



the prairie falcon

VOL. 29, No. 3
NOVEMBER 2000

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

November Program: **TALLGRASS LEGACY PROGRAM** **Jim Minnerath**

TALLGRASS LEGACY ALLIANCE

Jim Minnerath attended Emporia State University in the early 1970s and has work experience in several states, including Alaska, Wyoming, and Washington. He is now approaching 14 years with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Kansas.

His talk is titled "The Tallgrass Legacy Alliance." This is a producer-driven initiative, working on methods to promote both financial and environmentally sustainable ranching.

A very diverse group of agencies, organizations and individuals working together for the common good of the Kansas Tallgrass Prairie.

November 15, 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 Texas Star Cafe, at 5:45 PM. The program begins at 7:30 PM, 1014 Throckmorton, NE corner of Denison and Claflin. 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, Nov. 11th 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.

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CONTRIBUTORS

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UPCOMING DATES:

- Nov. 1 - Reservations Due for Sternberg Museum trip
Call 776-9593
- Nov. 11 - Sat. 8 AM
BEGINNING BIRDING
Acker/Durland parking lot
- Nov. 11-12 - Sternberg Museum,
Hays
- Nov. 15 - Wed. 5:45 PM Dinner
7:30 PM "Tallgrass Legacy
Program," Jim Minnerath
1014 Throckmorton, KSU
NE corner Denison/Claflin
- Nov. 18 - 2nd Bird Feed ORDER
Deadline
- Nov. 25 - Campout (call 539-1956)
- Dec. 2 - Bird Feed PICKUP

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BIRDING

DAVE RINTOUL

"What I love best in autumn is the way that Nature takes her curtain, as the stage folk say. The banners of the marshes furl, droop and fall. The leaves descend in golden glory. The ripe seeds drop and the fruit is cast aside. And so with slow chords in imperceptible fine modulations the great music draws to its close, and when the silence comes you can scarce distinguish it from the last far-off strains of the woodwinds and the horns."

Donald Culross Peattie, *An Almanac for Moderns* (1934), G.P. Putnam's Sons, NY

Silence will come later, but for now there is still plenty of audio for the outdoor walker and watcher. We are treated to cranes bugling across the western skies, geese cackling in the east, and the whistles and chips of the sparrows as they settle in for a few month's vacation in the winter resort they know as Kansas. As these pass through, they all add to the symphony of autumn, and give a distinctive aural background for any outing this month.

Migration months, of which November is one, are hard to predict here in the middle of the continent. Weather patterns far to the north can add huge flocks of birds to the state in a matter of a few days, or they can cause the flocks to bypass us altogether. Vagrant waterfowl and gulls are a certainty, but the exact species of vagrants are far less certain. The possibilities are intriguing, however, so let's take a look at a few of the usual suspects.

DOMESTIC CATS

One of our readers submitted an article written by Schanee Anderson, Curator of Education for the Sunset Zoo, published in the *Insider*, Issue 3, 2000. It concerned free-ranging domestic cats - basically the threat they pose to native wildlife. Here is

Sandhill cranes are already migrating in October, and numbers usually will peak sometime in November. The birds of the gray wind will spend their winter season scattered across Texas and New Mexico, waiting for the lengthening days to inspire them to dance, court, and peregrinate north again. Among the crane migrants will be the whooping cranes; family groups of three are a common sight at the central Kansas refuges of Quivira and Cheyenne Bottoms in late October and into November as well. And somewhere in the state might be the rarest of Eurasian vagrants, a common crane (*Grus grus*), whose scientific epithet evokes the call of all the cranes as they navigate in their own stately manner across the airspace of Kansas. No common crane has ever been sighted in the state, but they have surely visited, since Nebraska has hosted one in the spring during the past two years. Maybe this is the year.



Kansas waterfowl flocks can include anything in November. Some of the more unusual ducks to look for include the three species of scoters, the newly re-christened long-tailed duck (nee Oldsquaw), and perhaps an Eurasian wigeon or two. But don't just go looking for the

an excerpt from her article.

"Nationwide, cats probably kill over a billion small mammals and hundreds of millions of birds each year. Some of these kills are house mice, rats and other species considered pests, but many are native songbirds and mammals whose populations are already stressed by other factors, such as habitat

rarities; the sight and sound of a waterfowl marsh in November is worthwhile in itself, even if you only see mallards, teal, wigeon, and shovellers. Gulls can add spice to the month's list as well. Sabine's gulls staged an invasion of North America in October; perhaps we can hope for a black-legged kittiwake or a Ross's gull in November. Gull identification is not for the faint of heart, but I, for one, am glad that some folks seem to be very good at it.

Raptors also start to appear in larger numbers in November. Our annual quota of rough-legged hawks and dark-phase red-tails might be supplemented with a few oddities. Maybe a gyrfalcon will terrorize Cheyenne Bottoms again this year. Maybe the snowy owls will wander this far south. Again, while it is nice to find a rare bird, it is just as much fun to watch red-tails, and marvel at the fact that no two of them have similar plumage. Hawk identification has some of the same perils as gull identification, but at least there are

fewer hawks! Hope to see you out there, and give me a call when you find that gyrfalcon.

© (2000) Dave Rintoul

destruction and pesticide pollution." "A study in Illinois concluded cats were taking so many vertebrate prey that the prey base was not high enough to sustain wintering raptors and other native predators."

The NFHAS website has a link "Cats Indoors" that provides more information about the impact on cats as well as on wildlife when they are allowed to roam free.



After cutting down a silver maple in my yard, I discovered that its trunk was hollow. There were thousands of carpenter ants inside. A few years later, I discovered their new home. I had noticed some greeting cards sprinkled with cast pupal skins, suggesting that my cards were now a trash heap. There was something moving in the trash. It was a rove beetle (*Xenodusa cava*). Like me, this beetle prefers to hole up in a snug home when the cold winds blow. And he wanders about, searching for the distinctive smell of ants. When he finds them, he is something of a freeloader, and he begs for food.

He has handsome tufts of yellow hairs that secrete a substance which serves as a hostess gift. The workers lick this satisfying gift, and then they seem more fond of their guest. Maybe he had been unable to produce the required gift, and had been tossed out on the trash heap. This tickled me, and I dreamed of walking down the street and seeing uninvited guests struggling to lift themselves out of trash cans.

I hoped to find more beetles, so I looked up at the ceiling and saw a hole from which the ants discarded their trash. I removed the

ceiling tile and found a thousand ants clinging to the joists. My senses were assaulted by nightmarish sounds of their rustling and a rich, feral, honey-like aroma. I turned on the wet/dry vacuum cleaner, and I swept the end of the hose across the black ants, and over the roar of the vacuum's motor, I could hear the pinging as the big ants struck the metal bottom of the canister. To my sorrow, there were no beetles when I searched the canister. Anyway, the powerful vacuum had been unsuitable for collecting bugs, because it threw them against the canister with excessive force.

The ant colony had done no remodeling, because they had an adequate bedroom without performing any carpentry. Even so, they stimulated my imagination with visions of boards disintegrating into dust. A few of the ants had escaped during the confusion by crawling into a knothole, but it seemed ill advised to spray poison into the floor underneath my easy chair. After reading about a new strategy for controlling carpenter ants, and a great deal of shopping around, I purchased the recommended traps. They were 100% ineffective. Then I purchased a bomb and exploded it.

The bomb expelled noxious vapors into the knothole, and the ants dropped down and died.

Well, ants can catastrophically weaken structures such as those supporting my easy chair. After seeing carpenter ants, I remember that they can have several nests in a house, and I go around sniffing boards for their honey-like aroma. Then I sit down to rest and rock back forth in my chair. But I am not as relaxed as I might be, when the floor boards creak, as the chair moves. My curiosity about the beetle is also unsatisfied. During the spring, the beetle lives in nests of more aggressive ants (*Formica* species). *Formica* often sprays formic acid, and appears to enjoy biting the tender spots of curious lunatics. The less aggressive carpenter ants are a favorite of bears which inspect logs, snuffling for their aroma. Despite the intriguing aroma, I've never wanted to taste these ants myself. However, pileated woodpeckers can not survive the winter in some parts of the country, unless there are enough of the carpenter ants to keep them well fed.

© (2000) T.D. Morgan

WHAT DO INDOOR CATS MISS?

KILLING WILDLIFE, GETTING LOST, STOLEN, HIT BY A CAR, FATAL FELINE DISEASES, ABSCESSSES, WORMS, FLEAS, TICKS and ATTACKED BY DOGS.

MYTHS:

- "Belled" cats do kill wildlife. Cats with bells on their collars can silently stalk their prey. Even if the bell rings, birds and other wildlife do not necessarily associate the sound with danger.
- Even well-fed cats kill wildlife. The urge to hunt and the urge to eat are controlled by different portions of a cat's brain.
- Cat-injured wildlife seldom survive, even if they appear to have escaped. Infection from a cat's teeth or claws results in death unless antibiotics are given immediately.

PROTECT CATS, BIRDS AND OTHER WILDLIFE BY KEEPING CATS INDOORS!

For more information, contact:

AMERICAN BIRD CONSERVANCY

Cats Indoors! The Campaign for Safer Birds and Cats

1250 24th Street, NW, Suite 400

Washington, DC 20037

Phone: 202-778-9666;

Fax: 202-778-9778;

E-mail: abc@abcbirds.org



The nights ahead from mid-November to mid-December pretty much continue to belong to that currently scintillating quartet of Jupiter, Saturn, Aldebaran, and the Pleiades. During family hours, they glide in unison across the sky displaying an artistic variety of contrasting brilliances.

Saturn, rising first, and Jupiter, will be between the V of the Bull's face (known as the Hyades) – wherein Aldebaran gleams as the orange right eye – and the Pleiades, who are the epaulets on the Bull's shoulder. As noted last month, Jupiter, the gleamingest, will be at its brightest since 1989, reaching its peak on November 26th. On the 19th, Saturn, showing a lot of the flat plain of its rings to binocular-helped eyes, will be at its brightest since 1975.

However, it could also be rewarding to note the Venus show appearing during this period in the SW twilight and beginning each evening progressively higher. On November 28th, a slender but growing crescent moon will move up from among the stars forming

Sagittarius' sinking teapot, to smile just below and to the right of Venus, then it'll be within whispering distance the 29th. On the 30th, from the upper left, it'll wave 'so long till we meet again,' – once more, a brilliant gem near a silvery grin on December 29th.

Meanwhile, those planning to treat themselves to a telescope for Christmas might want to shop early, for the Old Farmer's Almanac says that on December 11th, when Venus will be about 10 degrees above the horizon at dark, Neptune could be visible as a little bluish body to the right of Venus. And adds that binoculars could be enough to pick out a little greenish Uranus in that area December 24th and 25th.

Others planning ahead should know also there will be a partial eclipse of the sun on Christmas Day. In Kansas a maximum of about 40% of the sun will be blocked by 11 AM. Dawn risers in November and December will have a sleepy Mars spy in the SE, and a furtive Mercury November 10th - 20th. The annual Geminid meteor

shower is due December 13th. The moon new November 25th, full December 11th.

And there will be other performers overhead who brighten and dim. One of which is an unhurried variable star who is soon to go dark for seven or eight months. Amidship of Cetus the Whale, in the sparsely populated "South Sea" area of the autumnal sky, its lonely red sparkling was noted disappearing from that dark area in 1596, fourteen years before Galileo's telescope. It was especially noticed back there again in 1770, as bright as Aldebaran. Very likely, its comings and goings were noticed at other times, but I guess because it stays visible for three or four months, then fades away for longer, folks would get accustomed to it, so that the changes came as magical surprises. Thus its name, "Mira – the Wonderful." Look for it as it likely fades through December. Otherwise, Orion's shoulders point almost toward it (but a little south), about five such spans westward, then a span up toward the zenith

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Audubon of Kansas Update

The AoK Board of Trustees met on June 24 in Oakley. Committees also met. What follows are a few highlights:

- 1) The Board has surpassed its goal to raise more than \$25,000 from Board members;
- 2) State Director Ron Klataske announced that a benefactor has pledged to give \$10,000 a year for the next three years, provided that AoK can match or exceed that figure annually. The Board is confident that it can raise such funds from loyal conservationists and Auduboners statewide;
- 3) Kansas City Power and Light is donating services to design and print a brochure about Aok;
- 4) Ron continues to work on several conservation issues, including the status of prairie dogs in Kansas, roadside management practices and the passage of the Conservation and Reinvestment Act.

CARA Calls and Thank Yous

Senator Pat Roberts is a co-sponsor of the Conservation and Reinvestment Act in the Senate. Please call or write to express your thanks! Senator Sam Brownback is not "on board." Please call or write to ask Sen. Brownback to support this important legislation, which will direct millions of dollars to Kansas—money that will help Kansas non-game species.

—Christopher Cokinos

FYI: Submit Newsletter articles by 15th of month to Cindy Jeffrey, 128 Dole Hall, KSU, or 15850 Galilee Rd, Olsburg KS 66520, or email to cinraney@ksu.edu MAILING: contact Carla Bishop 539-5129



Conservation Committee

JAN GARTON

In 1990, a wonderful member of our chapter passed away. His family established a memorial with NFHAS, and after pursuing an appropriate project for several years, we're pleased to announce the **Dedication of the Cecil Best Birding Trail on Sunday, November 12.**

Cecil's Trail meanders through a grass and woodland habitat opposite the linear trail, a quarter mile north of the Blue River boat access along east Hwy. 24. Benches and a special memorial glade offer places for rest, reflection and bird watching. New plantings of native trees and shrub swill add to habitat diversity.

Later, the Birding Trail will connect with other trails in the restored tallgrass prairie and savanna habitats of Northeast Park, after the park is further developed. We invite friends of Cecil and Jerry Best and friends of wildlife to the dedication of the Cecil Best Birding Trail. We will leave from the Blue River access parking lot at 1:30 PM, Nov. 12, to gather at the head of the Trail for a brief ceremony, then open the Trail for exploration and enjoyment. Bad weather will postpone the dedication until

Sunday, November 19, 1:30 PM. Call Jan @ 539-3004 or Leann @ 785-494-2556 for confirmation.

The creation and construction of Cecil's Trail could not have been accomplished without these cheerful and generous contributors:

WAYNE CORN for conceiving the idea, TERRY DeWEESE, JERRY DISHMAN, FRANK GIBBS for their assistance, LEANN HARRELL for hours of consultation, volunteer recruitment and trail blazing, TOM MORGAN, LEANN HARRELL, KIM HOWELL, PAUL WEIDHAAS, MADONNA STALLMANN for planting trees and shrubs, DUANE KERR for plants and planting advice, VIC THOMAS for mowing the first pathway, TERRI BRANDEN for chainsawing dead trees and bridge support posts (and loaning tools and truck), RYAN KLATASKE for maintenance mowing, DON YOCKEY for building benches and birdhouses, DON, VENUS, JOE YOCKEY and LEANN HARRELL for installing them, CHARLES BISSEY for engineering & designing the footbridge, GRIFFITH LUMBER CO. & employees BOBBY LEE & JAY for providing workspace, precision cuts and extra

helpful attention, KAPPA SIGMA fraternity brothers, LOGAN LECHNER, DAN CROFT, JEB VADER & T.J. VERA, DUSTY BECKER'S KSU Intro to Natural Resource Management students - ADAM HASTERT, TYLER ROBERTS, JAKE FALKE, BLAIR OGLEBY, plus TOM MORGAN, LEANN HARRELL, PAUL WEIDHAAS, LARRY PATTON, KIM HOWELL, JUDY ROE, MARCI GARTON, LEE LECHNER, NATALIE ROUSEY, TERRI BRANDEN for hand-carrying lumber to the bridge site, MIKE RHODES for beveling the bridge handrail, DON YOCKEY for digging bridge support holes, and (with TOM MORGAN, LEANN HARRELL & HOOGY HOOGEHEEM) erecting supports, DON YOCKEY (again) for installing bridge girders & railing posts, putting up railings, cutting lumber for & constructing bridge ramps, & dirt work around the ramps, "RED" Harrell (Leann's truck) for hauling lumber near the bridge site and various other places for drilling, cutting, etc., WAYNE CORN, JASON BROWN for construction of the ground deck.

MANY, MANY THANKS!!!!
Jan Garton, project coordinator

Cheyenne Bottoms in the Clear?

The latest word from Seaboard Farms is that the St. Joseph, MO, / Elwood, KS, area is the top choice for the "pork processing plant" (i.e. slaughterhouse). Interest in the Great Bend area has cooled, in part at least because of considerable protest, which united local Barton County residents with Audubon members around Kansas and the country. Near Great Bend is one of the nation's most important wetlands, Cheyenne Bottoms. Seaboard has been known to change its mind quickly, so we will continue to monitor the situation.

—Christopher Cokinos



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Audubon Society
P.O. Box 1932
Manhattan, KS
66505-1932**

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Permit No. 662
Manhattan, KS 66505**

Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society

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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

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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

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Write - or call (anytime)