



the prairie falcon

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NORTHERN FLINT HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY, P.O. Box 1932, MANHATTAN, KS 66505-1932

About eight years ago, while riding her bicycle, Shirley Shirely was hit by a car. She was unable to return to work as an R.N. for nearly 2 1/2 years. This was not all bad news however, for it was during this time that Shirley discovered the wonders of the Tallgrass prairie. Shirley claims it was indeed her time on the prairie that helped her recover from the accident. During those years of recovery, through the help of friend (Douglas Sheeley (roadside manager for Hardin County, Iowa), Shirely learned to identify native plant species and where to find them. She then proceeded to not only catalogue each species, but spent countless hours on the prairie, painstakingly creating the line drawings that fill the pages of her book, where each plant is pictured at various stages of its lifespan.

Shirley Shirley (no, that is not a misprint, that is her real name) is a woman of many talents. She is an R.N., with a BSN from the University of Iowa. She's a writer, photographer, artist and an Iowa Master Gardner. her knowledge of the prairie comes from touring over 80 remnant sites in her home county, at the elbow of her county's roadside manager. She helped him collect prairie seeds and later catalogued the county's prairie remnants. She continued the learning process through prairie walks with knowledgeable individuals, consulting with area prairie seed catalogue businesses, reading many books and finally beginning her own roadside prairie in front of her home.

Shirley will give a talk and slide presentation on the prairie plants of Iowa (which are very similar to Kansas prairie plants) and most importantly, she will share her insights on prairie restoration. Her book, "Restoring the Tallgrass Prairie," will be available for purchase after the program, along with a book signing.

October 18, 2000 - Before each program, we invite our speakers to join us for an informal dinner and discussion. Feel free to join us this month at Marco Polo's at 5:45 PM. The program begins at 7:30 PM, 1014 Throckmorton, Refreshments are served after every meeting, please bring your own cup. All meetings are open to the public.

Field Trips

BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK

Join us Saturday, Oct. 14th and every second Saturday at 8 AM in the Ackert/Durland parking lot on the KSU campus. We will carpool to a local birding hotspot and should return by about 11 AM. Birders of every age and interest level are welcomed. Children are especially encouraged to attend. Call Dave Rintoul, 532-6663 or e-mail him at drintoul@ksu.edu for more information.

October Program: RESTORING THE TALLGRASS PRAIRIE Shirley Shirley

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CONTRIBUTORS

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UPCOMING DATES:

- Oct. 14 - Sat. 8 AM
BEGINNING BIRDING
Ackert/Durland parking lot
- Oct. 14 - Sat. 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Bird Feed Pickup
1221 Thurston
- Oct. 18 - Wed. 5:45 PM Dinner
Marco Polo's
7:30 PM "Restoring the
Tallgrass Prairie,"
Shirley Shirley
1014 Throckmorton, KSU
- Oct. 28 - Sat. Campout
(call 539-1956)

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OCTOBER BIRDING

DAVE RINTOUL



"Soon pale shafts of light appeared in the eastern sky, flickering through the clouds like the white underwings of a magpie, and the distant mountains were transformed from their midnight blue to blood-red, melting to a sandy pink. The cranes lifted their heads from the shoulder feathers, shook their bills to free the bits of down that stuck to their nostrils like giant white snowflakes, and began to wade to shore to forage a short time before taking flight. Soon the life-giving sun would form rising currents of warm air that would lift them out of the valley and high into the air, and a westerly wind would let them drift eastward across New Mexico to their ancestral winter homeland. It would be a homecoming offering both security and danger."

Those of the Gray Wind: The Sandhill Cranes,
Paul Johnsgard, 1981, University of Nebraska
Press, Lincoln NE.

As you read this, Sandhill Cranes, which left Siberia and Alaska in August, and foraged in

the lush grain fields of the Prairie Provinces in September, are heeding the bite in the air and heading toward Kansas. This venerable species, whose flocks represent the largest remaining numbers of the crane family anywhere in the world, spends its time on the edge of winter almost year-round. When Sandhill Cranes cross into Kansas, you know that winter follows closely after their outstretched legs, as if their ancient bugling was a gathering call for gray clouds and swirling snowflakes. The weather, however, is not the danger that Johnsgard alludes to; cranes have endured millions of years of whatever weather is flung into their face. The danger is decoys, and shotguns, and hopeful hunters wondering how a Sandhill Crane might best be prepared. Chili, perhaps? The central flyway is a dangerous path these days, and the unlucky or the unwary will not be coming back through here in the spring.

October also brings other long-distance migrants to Kansas. Waterfowl numbers should start to build this month, at least in places where the summer drought left some water. The endangered Whooping Cranes, winging their way from Alberta to Aransas, visit Kansas this month, and with a bit of luck the Kansas birdwatcher can find families of these stately birds feeding and loafing at Quivira or Cheyenne Bottoms in mid-October. Lingering shorebirds will still make an occasional appearance, and predatory Peregrines or Merlins might follow them as well. Other birds, more likely to appear at your feeder than a Sandhill Crane, might also give Kansas birdwatchers a chance to thumb through their field guides

this month. Sparrows, those "little brown jobs" whose plumages all look alike to the beginning birdwatcher, arrive in good numbers in October. Lincoln's Sparrows and LeConte's Sparrows, two of the most elegant little birds on the continent, might be in your yard, or flitting through the sunflower seedheads along the roadside. Take a minute to review the sparrow pages in your bird book, and your preparation might be rewarded when you identify a Fox Sparrow, or a Savannah Sparrow among the Juncos feeding on the seeds that your Goldfinches have let fall to the ground. The drought in the western mountains may also bring us some unusual birds this fall and winter. Predictions are that Pygmy Nuthatches and Evening Grosbeaks might roam east across the plains this season, since food and water in the Rockies is a bit scarce at present. Mountain Bluebirds might also wander further east than usual, and Townsend's Solitaires will be seeking out cedar refugia in which to spend the winter. One can even hope for a Steller's Jay, or a Clark's Nutcracker, which rarely make appearances in this state. The drought may have had some negative effects, and the fires in the mountain west were certainly disastrous if your home was anywhere near them, but the silver lining for Kansas birdwatchers could be an outbreak of montane species in the state this fall. So get out there, look and listen, and see what the season has to offer.

© (2000) Dave Rintoul

The Natural Resources Defense Council is fighting the U.S. Navy's planned deployment of a new, planet-wide sonar system—one that the NRDC says will be harmful to marine ecosystems. For more information, contact the NRDC at 40 West 20th Street, New York, New York, 10011 or visit the website www.nrdc.org. By far the best group "out there" today working on endangered species and habitat protection issues is the Endangered Species Coalition, which can be contacted at 1101 NW 14th St. Suite 1400, Washington, D.C., 20005, or eco@stopextinction.org. The website is www.stopextinction.org.
Chris Cokinos, Conservation Committee

REGISTER NOW!! for the First International Workshop of the North American Colonial Waterbird Conservation Plan, to be held October 30 - November 1, 2000, in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Go to our homepage www.nacwcp.org to register on-line!!!

After 2 years of planning and a year of regional workshops, the first draft of the North American Colonial Waterbird Conservation Plan will be available for review September 15, 2000. The purpose of the workshop is to provide all parties interested in seabird and waterbird conservation an opportunity to participate in the formation of the Continental Plan. It will be critical to have individuals representing all the waterbird conservation regions participating.

Please contact Liz Skipper at the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies at lskipper@ass.org, if you are interested in travel support. We have planned a few activities to keep the meeting interesting, including a Halloween harbor cruise, an old fashioned New England clam bake, and a seabird and whale watching trip! Again, the website for registration is www.nacwcp.org



"Silphium first became a personality to me when I tried to dig one up to move to my farm. It was like digging an oak sapling. After half an hour of hot grimy labor the root was still enlarging, like a great vertical sweet-potato. As far as I know, that Silphium root went clear through to bedrock. I got no Silphium, but I learned by what elaborate underground stratagems it contrives to weather the prairie droughts."

Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac (1949), Oxford University Press, New York.

The compass plant (*Silphium laciniatum*) is a species of sunflower that has roots that can penetrate 10 to 15 feet into the prairie soil. These plants often live for 25 years before they reproduce. Even when they are fully mature, they will not reproduce every year. A population of compass plants usually has a mass flowering in the year that follows a drought year, so there might be a mass flowering next year. Mass flowering provides an abundance of nectar for butterflies and for hovering bee flies which have round bodies clothed with golden fuzziness. Each of the blossoms is composed of many florets, but only the ray florets can produce seed. When the plants produce only a few seeds, few if any will escape the taste of the seeds, ... but after a mass flowering, a high percentage of seeds will become seedlings. The flowering stalk can be 5 to 12 feet tall. The seeds sometimes remain in the seed head until the stalk falls over, and the height of the stalk will then determine the distance that the seed disperses from the mother. Just as a seed does not fall far away, I myself have not dispersed far from the mother. The flint hills are about one hundred miles from where I was born, but I lived here for several years before I began to appreciate the prairie. The openness was simply too alien for a boy who had found joy in the shelter of the woods of northwest Missouri. As I walked on the Konza Prairie in early September, I admired the symmetry of light and shadow as the sun began to illuminate the landscape with a painter's brush of oblique light. For a simple man like me, this natural scene was almost unbearably righteous. Perhaps this was a consequence of the symmetrical erosion of the geological layers of the hills.

But does the explanation matter?

During the afternoon, the temperature will soar to more than 100 degrees. Irregardless of the current process of climate change, there is nothing alien about heat and lack of rain to this area. I had expected the prairie to have a dry, brittle appearance. Instead I am overwhelmed by the strength of a prairie where each plant grows precisely where it is suited to grow. I will leave before midday. How can I appreciate the beauty, when the land is becoming a blast furnace? Surprisingly, the compass plants are just like me. They prefer to work during the morning and evening, and to rest during the hottest part of the day. The basal leaves of the plant are sensitive to the rising sun. As a leaf grows, its stem adjusts its growth so that one side of the leaf faces the rising sun. The sun rises north of east, and a mature leaf typically faces about 15 degrees north of east. A leaf with this orientation will harvest as much light as a horizontal leaf, but will lose less water, because it is less exposed to light during the midday heat. Like the plant, I appreciate the morning and the late evening. The compass plant is especially useful to those of us who wander about on an overcast night. When a person can not see the stars, he can drop to his knees and feel the rough leaves of the compass plant to discover the directions of the rising and the setting of the sun. The blossoms of the compass plant are said to face east. Some shrubbery is dense enough to shade the neighboring compass plants from the oblique rays of sunlight. Perhaps this increases the variation in the orientation of compass plant leaves. The leaf turns as it attempts to determine the direction of the sunlight, and if the light is indirect or if it is overhead, the leaf will keep turning until it completes its growth. Even in a location with unobstructed light, the orientation of the leaves is only as uniform as natural selection causes it to be. Future generations of compass plants could eventually possess randomly oriented leaves, if there was never any drought. This and other relationships enforced by the droughts has a powerful, liberating effect on my love for this landscape.

Continuous grazing by cattle is a threat to compass plants, but a mature plant

can survive several decades of intensive grazing, because of the reserve nutrients that are stored within its roots. Aldo Leopold wrote about the compass plant in his Sand County Almanac: "I once saw a farmer turn his cows into a virgin prairie meadow previously used only sporadically for mowing wild hay. The cows cropped the *Silphium* to the ground before any other plant was visibly eaten at all. One can imagine that the buffalo once had the same preference for *Silphium*." Leopold's phrase, "One can imagine ...," seems powerful. If I was living during the days of the wild buffalo, there would be no need for imagining what buffalo might do, because my life would be so connected with their lives that I would probably know everything that there is to know about them. Perhaps in those days, some people could become the buffalo mentally and pretend to be one of them as they took control of them and led them. I dream of the wild prairie and the array of tightly connected plants and animals. I see a good portion of that on the Konza Prairie, but there are no prairie dogs, no black footed ferrets, no burrowing owls, no wolves, and no ravens. Next to the human footprints in the dusty trail, there are a few of the young compass plants. I bend down to feel the rough leaves. The leaves are oriented to the reality of a new dawn. A meadowlark is perched on an older plant with a tall stalk, and it sings a timeless song which pulses within me. It expresses a joy in this precious moment. The landscape has a resonating rhythm of light and shadow and the light is the purest light I've ever known. I am flying free like a meadowlark across the prairie.

© (2000) T.D. Morgan



It's that time again when the great concert of colors should be on parade. Having massed with leaves of different reds and oranges and yellows, cyncopating with the evergreens. In the North Woods, the show should be streaming down the river valleys of the black earth prairies, where the greens will begin striking smaller juniperian notes. Then yellows will be predominating in the treetops as the parade reaches the Flint Hills and the burnished tallgrasses chime in.

Maybe.

Publishing the personal deadlines considered, I'm writing this in advance, having heard that the Woods have had rain – manna for those who were bracing for wildfires to break out in the great area that was blown down on July 4, 1999. So the program up north is likely to have started as usual. But while wildfires rage in the Rockies, the Flint Hills as I write have also turned penetratingly hot and dry. The view in early September seems fully autumnal as many trees are turning pale, I presume calling it quits for the year and dropping their leaves to limit dehydration. Our ground hasn't shown much sign of cracking yet, so can't guess how colorful the grasses will feel. But it seems possible the fall concert will not be played very brightly.

So if you want to look for water you could gaze upward, upward, on past the cloud vapors, if any. Because it seems there's water, real flowing water, if you look far enough. In a chapter titled "Oceans in the Sky," in a book titled *Life's Matrix*, a Biography of Water, Philip Ball, an editor at Nature magazine, will tell you that "water pervades the Universe... just about wherever we look in the heavens."

Much of it, such as the nearest on the Moon and Mars, he reports, is ice. But there's some liquid water even in the hellishly hot and acidic atmosphere of Venus, he says, albeit only twenty to 100 molecules per million. However this is liable to be gone in another 100-200 million years. Its

evaporation delayed by a large component of hydrogen02, a.k.a. deuterium, a.k.a. heavy water.

Now look with binoculars at the four large moons of Jupiter. Ball tells that one of the smaller ones, Europa, exhibits surface features and magnetic variations that indicate the presence of a liquid ocean underneath, and that larger Callisto, though lacking the surface features, has the magnetic variations.

Next, when that hot 9900 degree F. sun reappears, don't look at it directly, but be advised that the sun's spectrum reveals tiny amounts of liquid water in the cooler, 5400 degree F. sunspot areas. And recall that we are now at the peak of the 11-year sunspot activity cycle.

And that's not all, folks. In a book titled "The Restless Sea," Robert Kunzig, European editor of Discover magazine, adds that microwave receptions indicate the presence of liquid water in the black molecular cloud behind Orion's nebula, the middle "star" of his sword.

Water, water, everywhere, indeed. And not a drop of it within reach. Yet.

Then, when you're done water witching the cosmos there are other things worthwhile to behold. Chief among them are Saturn and Jupiter (bigger and brighter and later) rising in the evening hours between the Pleiades and Taurus' face, and making that brightly glaring Bull's eye. Aldebaran, seems unusually dim by comparison. Their grand tableau will be with us all fall as both planets approach their brightest for the year, and in Jupiter's case, the brightest in 12 years. A bonus comes on October 15th and 16th when the moon, still big after its October 13th fullness, joins them.

In October Venus will appear low in the SW after sunset, and become progressively higher. Mercury will be low in the SE about an hour before sunrise, while Mars, now about as dim as it gets, glimmers considerably higher, with Spica, in Virgo, northward from Mars.

The editors at Sky and Telescope suggest you also note Andromeda, those two rows of stars spreading slightly as they curve leftward away from the NE corner of the Great Square of Pegasus. A dim fuzz midway along the dimmest row (Andromeda's knee, as they see it) will be the Great Andromeda galaxy, a.k.a. M31, which they describe as our Milky Way's "big sister" – the combined light of hundreds of billions of suns, 2.5 million light-years away, "the farthest thing you can see without using binoculars or a telescope."

The moon will be new October 27th and full again November 11th.

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Dog Days by Michael Rhodes

the haze lies heavy
oppressive
in the valleys
the wind rages
with enormous thirst
blowing from the south
the sun's intensity
goes unscathing
only in the shade
of weltering trees
dropping brown
drought stressed foliage
upon cracked soil
blowing dust and pollen
enhance the misery
of the heat storm
of August
the most brutal month
that drives humans
into their shelters
and withers grasses
on the hills

Michael Rhodes, © 2000

Editor's note:

Carla Bishop maintains our membership list and prints the mailing labels for the newsletter. So if you have a change of address or need to correct your mailing address, contact Carla Bishop at 539-5129 or email her at cbishop@ksu.edu. The newsletter is labeled and mailed by Jan Garton.

FYI: Newsletter articles are due the 15th of month. Submit them to Cindy Jeffrey, 128 Dole Hall, KSU, or 15850 Galilee Rd, Olsburg KS 66520, or email them to cinrancy@ksu.edu


Conservation Committee *New EPA standards proposed for Kansas waters need support*

JANET THRONE

The EPA has allowed all of the 68 stream segments listed as “outstanding natural resource waters” in the 1994 Surface Water Quality Register, to be downgraded to “exceptional state waters”, which would allow the state to add more discharges to these streams rather than making them pristine as required by the current designation of “outstanding natural resource waters.”

Forty-seven out of 50 states regulate private surface waters regarding water quality standards. The proposed standards would allow the state to act to protect those who live downstream of these waters (ie. - farm ponds) from pollution originating in the farm pond or other surface water.

FACT:

81% of Kansas rivers and stream miles tested are not suitable for recreation and other designated uses – they're too polluted.

ACTION: Submit your comments to EPA by October 16, 2000.

Comments postmarked after this date may not be considered.

Send three copies of your comments to this address.

Ann Jacobs

U.S. EPA Region VII

Water Resources Protection Branch

901 North 5th Street

Kansas City, Kansas 66101.

Telephone: 913-551-7930

If possible, also email an electronic version of comments either in WordPerfect or ASCII (text) format, to Ann Jacobs at jacobs.ann@epa.gov.

Tell the EPA that you support the proposed regulations that help clean up our waters, but do not support the “downgrading” to “exceptional state waters.”

Let them know that the citizens of the state want clean water, and think that they should be protected from polluters upstream and municipalities that dump sewage effluent in our rivers and streams.

FINANCE MEETING

All Audubon members are invited and encouraged to participate in a special Finance meeting Tuesday, October 24, 7 PM at Hoogy's house, 327 Shetland Circle, Ogden. We'll be taking on two issues:

How do we replace and increase dues money that National Audubon Society (NAS) will no longer share with NFHAS (Northern Flinthills Audubon Society)?

Bird feed sales, the Birdathon and dues sharing with NAS have been the primary sources of income for NFHAS. We use the dues dollars to partially offset the costs of printing and mailing our newsletter to our National Audubon members, but NAS (through a complicated scheme) will be reducing our portion of the dues. We will have to raise additional money to cover that loss, or may be forced to require all newsletter recipients to subscribe to the Prairie Falcon, as well as paying National dues. What do YOU think?

How do we raise the roughly \$7,000 needed as matching funds for the Michel-Ross Audubon Preserve property that our chapter owns and manages in the Stagg Hill area?

The Michel-Ross issue represents a major capital campaign for the chapter and will require both innovation and fun before chapter members will swallow the bitter pill of “fund-raising.” Please join in our discussions and help the medicine go down — in a delightful way!

Directions: West on Hwy 18 into Ogden; turn right at Casey's and go up the hill, past the water tower. There's a new addition on the right with horse-related names; look for 327 Shetland Circle.

THANKS to those who donated to NFHAS by recycling their aluminum cans and earmarking the proceeds to our chapter. Last year we received \$44.65 from Howie's — that's almost 450 pounds of aluminum!

If you want to join the **NFHAS recyclers**, just tell the person at Howie's that you'd like to have your cash donated to Audubon — they'll make a record of it, and at the end of the year NFHAS will be able to do more for our community and the environment.

Just remember to keep a record of the amount donated each time and you can take it off your taxes, too.



**Northern Flint Hills
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Also available on the World Wide Web at the URL <http://www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html>

Subscription Information:

Introductory memberships- \$20 per year; then basic membership is - \$35 annually. When you join the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, you automatically become a member of the National Audubon Society and receive the bimonthly Audubon magazine, in addition to the *PRAIRIE FALCON*. New membership applications may be sent to NFHAS at the address below; make checks payable to the National Audubon Society. Renewals of membership are handled by the National Audubon Society and should not be sent to NFHAS. Questions about membership call toll-free, 1-800-274-4201, or email the National Audubon Society join@audubon.org.

Nonmembers may subscribe to the *PRAIRIE FALCON* newsletter for \$10 per year. 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

Kansas (statewide): 316-229-2777
Kansas City area (incl. W.MO): 785-342-2473
Nebraska (statewide): 402-292-5325

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Addresses & Phone numbers of Your Elected Representatives

Write - **or call** (anytime)

Governor Bill Graves: 2nd Floor, State Capitol Bldg., Topeka KS 66612. Kansas Senator or Representative _____: State Capitol Bldg., Topeka KS 66612, Ph.# (during session only) - Senate: 913.296.7300, House: 913.296.7500. Senator Roberts or Brownback: US Senate, Washington DC 20510. Representative _____: US House of Representatives, Washington DC 20515. U.S. Capitol Switchboard : 202.224.3121. President Bill Clinton, The White House, Washington DC 20500. Information about progress of a particular piece of legislation can be obtained by calling the following numbers: In Topeka - 800.432.3924; in Washington - 202.225.1772. Audubon Action Line - **800-659.2622**, or get the latest on WWW at <http://www.audubon.org/campaign/aa/>