



the prairie falcon

Vol. 30, No. 3
NOVEMBER 2001

November PROGRAM
Nov. 14
7:30PM

“Why You Should Care
about CARA.”
Chuck Otte

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

“Why You Should Care about CARA.” Chuck Otte

CARA, the Conservation and Reinvestment Act, is an attempt to secure long-term funding for state, federal and local conservation programs such as wildlife restoration, parks and outdoor recreation, coastal conservation and historic preservation. If passed in its current form, it would provide \$3.1 billion annually for 15 years. Kansas would receive several million of that annually. We will discuss the history and current status of the CARA legislation, what it could mean to Kansas and how some of the money might be used within the state. The discussion will include CARA's potential interaction with the recently adopted Kansas Wildlife Diversity Plan.

Chuck Otte has been employed by the Geary County Extension Office/K- State Research and Extension since January 1982. He attended and received 2 degrees from the Univ. of Nebraska; a B.S. in Agronomy (Crop Production) in 1979, and an M.S. in Agronomy (Plant Breeding and Genetics) in 1981. He is currently a board member of the Kansas Ornithological Society (KOS). He has also served as newsletter editor of the KOS's quarterly newsletter, *The Horned Lark*, since 1992. Chuck currently serves as chairman of the Kansas Non-game Wildlife Advisory Council (KNWAC). He also serves as a member of the board of directors and executive board of the Kansas Rural Center, a non-profit organization that promotes the long-term health of the land and its people through research, education and advocacy.

Before each program, we invite our speakers to join us for an informal dinner and discussion. Feel free to join us this month at Gold Fork 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. All meetings are open to the public.

Field Trips

BEGINNING BIRDWATCHING WALK

Join us Saturday, Nov. 10th 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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UPCOMING DATES:

- Nov 9 Stargazing/Campout
Margy Stewart 776-8852
- Nov 10 Beginning Birding 8 AM
Ackert Parking Lot
- Nov 14 Wed. 5:45 PM DINNER
7:30 PM - PROGRAM
1014 Throckmorton, KSU
NE corner Denison/Claflin
- Nov 17 Bird Feed ORDER
Deadline
- Dec 1 Bird Feed PICKUP
9AM - 1PM
UFM, 1221 Thurston

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MANHATTAN, KS



NOVEMBER BIRDING

DAVE RINTOUL

As some people play bridge or pinochle, a few friends and I compose parables. The one rule of the game is that these inventions must give the appearance of wisdom but in fact defy sense. I am challenged to compose one that had a bird in it. This is one I give them.

“The Master of Dwalno was standing in the doorway of the sanctum when a bird, a magpie, landed on his left shoulder. His disciples, alarmed, asked what this signified; and he, calming them, said, “I have just received and answer to a question I have not yet asked.”

It was unanimously agreed that this parable perfectly meets the rule. After my friends have gone, however, I find myself trying to make sense of it, feeling that I am on the verge of doing so. But it is only the verge of sleep.”

Leonard Nathan, Diary of a Left-handed Birdwatcher, 1996, Graywolf Press, St. Paul, MN.

It seems like the last few weeks have met this rule as well. Everywhere is the appearance of wisdom and the defiance of sense. Questions asked are never answered, but questions unasked are answered over and over, until one supposes that they were indeed asked and you just missed it. And every night the verge of sleep makes it seem sensible, but the light of the next day reveals only the same appearances of wisdom, the same incomprehensible nonsense. Luckily the birdwatcher has some escape from the shadow of this parable, and can get outdoors to reconnect with things which may be just as mysterious, but which at least make sense.

Waterfowl migration begins in earnest in November across the center of the continent, and ducks and geese will be heard, seen, and otherwise sensed all month long. But an even more exciting migrant, sandhill cranes, visit Kansas in large numbers this month. These masters of the gray wind have spent the summer in places as remote as Siberia, and are coming back to spend the winter in equally remote places like the panhandle of Texas. Flocks of cranes will dress up the marshes of central Kansas this month, and among them may even be one or two families of one of the rarest birds in the world, the whooping crane. Kansas birdwatchers live in a wonderful part of the world, with an

opportunity to see two of the fifteen species of cranes in both spring and fall. The bugling of a whooping crane parent as the birds take off in the early morning fog at Quivira is an unforgettable sound. And the soft contact calling of a flock of sandhill cranes is music that never seems to get old, even though fossil sandhill cranes over six million years ago make this the oldest extant bird species on earth. We don't know a lot about crane society, or crane migration, or even if cranes will last another six million years on this mistreated globe, but we should know that seeing and hearing them this month will bring us all a bit closer to earth and an understanding of our place on it.

Additional excitement may visit your bird feeders this month as well. You probably don't want to find a flock of cranes in your yard, but you might welcome a flock of pine siskins, or Harris' sparrows, or even a few red-breasted nuthatches. The latter seem to be here in decent numbers even as I write this in mid-October, so hopefully we will have these noisy sprites in the area all winter long. Some years they are abundant here, and other years they must be abundant somewhere else, but this is always a bird that I look forward to in November. The wild sunflower crop is pretty spectacular, at least here in eastern Kansas, so it may be a month

or two before the bigger flocks of seed-eating birds get into the towns and villages, however.

Other birds leave the area in November. Turkey vultures will head south this month, as will the current migrant hordes of ruby-crowned kinglets, being replaced soon with golden-crowned kinglets. Flycatching birds will be almost non-existent until the return of the purple martins and Eastern phoebes next March. And our summer resident red-tailed hawks are replaced by darker northern cousins, by bald eagles, by rough-legged hawks, and maybe even a snowy owl or two. But this cycle, repeated annually for the past few million years, does make sense, and it is good to remember this rhythm in a world that seems uneasy and alarming right about now. So try to get out this month, find some birds, relax and just enjoy the spectacle of fall in Kansas. I recommend it highly!

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As I drove down the driveway on the steep, wooded hillside, I rolled down the window and sniffed the scent of the night breeze. As I heard the call of a nearby whip-poor-will, I stepped on the brake and the tires shuddered to a stop. Just like the first time I had heard that uncanny call, I felt myself drawn to the mystery. Does the bird sing to establish its territory or does it sing to evoke in others the emotions that it feels in its own breast?

The whip-poor-will inhabits dry, open woodlands, where its intricate pattern of gray and brown makes it almost impossible to see against the background of the ground on which it rests. Its legs are not well suited for perching, being located rather far back on its body, and surely it must be more comfortable when resting its body against the welcoming substrate of the forest floor. Perhaps it remains nestled against the ground when it sends its call resounding into our hearts.

Eventually it launches its body into the air in which it maneuvers with the skill of a true master, as it catches insects in flight with incredible skill. It has large eyes, and these eyes surely enable it to see the branches of trees, so that it does not crash into them and break off some of its precious feathers. Its eyes extract as much information as possible, and glow ruby red in the light of a car's headlights. That light is reflected from a layer within the eye, which reflects light back into the retina, giving the light one more chance to provide information about the bird's surroundings.

Its reproduction is synchronized with the phase of the moon, so that the most vociferous demands of its nestlings occur during the light of the full moon. But its eyesight would seem to be insufficient to provide complete information about the movements of its prey. In similar

situations, most creatures use all of their senses. A whip-poor-will has whiskers, and our understanding of whiskers is undergoing an upheaval. A study with seals has shown that whiskers allow seals to follow the turbulent path of moving objects.

A whip-poor-will has a fringe of bristles between its eyes and its beak that forms a loose basket that might funnel insects into its open beak. I imagine that these whiskers are sensitive and might be proportioned so that they are most sensitive to the air displaced by the small wings of the bird's prey. I long to be the whip-poor-will long enough to understand what it senses, but I will never understand its experiences.

In November, it will probably begin its migration to a mature tropical forest. Next spring, if I am lucky, it will return to my woods and send its call resounding into my heart.

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Project FeederWatch - Cornell Lab of Ornithology

What is Project FeederWatch?

It is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders in North America. "FeederWatchers" periodically count the highest numbers of each species they see from November through April. It is the longest running of the Cornell Lab Ornithology citizen-science projects. FeederWatch helps scientists track broad-scale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance.

Findings from Project FeederWatch help researchers understand changes in North American feeder bird populations not only during a particular winter but also over many years. FeederWatch was the first study to document cyclical changes in Varied Thrush abundance. It also was the first to clearly document the irruptive patterns and movements of the Common Redpoll. Most recently, FeederWatchers are helping track the spread of mycoplasma conjunctivitis, often referred to as House Finch eye disease because it primarily affects House Finches.

Each fall, there is a "FeederWatch Top-10 List" of the 10 most frequently reported species in North America. Last year's list: 10) Black-capped Chickadee, 9) House Sparrow, 8) European Starling, 7) Northern Cardinal, 6) Blue Jay, 5) American Goldfinch, 4) House Finch, 3) Downy Woodpecker, 2) Mourning Dove, and the number ONE species most frequently reported was the Dark-eyed Junco - seen at 85% of FeederWatch feeders.

Participants receive a Research Kit that includes a full-color feeder bird poster and calendar, and the FeederWatchers's Handbook. They also receive summaries of FeederWatch data and other findings published in the Lab's quarterly newsletter, *Birdscope*. A \$15 fee helps cover the cost of materials and data analysis.

For more information or to sign up call Cornell Lab of Ornithology 800-843-2473 or visit the FeederWatch web site at <http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw>



We're heading for the showers, at least two in particular, the Leonids, Nov. 17th- 18th, the Geminids, Dec. 13th - 14th, and the Moon will be politely bowing out to leave the sky dark for the occasions. Fireballs that come in showers, I read, can also be called "radiants" that rise into the sky or spread over top of us, depending on whether or not their source is below the horizon when we see them.

Such fireballs are explained as comet debris. Picture various wooden clipper ships skimming across an ocean, all on different routes and schedules, but all irregularly shedding slivers and threads of their timbers and sails. The pieces from ships of many passages will have had more time to straggle out thinly along the ship's course; the pieces from newer ships could be floating in lumpier aggregations. Of course comet trails extend for millions of miles. Along comes the Earth on its routine, crosses some paths here and there, and some pieces come shooting through the atmosphere, and the more bunched the merrier. Though most pieces apparently are really no bigger than a

finger nail, and weigh perhaps as much as a feather barb, with the friction of moving 30 miles per second, more or less, wow! How they glow and leave momentary trails of their own.

On Nov. 25th - 27th we may see some of the lingering, thinning trail of a comet known as Biela's, that has shed its all. All such meteors were once thought to travel, bunching and thinning, in a big orbit of their own around the sun. Then a great Leonid display of 1833 got a Yale professor, H.A. Newton, wondering as well as wowing. In 1864, he'd traced a history of twelve such occasions back to 902 AD, and noticed that if he counted back there by 33 year intervals (give or take a year), he landed on all twelve. So he predicted big things for November, 1866, and hit the bulls-eye. Next he noticed an amazing coincidence with the timing of a comet know then as Tempel's.

Not all 33-year Leonid moments have been special. Those of 1966 stormed in at a hundred meteors per second; 1999 hopes were disappointed. Haven't seen any

Leonid predictions for this year; for the Geminids I'm told to look for action about every minute or two. In any case a meteor's a winging glow with a wow!, wherever, whenever.

Something more dependably to watch for will be Saturn. Though usually a dimmer member of various picturesque celestial groupings, he will be much more prominent these coming nights. Old Man Moon, though politely self-effacing for the two main meteor showers, will swell up full to crowd out our old ringed planet (occult him, is the polite, technical term) during November 30. But Saturn will otherwise persist, rising with a golden sparkle at sunsets and not winking out till the western horizon swings up over him at sunrises, and reaching his greatest brilliance for the year Dec. 3rd. A solar eclipse over Central America will be slightly noticeable here Dec. 14th, late afternoon.

The Moon: new Nov. 15th, Dec. 14th; full on that Nov. 30th.

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FIELD TRIP - NOV. 9TH 4PM -----

- A PRAIRIE SUNSET**
Enjoy the view at Margy Stewart's Wildlife Refuge
- STARGAZING** on the Prairie with an expert! After a prairie sunset – watch the stars with Pete Cohen guiding you through them.
- CAMPOUT** under the Stars.
Margi has two teepees setup – or bring your own tent.
- EAT** all evening long.
Non-stop potluck – or as long as it lasts!

- TAKE YOUR PICK - OR DO IT ALL.**
- MARGY STEWART** invites us to her prairie home and wildlife refuge. You do not have to stay the night or join in the potluck to come!! Just get yourself to this beautiful prairie setting - and enjoy the view, stars and company. Here's how - from Manhattan:
- 1) Take McDowell Creek Rd. (the immediate right turn after crossing over the Kansas River on 177 going out of town.
 - 2) Cross under I-70. You are now on McDowell Creek Rd. south of I-70.
 - 3) Go exactly 5 miles. (WARNING: when you get to the community center bear RIGHT around the center. Stay on the paved road.)
 - 4) Address is 4815 Lower McDowell Creek.
A black mailbox says "Stewart & Young."
A sign says "Bird Runner Wildlife Refuge."
The driveway is a half mile long.

Hope to see you there Friday, November 9th anytime after 4PM.

Patricia Yager



Want to provide environmental education at home and abroad? For a donation of \$25 to the environmental education fund of the Flinthills Audubon Society, you can impact students of two Manhattan elementary schools, K-State University, University of Guayaquil, and elementary students from the community of Loma Alta in Ecuador. Here is how the money will be used.

\$20 - pays for a student from the University of Guayaquil to travel and provide an environmental education activity in the rural schools at Loma Alta, Ecuador.

\$5 - stays here in Manhattan to support a new environmental education effort in local schools. K-State undergraduate volunteers lead by Audubon's education committee will use your donations to develop materials and do environmental education activities in Manhattan elementary schools.

More about the Ecuadorian Community you will help:

Imagine owning 2500 acres of cloud forest and 12,000 more acres of diverse tropical habitats like rivers, dry forests, moist forests, traditional agroforested systems, pastures, irrigated croplands, four villages, and a road connecting you to the vibrant coastal resources of western Ecuador. You would probably consider

"Wouldn't it be great if we had a good way to use all these results in an environmental education program?"

yourself pretty rich, right? Actually, the 3000 inhabitants who share ownership of the Loma Alta watershed think of themselves as rural poor, and by most economic measures they are. A typical 40 year-old parent from Loma Alta has 8 kids, a mule, a horse, a three-room shelter, some small livestock, a 2nd grade education and earns about \$100 per month. They consider themselves better off than their parents because their drinking water is purified, they have more access to medical care, and electricity flows to their house. Most of their children finish 6th grade and about 10% even go on to secondary school.

I began working with the Loma Alta community in 1994. My goal was to convince the small democracy to protect their cloud forests to sustain the biological diversity there. By doing scientific studies supported by Earthwatch Institute, NSF, and the Ford Foundation we learned that the cloud forest played a critical role in capturing fog and thus providing water to the community.

We presented this information at village meetings and suggested that preservation of the cloud forest was key to long-term sustainability of the community. In August 1996, Loma Alta established the first

community-owned forest preserve in Ecuador. They currently exclude hunting, tree cutting, and expansion of agriculture in the preserve.

I now do research on birds in the protected area and am hoping this information will attract ecological tourism to replace lost income from forest destruction. There are

some amazing attractions including: thousands of hummingbirds in the reserve at Christmas time, plenty of trails for trekking, and proximity to the Pacific coast.

To facilitate local environmental awareness I use some of my Earthwatch funding to provide internships to Ecuadorian university students. They participate on the Earthwatch project and do a small study of their own.

I kept thinking... "Wouldn't it be great if we had a good way to use all these results in an environmental education program?" That is when the students suggested that they would give educational talks and make up activities for the schools if we could only pay for them to do it. That is where you come in!!! I hope you will help.

*Dr. Dusty Becker
KSU Dept. of Horticulture,
Forestry and Recreation Resources*



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



Printed on 100% post-
consumer recycled paper

Non-profit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 662
Manhattan, KS 66505

Return Service Requested

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 \$15 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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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 W. Bush, 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/>