

65th Manhattan Christmas Bird Count Dec. 14, 2013

Six quasi-independent groups cover our CBC circle (centered at Anderson Hall, see map pg.5); if you wish to join one of these groups, please call the group leader at the numbers (pg. 5). If you can't make up your mind, ask me (Dave Rintoul at 532-6615 or drintoul@ksu.edu) and I will try to get you hooked up with a group.

The count commences at dawn and ends at dusk (unless you are part of a group counting owls). The count numbers are compiled and stories are swapped at a chili dinner. I would also like to ask our readers who

live within the Manhattan CBC area to plan to count the birds at their feeders that day and pass the count results along to me. If you would like to do that, please contact me using **email (drintoul@ksu.edu), phone (785-532-6615 days, 785-537-4143 evenings)**. I will send you some brief instructions and a checklist. After the count day, you will need to send that information back to me as quickly as possible so that I can add it to the count results.

Manhattan CBC Compilation Dinner/ Chili Supper

Join the NFHAS and fellow birders for a potluck supper at 6 PM, Dec. 14, at the Seniors Service Center, 412 Leavenworth, Manhattan. Feel free to bring a dish to share. Free-will donations to NFHAS are 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 want to help setup, please call

Carla Bishop, 539-5129 or 532-1858 or email: cbishop@ksu.edu

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 42, No. 4~ December 2013

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CBC map - Guides
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Upcoming Events

Dec. 2 - Board Meeting 6 PM
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

Dec. 14 - Manhattan CBC contact Dave Rintoul
(more on page 5)

Dec. 15 - Olsburg CBC contact Gary Jeffrey
785-468-3587 or cinraney@k-state.edu

Jan. 4 - Eagle Days, Tuttle Creek Corps of Eng.

Jan. 6 - Board Meeting 6 PM
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan



Skylight plus Pete Cohen

Will it be or won't it? I have to write this too early to know if Comet ISON, referred to last month, will be performing up to its potential or not. Passing very close to the Sun (spacially speaking: 800,000 miles, about treble the Earth-Moon separation) it will likely either vaporize brilliantly, or crumble – bloom or bust. At least for that question we'll be having a definite answer. Remaining will be the age – old seasonal question of “what will the winter be like?”.

Mark Twain wrote that “the weather is a literary specialty, and no untrained hand can turn out a good article on it.” This was part of his foreword to an 1892 novel titled “An American Claimant,” purported by him to be the first novel ever written by use of a Dictaphone. It was also an attempt to write a novel without giving any mention to the weather, at least in the main text. An appendix describing the weather was available for readers wishing to refer to it.

Yet if one can't predict the weather one can at least observe its effects. This is an activity encouraged and being worked at by the USA National Phenology Network, founded in 2007. Its goal is to augment the research of scientists by providing data collected by a wide array of individuals who take assiduous notes of the plant and animal activities around them: the timing of the arrivals, lingerings, and departures of birds, of buddings and flowerings, of insect appearances,

movements of fish, turtles, deer, etc.--much more data than the limited number of professionals could gather, but which can be applied to their work.

Such accumulated information is seen as having the potential of being particularly useful applied to the subject of climate change. See: www.usanpn.org

To return to some historical observations, this month marks the 240th anniversary of the Boston Tea Party (16th), the 180th of the Gadsden Purchase (30th), the 110th of the first flight at Kitty Hawk (17th), and the 100th of the Federal Reserve Act (23rd).

In the sky Venus remains the high-flying evening star, though beginning a little lower each night, coyly getting closer to the Moon the 5th and 6th and soaring just behind (to the left) of the Teapot in Sagittarius the 18th, while Alderbaran, the red eye of Taurus stares closely at the Moon.

Jupiter and the Moon compare brightnesses close by each other the 20th and 21st. Saturn, who's been absent, returns to do this month's a pas de deux with Mercury low in the dawns of the 25th and 26th, Saturn moving from below to above.

In the dawns of the 25th-27th Mars and the star Regulus move above the much larger Moon like a couple mosquitoes, reddish Mars seeming to have drawn blood from stone.

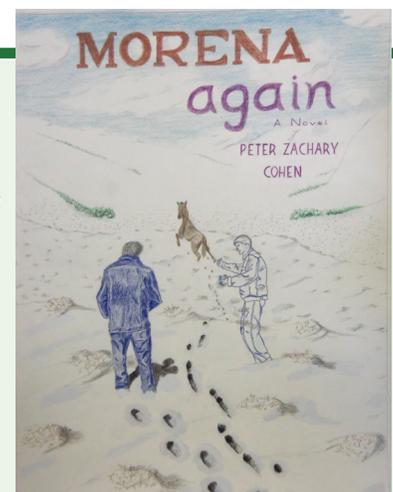
The Moon is new the 3rd at 6a50 and reaching full the 17th at 9a16 as it prepares to upstage the Leonid meteor shower that night.

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Besides writing “Skylight” for our newsletter, Pete Cohen has published a short novel as an e-book, titled “Morena Again,” based on his experiences with horses and blizzards in Wyoming.

“In the moments between her hearing and seeing the two riders after her, the old mare is running, an action that gets her abandoned to a wilderness blizzard in which she encounters an older teenager, abandoned by other reasons and wrestling panic, useless anger, and with himself over the crucial choices to make to hope to survive. Despite each's need for the other their encounter is not chummy.”

It's available on: Aldiko, Apple iBook Store, Barnes & Noble, Diesel eBook Store, Kobo, Sony Reader Store, and Stanza. On Kindle by downloading the .mobi file at Smashwords.com, and as a pdf. for Mac or PC from Smashwords.com.





Leaf fall began last month and the black walnuts were the first to go bare. It is now

the end of October and a hard freeze last week catalyzed others into a sped-up drop: a slight breeze, a later hard rain and gravity led to a constant drift of yellow, brown and dilute green from tree to ground. Physics is aided by biochemistry in the leaves themselves: a layer of larger, harder-walled cells called the abscission layer forms between the end of the petiole or leaf stalk and the branch, shutting off water to the leaf. Freezing causes the abscission layer to harden more rapidly, leading to leaf fall. If the abscission layer hasn't formed by the time of the first hard freeze, chances are the leaves will remain on the tree longer. The oaks retain their leaves often until spring arrives.

A few mornings ago, I watched Iris the Jersey cow craning her neck in an attempt to reach what I thought were the last leaves on a tree branch, but, instead, she wrenched off a softball-sized neon green orb and worked it about in her mouth. Not having upper front teeth, she gripped it between her lower ones and her flat palate and thick lips until she was able to crush it, slobbering profusely all the while. The fruit of the Osage orange tree is a fall treat for horses and other livestock, although the Highland cows seemed to be more curious than enamored by the hefty balls. The trees producing the fruits are only female as the species is *dioecious*.

We have several very old but grand Osage orange trees on our land and, peculiarly, they don't seem to follow a fence line, but are scattered on hillsides as if the seeds were dropped willy-nilly by an earlier resident. Near one very robust and fecund female tree was a dinky one, more than likely a male (no pejorative intent) as there were no fruits beneath it. The flowers of both sexes are showy, the color of the eventual fruit, and pleasant-smelling, and pollination is accomplished by insects.

The tree was originally indigenous to the Red River (of Texas-Oklahoma) valley, and the Osage Indians, familiar with the value of the wood for bow-making (hence, the common name of Osage orange, or the more melodic French "bois d'arc"), traveled great distances to obtain it. Because of the density and hardness of the wood, and the stout, sharp spines the branches sport, the trees were prized as natural, fast-growing fences and were planted to create thick, impenetrable hedges that would

Bois d'arc Dru Clarke



deter livestock from escape and predators from entry. Tons of seed were exported from Texas to facilitate their cultivation, but barbed wire eliminated the need for the product, so the tree's wood now serves as fence posts which often outlast the wire attached to them.

The wood is quite beautiful: its bark is a chestnut brown shot with orange, the wood itself a rich, bright orange, with yellow heartwood. The bark can be pulled off in long strips and makes a good fire starter. The dried wood loaded with BTU's can be used for firewood, but it sparks like crazy and can't be left unattended. The strong but springy branches are still used to make bows and highly coveted walking sticks that, when polished, have a warm glow about them. Its roots yield a yellow dye. People collect the fruits, purported to have insect-and spider-repellent properties, and place them in closets and basements. Indeed, recent research has isolated several promising chemicals, one of which is similar to DEET in its noxious effects. Even had this remained undiscovered, the fruit has a pleasant, citrusy fragrance that can enliven an indoor atmosphere. I like to simply hold the cool, bumpy globe in my hands and sniff it.

Curiously, few existing wild animals other than squirrels and deer eat the fruits. There is a fine and intriguing hypothesis that a species of extinct ground-dwelling giant sloth ate the fruits and distributed the seeds in its feces, therein spreading the tree throughout suitable habitat. (It is possible that this species existed *alive* in North America and South America until modern times as skeletons with skin, hair, and tendons have been found in caves in the Anza-Borrego Desert in California and Ultima Esperanza, Chile.) Any fossilized identifiable sloth scat should confirm or deny this. I, for one, have my fingers crossed that it is true! It would be even neater to look out one day and instead of a cow munching a 'hedge apple' see a huge, lumbering ground sloth getting down on the neon green.

Anyone objecting to the litter on the ground the fruits create in the fall should think seriously about renting a cow or a horse, or resurrecting a sloth. Or not. At any rate, enjoy the tang in the air during leaf fall. (A foul odor would be, of course, from an approaching sloth.)

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Louis Agassiz Fuertes & The Singular Beauty of Birds
Published 1971 Harper & Row Publishers, Inc.
Introduction by Roger Tory Peterson

This book came into my possession from a used book sale. It is amazing. Everyone is familiar with James Audubon's bird paintings, but I was not familiar with Louis Agassiz Fuertes. He is considered by many as the most prolific ornithological artist after John James Audubon. In 1899 he was included in the famous Harriman Alaska Expedition – along with John Muir, Edward Curtis, John Burroughs to name a few. He was recommended for the expedition by Dr. C. Hart Merriam, chief of the U.S. Biological Survey (later the Fish and Wildlife Services). He worked with Frank Chapman, curator of the American Museum of Natural History, doing field research and background dioramas for the museum.

I first looked at the illustrations of his paintings in this book, put together by Frederick George Marcham, with an introduction by Roger Tory Peterson. The images are so alive – I would love to see the originals!



Then I went back and read the introduction and the letters he wrote while on expeditions.

*“June 3 (Lou’s Inlet, Greenville Channel, British Columbia)
... I struck right into the forest along the left and found it impenetrable... I heard a pileolated warbler, and after an hour’s search within a few yards of it through the deep brush, and all within a radius of 100 feet. I finally got a glance at it, as it disappeared over a mossy boulder into the ferns beyond. Saw a creeper go into its nest on the side of a dead spruce tree, and saw some more rufus hummert – the strangest thing to see a bright fox-colored hummingbird s-s-sing like a creeper, with*

a big bumble-bee buzz – curve up into a giant forest where everything in view is vasaat: pose with its tail pendulum-like, swinging under it, look around, and broooooom off again, all before you quite notice it!”

This book is on ebay for sale, but not in print anymore. Not sure if it is in the library, but if you come across this book at used book sale, estate sale or used book store “GET IT.” Or “google” him, there are many sites with images and information about him and his work.

He was named after Louis Agassiz, and my question is how did his parents know he would be so interested birds and animals to name him after the most famous Natural History Professor? (In 1837 Louis Agassiz was the first to scientifically propose that the Earth had been subject to a past ice age. Agassiz served as a non-resident lecturer at Cornell while also being on faculty at Harvard.)

Cindy Jeffrey

Save the Dates...



65th Manhattan CBC Group Leaders

Dave Rintoul 532-6615

Clyde Ferguson 539-4856

Jack Cully 532-6534

Hoogy Hoogheem 539-7080

Doris Burnett 537-2502

Brett Sandercock 532-0120



Area Christmas Bird Counts

December 14 - Manhattan CBC - contact Dave Rintoul drintoul@k-state.edu

December 15 - Olsburg CBC - contact Gary Jeffrey 785-468-3587 gjeffrey@twinvalley.net

December 22 - Wakefield - contact Chuck Otte 785-238-8800 or otte2@cox.net

December 29 - Junction City - contact Chuck Otte 785-238-8800 or otte2@cox.net

To find other area CBCs - go to the Kansas Ornithological Society website for a complete listing <http://ksbirds.org/kos/2013CBC.htm>



Thank you to everyone who supported NFHAS' 2013 birdseed sale. Twenty-seven people placed orders with the final sales total reaching \$2288.30.

Special thanks to Patricia Yeager for spearheading the effort, to Cindy Jeffrey for getting prices and creating the order form, and to Dick Oberst, Jacque Staats, Tom Morgan, Bob Mohr, Donna Roper, and MJ Morgan for help in unloading the seed, delivering orders, and loading vehicles. Thanks to Tarwaters, our supplier, for working with us in providing good seed and reasonable pricing.



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Also available on-line at www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html

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, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Make checks payable to the National Audubon Society. Membership renewals are also handled by the National Audubon Society. 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 discussions.

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