

JOIN US for a going away party for Tom and MJ Morgan!!

They will be moving to Wisconsin in June. I know they would love to see you all!

May 7, at La Fiesta, 6:30 p.m

(Blue Hills Shopping Center on Tuttle Creek Blvd.)

A combo - party and meeting!



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



## prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 46, No. 9 ~ MAY 2018

### Inside

pg. 2- Skylight  
Pete Cohen

pg. 3 - Guests of the A-Gnawing Kind  
Dru Clarke

pg. 4- Michel-Ross Preserve

pg. 5- Swift House for free

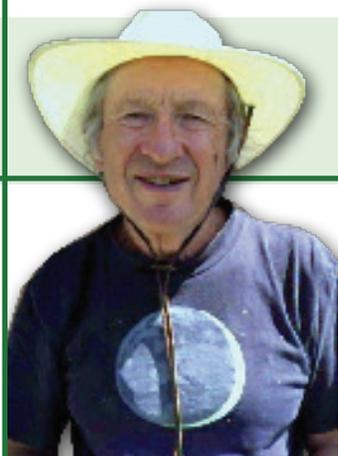
### Upcoming Events

May 7 - Board Meeting & Farewell Party for the Morgans!  
see above

May 12 - Saturday Morning Birding 8 am-11 am  
Departing from Sojourner Truth Park

May 13-19 -Michel-Ross Preserve stroll

May 19- Birding and cleaning Michel-Ross Preserve  
see page 4



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Johannes Helvelius (1611-87) was once mayor of Danzig (now Gdansk) in Poland, and was NOT the French Helvetius that keeps confusing my computer. Helvelius was also an accomplished astronomer (assisted by his second wife, Elisabeth, who's considered by one website to have been the first woman astronomer). He had a penchant for focusing on areas where stars were dim and ignored by other observers. His imagination formed them into groups, which he named, seven of which are official constellations to date, one of which adjoins another faint group particularly a part of May's evening skies, if you can find them.

They glimmer faintly behind Leo the Lion whose stars form a large reversed question mark as his head and shoulder, with a distinctive trailing right triangle as his rear end. On Earth, in any month, is an outdoors children's game called Hounds and Hares. The Hares run and hide, the Hounds seek. These stars form the Sky's version of the game, though it involves a different kind of 'Hairs'--a spray of weak sparkles that once were considered merely part of Leo till more ancient folk gave them independence. The 'Hounds', another gather of mild stars above those, owe their separate identity to Helvelius. As said, one has to seek for both groups. The lower older one is called Coma Berenices, as explained to the right...



The stars depicted are sized for clarity.  
In reality they appear in the sky just as pinpoints of light.

Very easily seen in May will be Jupiter, gliding brilliantly through the southern sky from sundown till dawn, at its brightest for the year the 8th and 9th. It still won't be brighter than Venus that as the "Evening Star" that will be in the evening twilight ever higher, yet still set back down well before midnight. Meanwhile in the past-midnight hours reddish Mars and silvery Saturn will be notable bright neighbors in Sagittarius to start the month with trailing Mars shifting back into Capricorn about the 14th.

The Moon is closest to Saturn on the 4th, gets between it and Mars the 5th, and is nearest Mars the 6th. It passes above Leo's highly visible star Regulus the 21st, then above Spica in Virgo the 25th, to get between Jupiter and Spica the 26th, then moves close to Jupiter the 27th, and gets back near Saturn the 31st. New the 15th at 6a48, full the 29th at 9a20.

*In Egypt off to battle went a certain King Ptolemy,  
whose Queen had golden hair; in Egypt that's an anomaly.  
To the Goddess Aphrodite this queen promptly appealed,  
promising to cut off all her hair if the Goddess  
brought her King home safe from the battlefield.  
He returned, she cut, and the headless Hair was put to sail  
into the sky as an emblem of promises kept. And these are  
the same Hairs that once were the tuft of the Lion's tail.*

*But that left some neighboring dim stars still unclaimed.  
Until the astronomer Johannes Helvelius got then named.  
They became Canes Venatici for he was inspired  
to give them that name because that was the name  
that his knowledge of Latin required.  
They represent Hunting Dogs, because he thought it absurd  
that the next constellation behind them, Boötes,  
called a Herdsman, had no dogs to protect his herd.*

*So in the dimness that's been stated,  
There became created  
a pair of constellations, otherwise unrelated.  
And the wonder never ceases,  
as the pleasure just increases,  
when one can locate and separate  
Canes Venatici from Coma Berenices.*

© 2018 Peter Zachary Cohen

## Guests of the A-Gnawing Kind

Dru Clarke



The biological chart posters, recycled from an abandoned school house, hung in shreds from the walls of the treehouse. Fiberglass insulation lay in clumps, infused with all matter of debris, and dried splashes of urine puddled on the floor next to the baseboards. Squatters had invaded over the winter and had made a comfortable – for them – home. Oddly, they had left the couch with a pile of old comforters and blankets alone, although one wooden arm had been gnawed a bit. Welcome to the abode of rodents.

I was able to greet three of them as I began to assess the damage and figure out a way to get them to move on to more appropriate quarters. The first was a fox squirrel who sat nibbling a walnut on the inside ledge next to the hole cut out for the chinquapin oak, one of the trees holding up the beams of the tree house. It didn't feel like sharing its nut and fled through the opening.

The next day I spotted a white-footed mouse who sat on the same ledge but above the chart labelled "Spermatophytes: Means of Pollination" (visitors often remarked – even snickered- at my choice of charts, but they were the most colorful and informative of the group). It was quite endearing, with its large and shiny black-button eyes, its slender white feet, and inquisitive manner. Timid by nature, it must have thought the place was abandoned and made a nest in the insulated space between joists. White-footed mice are reservoirs for Lyme disease, as are deer mice, which is transmitted by deer ticks, and they may harbor hantavirus. I considered the mouse droppings scattered over the floor with some trepidation. It finally scooted away, tired of this interloper.

The third made itself known as I began to remove the torn covering of the north wall. A roly-poly cotton rat didn't stick around to observe: it burst from the wall where it had made a cozy nest and melted into the west



wall, beating a hasty exit. To my eyes, it was a pretty and beguiling animal, all soft and round, with a grizzled coat and bright eyes. Cotton rats usually make their nest of cotton, but fiberglass will do in a pinch. I can't imagine how they cope with the itch, but their thick pelage may insulate them from that: I

know that without protection those glass fibers can linger, as they are doing now where my gloves and sleeves left a gap as I swept the clumps into piles. In the nest they made under the couch was a veritable pantry of goods: hulls of walnuts with their intricate labyrinthine pattern, coffee tree beans, locust tree pods (the lining is sweet and treacly), dried elm leaves, naked hackberry seeds cleansed of their sugary skin, lots of lozenge-shaped turds, and pieces of a shed snake skin! Did a snake share quarters with them, or was it just a decorative item?

Benign negligence sometimes comes around to bite, or gnaw at, you, especially if it involves a remote, less visited structure that is within your stewardship. In securing the interior, a friend invited me to take some of the cedar siding from a century-old barn he was recycling to clad the walls, now bare of charts and insulation. I was able to save some of charts and rehang them to brighten the interior and inform visitors. Perhaps some of my rodent friends will come as well, admire its artful nature, then move on to more appropriate quarters. I *think* I will miss them.



© 2018 Dru Clarke

## VISIT the Michel-Ross Preserve

Northern Flint Hills Audubon was generously given 26 acres called the Michel-Ross preserve. Appreciate this gift by strolling through the preserve on any day of the week of May 13-19th. When doing so, please do two things.

1) Keep a list of bird species that you see and send them to me [pyeagerbirder@gmail.com](mailto:pyeagerbirder@gmail.com). We will publish the week's results in the next Prairie Falcon.

2) Humans have made several paths through the preserve which is convenient when birding but with this convenience comes a bit of trash here and there that needs to be removed. So the second thing that I would like you to do is to take a trash bag and gloves with you and pick up the trash you see. If you have a full bag and do not wish to trek back through the preserve with it, just leave it at any of the four Michel-Ross Preserve Signs and bags will be picked up daily.

**The final day Sat. May 19th, meet at the uppermost Michel-Ross Preserve sign along Stag Hill Road at the end of Canyon Rd. at 9:00 a.m. We will work/bird until 11:00 and eat together at El Tapatio for lunch. Join us!**



## SWIFTS anyone?



It's about 6 foot 5 inches tall.

I had it in a place that was shaded in the afternoon, based on an assumption that a southern or western exposure would overheat the swifts. Also for this reason, the metal is painted white. The tower is wide enough to enclose a 12" diameter construction form. The cardboard form is in good shape, considering it has been in the tower for ten years.

This tower could be anchored on masonry of a shallow "well" (although I didn't do this). Swifts have been observed nesting in old wells in several different areas. At least one observer noted that nests were originally present in chimneys, but these old chimneys fell down, and the swifts began nesting in wells that had served the houses.

I think the main chance for worthwhile experimentation with this is to try this metal "tower" in a location near to a colony of chimney swifts that is getting crowded.

If you are interested contact me, Tom Morgan, before May 10th

[morganmjt2@gmail.com](mailto:morganmjt2@gmail.com)



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

Return Service Requested

Non-profit Organization  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Permit No. 662  
Manhattan, KS 66502

Also available online at [nfhas.org](http://nfhas.org)

Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society.  
Edited by Cindy Jeffrey, 15850 Galilee Rd., Olsburg, KS 66520. (cinraney@ksu.edu)  
Also available online at [nfhas.org](http://nfhas.org)

WE NEED YOU!

PLEASE consider joining our NFHAS Board.

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

**Vice President**

**Secretary**

**Treasurer**

**Board member at large:**

Education Chair

Birdseed Chair

**NFHAS Board**

President: [Patricia Yeager](mailto:pyeagerbirder@gmail.com) - pyeagerbirder@gmail.com 776-9593  
Vice Pres. MJ Morgan - morganmjt2@gmail.com  
Secretary:  
Treasurer: Carla Bishop - carla.kay.bishop@gmail.com

**COMMITTEE Chairs:**

Membership:  
Programs: Kevin Fay  
Butterfly Garden:  
Alsop Property: Patricia Yeager - pyeagerbirder@gmail.com  
776-9593

Education:  
Bird Seed Sales:  
Newsletter: [Cindy Jeffrey](mailto:cinraney@ksu.edu) - cinraney@ksu.edu 565-3326  
Fieldtrips: Patricia Yeager, Kevin Fay 776-9593  
AOK Representative: Cindy Jeffrey  
At-large: Tom Morgan

Contacts for Your Elected Representatives ( anytime) Write, call or email: Governor: 2nd Floor, State Capital Bldg., Topeka , KS 66612. KS Senator or Representative: State Capital Bldg., Topeka, KS 66612. Ph# (during session only) Senate - 785-296-7300. House - 785-296-7500. U.S. Senator Roberts <Roberts@senate.gov> U.S. Senate, Washington DC 20510. Jerry Moran U.S. Capital Switchboard 202-224-3121.