

**Bats in Kansas - Stan Roth**  
**Oct. 19th, Manhattan Public Library**  
**7 p.m. Auditorium**

A brief overall discussion about bats in general and some “issues” that have cropped up in recent years, then a survey of the best known Kansas bats, their distribution and ecology.

Stan Roth came of age in Olathe and attended KSTC Emporia for 6 years w/ BSE and MS in biology. He was hired to teach students at Lawrence High School in 1959. “Biology was my gimmick and we involved students in many studies and surveys of Kansas natural history during my 40 years there.” After retirement in ‘99, Stan took an adjunct position with the Kansas Biological Survey where he continues to pursue studies that involved students with: nesting colonies of great blue herons, rattlesnakes in prairie dog towns, ledge-nesting raptors, ferns in the Chautauqua Hills, cave bats in the Red Hills, distributional surveys of terrestrial vertebrates throughout the state, etc., etc. Join us for dinner at 5:15 p.m. at the Olive Garden.



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



## prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 40, No. 2 ~ October 2011

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### Upcoming Events

- Oct 3 - Board Mtg. 6:00 p.m.  
home of Tom & MJ Morgan
- Oct 7- BIRD SEED ORDER deadline
- Oct 8 - Sat. Morning Birding 8 a.m.  
Meet at Sojourner Truth Park
- Oct 15 - BIRD SEED PICKUP UFM
- Oct 19 - Program “Bats in Kansas”  
7:00 p.m. Manhattan Public Library,  
Auditorium
- Nov 12 Sat. Morning Birding 8 a.m.  
Meet at Sojourner Truth Park



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Some time ago I mentioned here that literally for two to three thousand years to name a passing cloud was as difficult as catching a falling star. The centuries rolled by as people endeavored to describe the various faces of the sky in ways that could enable others not immediately present to get the picture. This was not simply to make letters home more interesting. Clouds were observed to have causes and effects and being able to learn from the experience of others how to read the language of the sky could become extremely important to a good many activities.

And then one evening in 1802 suddenly—after he'd worked at it for some years—a young chemist named Luke Howard offered a makeshift lecture in a laboratory basement that sent folks interested in the topic hurrahing that this Holy Grail had been found. Yes, they agreed, all clouds were either cirrus (hair-like), stratus (layered) or cumulus (heaped). These three little words, alone or in combinations, could make the sky's messages transportable. And if there was rain involved with any situation, one merely added the adjective, nimbus.

Others took it from there and now there is a Linnaean structure of cloud terminology using distinctions of altitude and breakdowns according to Genus, species, variety, plus an accessory status. There are way past 100 official differentiations, "official" as being recognized by the World Meteorological Org. in Geneva, Switzerland. And the Cloud Appreciation Society that I referred to then is currently involved in making a new "supplementary" designation of "asperatus" official. This would refer to an agglomeration of visible vapor resembling the surface of a wind-tossed sea, though with less exuberant motion.

I mention this because Gavin Pretor-Pinney, founder (and member #1) of the Society is the author

of a new book, *☁* (Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 2011, \$14.95). It is scarcely the only presentation of color photos of clouds with their nomenclature, but with its 145 pages in a 5 1/4" x 7 1/4" hardcover format it contains the work of 105 photographers from Kansas City to Antarctica (some pix as small as 1 1/4" x 2", some given 2-page spreads) and is able to offer a little more commentary than others I've seen, plus a table of a lot of cloud form names in their Genus, etc. arrangement, and a decent index. Also, for those interested, there are blanks to record one's sightings, and a value given to each named form so one can award oneself points. The values, applied according to frequency of appearance, seem to be based partly on some German research but mainly on the author's British intuition.

As with all other cloud presentations I've consulted, it still requires for me a lot of individual judgment to correlate an actual sky scene with the pictures. And inexcusably, in my view, there is not slightest nod to Luke Howard. Still, its issuance seems worth mentioning.

Worth mentioning for October is Jupiter, who will be pulling bright all-nighters, coming on the 27<sup>th</sup> (sayeth the *Old Farmer's Almanac*) as close as it will get to Earth until 2022, after performing a duet with the Moon the 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup>. Meanwhile Mars will start showing up about 2 a.m., and gradually a little earlier and more noticeably. Venus will eventually be spotted setting as the twilights come earlier. And Saturn should slip upward a little up left of Spica in the dawn before Halloween.

The Moon will start the month above Antares in Scorpio the 1<sup>st</sup> and be glowing to the right of Mars the 21<sup>st</sup>, and to the right of Regulus in Leo the 22<sup>nd</sup>. Then while Jupiter is hitting its peak the 28<sup>th</sup>, it will be to the right of Antares and above Venus before it, too, sets. Full the 11<sup>th</sup> (9p06); new the 26<sup>th</sup> (2p56).

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## Was It the Heat?

# Aggression Among Backyard Birds at the Watering Trough

MJ Morgan

Recently, a NFHAS member reported witnessing a large, female Brewer's Blackbird killing a house sparrow at his water fountain. It was the week of July 17<sup>th</sup>, just outside Manhattan – a searing drift of triple digit days that left birds of all sizes and species panting with open beaks. At backyard watering stations, birds congregated. A fountain is a huge draw, as for most birds, the sound of water is nearly irresistible. Just east of Manhattan, heat-stressed birds rose and fell around a member's fountain, drawn to the gurgling water and plunging in. On this burning hot, preternaturally still afternoon, a house sparrow ventured close to a blackbird. The observer reported: "They were both on the fountain drinking when the Brewer's reached over, grabbed the sparrow with its beak and threw it hard to the ground. The stunned sparrow lay there fluttering. The Brewer's jumped down directly on it, killed it with a few blows from its beak, and ate it. The whole thing took about five minutes." Later, the member found the remains of the sparrow and described it as "just a shell."

If this were an assassination driven by territorial defense or the act of a desperately thirsty, heat-crazed bird, it might be more palatable than the scientific data on such behavior. Blackbirds and magpies are predators and reapers of a wide variety of insects and animal flesh. One study described a flock of 300 Redwing and Brewer's Blackbirds flying behind a tractor disking a large Illinois field in spring. This field was located to the south, on the floodplain of the Ohio River; and a recent flood had resulted in the migrating of hundreds of prairie voles and mice to a higher ground. In the wake of the tractor, blackbirds were observed pursuing and eating entire young leopard frogs, adult mice, and juvenile voles. "Larger adults (voles) were incapacitated by incessant pecking and then eviscerated." Following the blackbird flock were several common crows, who enjoyed the vole carcasses.

The phenomenon of active predation and carnivorous hunting among blackbirds is thought to have evolved because of "patchy" food resources and an uneven distribution of feeding opportunities relative to flock size. Blackbirds are described as "opportunistic generalists." They do not pass up a high-energy food source – a young vole, a tender-skinned frog... or a house sparrow. Yet bird behavior is always complex. At the fountain that day in July, it wasn't a group of hungry blackbirds capitalizing on the moment; it was a single, aggressive female who attacked and consumed a smaller bird. Since blackbird and magpie stomachs have revealed a diet almost entirely composed of insects – most of the time – researchers explain that small mammals and birds are seen as secondary rather than primary sources of protein. Sometimes the primary sources deplete. Magpies prey on other adult birds only during the breeding season, but blackbirds have a more flexible lookout.

It is tempting to use the insufferable heat of this brutal 2011 summer to explain some unusual bird behaviors. Yet biology will usually trump emotion. One female Brewer's blackbird was a little hungrier than her peers, a little less satisfied by the less available food resources, the insectian ranks thinned by heat and dehydration and competed for relentlessly. One house sparrow was thirstier than others and a little less vigilant. In the human world, night sentries have made the same mistakes with similar fatal results. Caught in our recording eye, this single instance of hunt-and-kill at the bird bath seems anomalous and insidious. Most of us don't lift our binoculars hoping to witness the death of a sparrow. The quick, professional kill startles us, a drama we recount to others. But the facility of the kill suggests we are watching an act researchers term "not uncommon." In fact, it is a backup system in the bird world. The fountain take-down was not random but a foraging strategy that will insure Brewer Blackbird eggs next spring, despite the limited food resources of the summer. In the end, we can probably say, yes, it was the heat!

*MJ Morgan*



## One View of Keystone Dru Clarke

July 6, 2011

Dear Secretary Clinton:

How does one begin a plea for caring about and protecting a place where very few live, but a place so unassuming in appearance that one would never guess that it lay gently, protectively, over one of the most valuable bodies of fresh water in the western hemisphere? Who but a few ranchers or people who were in tune with the natural rhythm of that place? This is the Sand Hills of Nebraska, a geologically young but fragile ecosystem that is not only uniquely beautiful but vital for migratory species, like the sand hill crane and the mightily threatened whooping crane, and hundreds of species of native flora. How can this be? Because it covers the Ogallala Aquifer, a post-glacial creation of underground gravel beds infiltrated by water that quenches the thirst of eight states. In places, it seeps to the surface and runs into low areas, creating wetlands so lush that birds simply drop down and rest to refresh before continuing on their long journeys northward.

I do not live in the Sand Hills but I cherish them as a place. I have driven through them and marveled at their undulating contours, and have been amazed by the dunes, porous as they are, and the generous and diverse life they support. I live in the Flint Hills of Kansas and feel a similar affinity for them as an irreplaceable natural system that, too, has been stung by misguided wind power entrepreneurs. And the Sand Hills are today being threatened by shortsightedness in the guise of attending to another thirst: that of providing oil via the Keystone XL, a high-sounding name TransCanada has given its startlingly arrogant pipeline project that is planned to gouge a scar through Montana, South Dakota, Nebraska (the Sand Hills), Kansas (near, but missing, my beloved Flint Hills), Oklahoma, and Texas. The pipeline would carry DilBit, diluted bitumen, derived from tar sands in Canada's boreal forest (another ecosystem that sequesters carbon destroyed), an extremely toxic slurry that if seeping into an environment could cause unimaginable harm, worse than any spill ever experienced in the ocean or a gulf. Ironically, those birds who gain sustenance from their stops in, among other places, the Sand Hills, breed and raise their young in, of all places, Canada. (Another irony implicit in this astoundingly far-reaching plan is the name chosen for it: keystone. A keystone is the one top stone in an arch that keeps it from falling in on itself: in nature, keystone species are those which keep the ecosystems functioning. By analogy, the Ogallala Aquifer acts much like a keystone.)

As I understand it, TransCanada has been rather heavy-handed in dealing with requests for easements from U.S. landowners who are understandably reluctant to grant them. I have read also that your former presidential campaign director, Paul Elliott, is TransCanada's chief Washington lobbyist! Secretary Clinton, this certainly poses an ethical question for you in considering granting a permit for TransCanada to proceed with their plan! Please deny this potentially egregious assault on not only our precious land and water but on the stewardship in place by those who live on, care for and love these places.

To be persuaded by letters may not be enough: ground-truth what I am talking about and travel to the Sand Hills (and other sites that would be impacted by the pipeline), visit with the people, and you will then understand what is at stake.

Thank you for your time and attention.  
Most sincerely,  
Mrs. Dru Clarke



*photo by MJ Morgan, Clay Center, KS*

**Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society  
2011-2012 Bird Seed Fundraiser**

**Orders Due:**  
October 7  
November 7  
December 26

**Return with payment to:**  
NFHAS % Annie Baker  
P.O. Box 1932  
Manhattan, KS 66505-1932  
(785) 375-4633  
<bunny@k-state.edu>

Checks payable to:  
Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, or (NFHAS)

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Bird Seed Descriptions:

- STRIPED SUNFLOWER SEEDS** contain larger hearts than black oil sunflower seeds and are particularly suitable for larger songbirds.
- BLACK OIL SUNFLOWER SEED CHIPS** are high in energy and can be used in tube feeders. It is especially liked by Pine Siskins. Hulled sunflower seed is consumed by a variety of birds, large- and small-beaked.
- MILLET** White millet is a favorite of most small-beaked ground-feeding birds; Red millet is also readily eaten. Quail, doves, juncos, sparrows, towhees, cowbirds, and red-winged blackbirds are attracted to millet.
- CORN CHOP, or cracked corn** kernels, like millet, is attractive to a variety of birds, especially ground-feeders. It also attracts crows, starlings, doves and squirrels.
- THISTLE SEED** is very attractive to Gold Finches and all other finches that are here over winter. It is excellent for tube feeders.
- SAFFLOWER** is a favorite with Cardinals, and squirrels really do not like it.
- PEANUT PICKOUTS** are chunks of peanut hearts and are very attractive to woodpeckers, nuthatches, chickadees, titmice, jays, wrens, and more.
- FLINT HILLS FEAST** is the premium seed mix: 50% striped sunflower seed, and 50% white proso millet (with no milo or fillers).
- CHEAP CHEEP MIX** is less expensive but still attractive to many species. It is 40 % cracked corn, 40 % white proso millet, and 20 % striped sunflower (with no milo or fillers).
- REGULAR FORMULA FINCH MIX** consists of 50% sunflower chips and 50% thistle seed. This is very popular with most tube feeding species.
- SUET CAKES**, in addition to having other nutritious ingredients, the main ingredient, high calorie beef fat, helps birds maintain body heat in cold winter months. Bird seed, berries and peanut butter are mixed in with suet. Enjoy woodpeckers, wrens, nuthatches, and chickadees.

*(Taken from Audubon At Home Bird Feeding Basics, [http://www.audubon.org/bird/at\\_home/bird\\_feeding/index.html](http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/bird_feeding/index.html))*

<p><b>Sales Support Local Chapter Activities</b></p> <p>As with all of our fund-raising activities, proceeds from our seed sales go toward supporting the educational and conservation projects of the local chapter. All of our labor is voluntary. Taxes are included in the price of our seed. Even though we are a not-for-profit organization, we are required to pay tax on any retail sales. Any additional donation you may wish to include with your order is appreciated.</p>	<p><b>Quality Seed, Easy Handling</b></p> <p>The products we offer are high quality seeds. Our mixes were created to satisfy the needs of local bird populations at reasonable costs. We have tried to make it easy for you to purchase the amount of seed you want without having to handle heavy, awkward bags. Our seed comes in 10, 25, and 50 pound bags. We try to obtain the seed in paper bags whenever possible.</p>
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## 2011-2012 Bird Seed Fundraiser

**Pick Up:**

October 15  
November 19  
January 7

**Location:**

Saturdays, **8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.**  
UFM, 1221 Thurston, Manhattan  
*Thank you for your order & support!*

Volunteers welcome! Help unload the delivery truck at 7:45 a.m., or volunteer throughout the morning. Contact Annie Baker.

### Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society



Description	Size	Cost	Quantity	Total Cost
Flint Hills Feast mix	10 lb	\$9.20		
	25 lb	\$20.00		
	50 lb	\$34.00		
Cheap Cheep mix	10 lb	\$8.20		
	25 lb	\$16.50		
	50 lb	\$29.60		
Sunflower (Striped)	10 lb	\$12.90		
	25 lb	\$26.20		
	50 lb	\$44.90		
Sunflower Chips	10 lb	\$22.10		
	25 lb	\$40.20		
Regular Finch Mix	10 lb	\$19.30		
	25 lb	\$35.60		
Niger Thistle	10 lb	\$17.50		
	25 lb	\$32.50		
Safflower	10 lb	\$13.80		
	25 lb	\$30.50		
Peanut Pick-outs	10 lb	\$20.30		
	25 lb	\$31.00		
Corn on the Cob	10 lb	\$7.30		
	25 lb	\$13.00		
Medium Corn Chop	25 lb	\$16.50		
White Millet	10 lb	\$6.40		
	25 lb	\$12.20		
Red Millet	10 lb	\$7.30		
	25 lb	\$15.70		
Suet Cakes	High Energy	\$1.00		
	Peanut Butter	\$1.00		
	Berry	\$1.00		

<b>(COMPLETE this portion and return with payment.)</b>  <b>Name:</b> <b>Address:</b> <b>Phone:</b>	<i>Delivery service available – Manhattan city limits – Please include addt'l \$5.</i>  <b>Email:</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL:</b>	
		<b>DELIVERY:</b>	
		<b>DONATION:</b>	
		<b>TOTAL:</b>	

## TAKE NOTE



**A big THANK YOU  
to JOE Mosier,  
for stepping forward to help  
with the Butterfly Garden!!**

## **A big THANK YOU to Annie Baker for returning to supervise the Bird Seed Sale!!**

A note about bird seed prices: Growing conditions this season were less than ideal. Black oil and other sunflower seeds are in short supply, and the stock that is available is expensive! Supplies should increase later in the fall as late-planted fields are harvested, but Tarwater Farm Supply, which provides most of our seed, has no black oil sunflower seed for us now.

The 2011-2012 NFHAS Seed Sales will be affected as follows:

Black oil sunflower seed will not be available in October and November. We hope it will be available for the January sale, but stock will be expensive. Striped sunflower replaces black oil in the Flint Hills Feast, Cheap Cheep, and Finch Mix blends.

### **Orders Due:**

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P.O. Box 1932  
Manhattan, KS 66505-1932  
(785) 375-4633 <bunny@k-state.edu>

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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, 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](mailto:join@audubon.org). Website is [www.audubon.org](http://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](mailto:list_serve@ksu.edu)> and join in the discussions.

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