickname for this jaw-droppingly gorgeous bird.

Another notable visit has been that of two rose-breasted grosbeaks (oddly, both adult males), one on either side of the mega-saucer planter feeder. When these two species of birds come to feed, no other bird jockeys for position in their presence, perhaps as awed as we are by their splendid plumage.



*rbgb\_2001 Dave Rintoul*

The riparian area behind the house where tall deciduous trees and a thick shrub layer grow is another attractant for neotropical migrants. One recent dusk as we built a fire under the trees’ canopy near the creek to toast marshmallows, we heard squabbling in the branches above and saw a pair of scarlet tanagers darting among them. In winter this is the domain of barred owls, but they have moved up the creek. Now,



wrens, thrashers, and a host of others join in chorus from their tiered perches throughout the lengthening days.

The feeders supplement what habitat provides and encourage proximity, what habitat often shrouds. We worry about loss of habitat, even odd pieces of the landscape that some species have become accustomed to for shelter and nesting. An old rock house nearby still stands strong in a grove of mature trees on a corner of pasture land. For years, the house has been abandoned except for a group of turkey vultures who return yearly to nest in the upstairs bedrooms (the window panes have been shattered for as long). Recently a “for sale” sign has been jabbed into the soil on

the corner of the property: will the vultures be welcome to stay or will they be forced out like so many squatters? This is one of those times I wish we were wealthy so we could buy it and allow the vultures to stay.

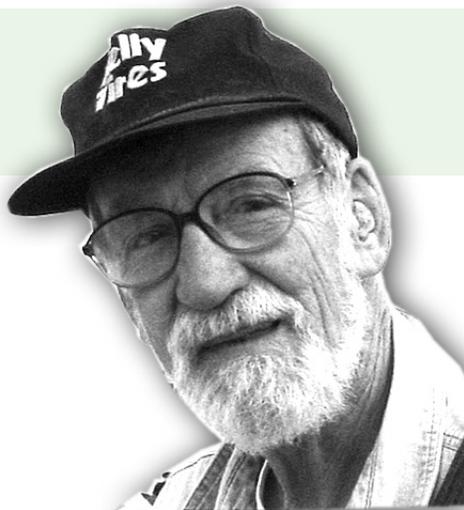


*turn\_yofa\_2008 Dave Rintoul*

Vultures don’t come to feeders, but we feed them anyway. One of our mares gave birth in the south pasture, her heavy placenta like jetsam on the spring grass. Two days passed, then a vulture came to feed. In another two days, vulture and afterbirth were gone. They, too, have no equal. Nonpareil – “no equal” - may be a fitting description for the entire tribe.

Walter Inglis Anderson, an eccentric American artist who is one of my favorites, said, “Birds are holes in heaven through which man may pass.” Our simple feeders may let a little bit of heaven slip through, giving us a closer look at glory.

© 2008 Dru Clarke, May 20



## 2008 BRIDATHON CLYDE FERGUSON

On April 26-27, our Birdathon team of Jim Koelliker, Michael Strobe, Michael Donnelly, Roma Lenehan, and Clyde Ferguson, with Karen Hummel watching her feeder, identified 108 species in our 24 hour search. Special thanks go to my cousin, Roma, who drove down from Madison, Wisconsin for the count; she can both hear the birds and know what she hears. We covered an area from Tuttle Puddle to

Interstate 70 North and South, and from State Lake to Milford Reservoir East and West. That's 164 miles by car and about 4 miles by foot.

For those who know our area, a few of the bright spots will be interesting. We started at my house, seeing not much. Moving to Jim Koelliker's house we picked up Pine Siskins and Red-Breasted Nuthatches. We found Cico park full of sparrows and saw our first Baltimore Oriole. The KSU Pig Farm had high water, few shorebirds except for a Killdeer, but I think we got the Common Yellowthroat there. Tuttle Puddle produced the lone White Pelican, cormorants, and a Parula Warbler in a tree near where we saw it last year. Willow Lake gave us an early Indigo Bunting, but we missed the Prothonotary Warbler. Rocky Ford was a bust, but State Lake was hot, three grebes (including the seldom seen Horned Grebe), and our first ever Red-Breasted Merganser. After supper it began to rain and grew colder which made our attempts to hear goatsuckers futile. That meant out before daylight Sunday a. m. where we finally heard the Chuck-Will's-Widow and the Barred Owl. We then drove through Konza Prairie east to west, picking up Greater Prairie Chickens, Grasshopper Sparrows, and down on King's Creek our first positively identified Least Flycatcher, Summer Tanagers, and an early Great Crested Flycatcher. Ever westward, we hit the sewer ponds at Grandview Plaza, saw most of our ducks there including a Pintail hen, and a Peregrine Falcon pursuing some little brown jobs. We saw Eurasian Collared Doves in Grandview Plaza, very little at the Milford dam, and found the Bank Swallows in Milford as our time ran out.

Three other birds deserve special mention; Strobe found the Ruby-Throated Hummingbird demanding his feeder be put up (a first ever bird for this count I think); he also heard the Great-Horned Owl, and Karen Hummel saw the Bewick's Wren (seldom seen on the Birdathon).

As of today, May 18, 2008, the Birdathon has received \$1,706.40 from our clients. Keep those checks coming in and get out there and see what's coming through our area that you are missing. No time to waste -- we are late in the migration this year. Clyde Ferguson

### RECOMMENDED SUMMER READING

Fred Krupp, president of Environmental Defense Fund, has co-authored a new book with journalist Miriam Horn, *Earth: The Sequel*. The book seeks to change the global warming debate and offer a positive message that we can reinvent energy and stop global warming.

### CAN YOU HAVE TOO MANY BIRD BOOKS?

Also, check out a new bird book - "The Guide to Kansas Birds and Birding Hot Spots" by Bob Gress and Pete Janzen, forward by Kenn Kaufman.



## TAKE NOTE

Audubon of Kansas Field Trip:

June 4-7 Valentine National Refuge and Ft. Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge and Hutton Sanctuary

Lodging: Bassett Lodging - Bassett Lodge, 402.684.3376, Ranch Land Motel 402.684.3340

Valentine Lodging: Trade Winds Motel 402.376.1600

Schedule: Wed. meet in Thedford for dinner

Thur. Birding, partial tours of Valentine National Wildlife Refuge and Ft. Niobrara

Fri. Meet at 7 a.m. for day of birding, hiking, wildflowers on Hutton Sanctuary

Sat. Meet at 7 a.m. morning field trip to Hutton Sanctuary, picnic dinner at Sancturay overlooking the wet meadows and river

For more information call 785.537.4385

### CALLING ALL MEMBERS ---- PLEASE COME TO JUNE 1ST YEARLY PLANNING BOARD MEETING 4 P.M.

JOIN US FOR SUPPER AND PLANNING THE NEXT YEAR

AT PATRICIA YEAGERS! 5614 BAYERS HILL, LAKE ELBO - FROM MANHATTAN GO EAST ON HWY 24, JUST PAST MILE MARKER 321 IS "LAKE ELBO RD" TURN LEFT (NORTH) AND GO NORTH UNTIL THE PAVEMENT ENDS, TURN INTO LAKE ELBO HOUSING DEV. IGNORE ALL RIGHT TURNS UNTIL YOU CROSS THE DAM, THEN TAKE THE FIRST RIGHT - "BAYERS HILL" 4TH HOUSE ON THE RIGHT, CEDAR-SIDED



#### BLUEBIRD Trail

There is a bluebird trail including six or seven birdhouses along the Cecil Best Trail. If you are interested in helping maintain these house - please contact Patricia Yeager 776-9593 or email her at [pyky@flinthills.com](mailto:pyky@flinthills.com)



<http://www.storyofstuff.com/>

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Earth day:

Local landmark, can you identify it?



East facade of Bluemont Elementary School  
(thanks Kevin Fay)



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If you do not want to receive the national magazine, but still want to be involved in our 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](mailto:list_serve@ksu.edu)> and join in the discussions.

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