



NFHAS is desperately in need of help -- more energy and commitment from our membership to continue maintaining the newsletter, programs, Michel Ross Preserve, Cecil Best Trail, educational programs, birding trips, etc., and now the Inez Alsop project. PLEASE consider volunteering. We need a secretary – Annie Baker can no longer continue as secretary, but will continue as the leader of the Bird Seed Sales! She says that Secretary duties only require about 2 hours a month. We still need someone to take over as treasurer. Carla Bishop is willing to help that person get up to speed and comfortable with the job. She has been a great treasurer and streamlined the task. She says that the position requires approximately one hour per week for bookkeeping the Society's accounts and one hour a month as a member of the board.

NFHAS is also looking for someone to coordinate the care of the Butterfly Garden. Susan Blackford must give up the position. You may contact her for more information on the time and work involved.

**Early Audubon in Action!**

Annals of Kansas, a collection of extracts from the 53,000 Kansas newspapers in print around the state, opens a window on concerns for overwintering birds in Kansas as early as 1916. In that year, National Audubon Society collaborated with the U.S. Postal Service to help the Kansas State Fish and Game Warden feed the [much larger] number of birds in rural areas. The society sent \$200, and Kansas mail carriers delivered the birdseed for free on their rural routes.

The winters of 1916 -1918 were some of the coldest on record for Europe and North America.

NORTHERN Flint Hills Audubon Society,  
P.O. Box 1972, MANHATTAN, KS 66505-1972



# PRAIRIE FALCON

NORTHERN FLINT HILLS AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 38, No. 10 ~ JUNE 2010

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## Upcoming Events:

- JUNE 12 - SAT. MORNING birding, MEET AT 8 A.M.  
Sojourner TRUTH Park
- JUNE 20 - BLUE bird HOUSE - Pillsbury Crossing,  
POTT. Co. LAKE #2
- July 5 - BOARD MEETING 6:00 p.m.  
(CARLA Bishop's HOME -  
1822 RockhillDr.)  
COME AT 5:30 TO SEE HER Day lilies



## SKYLIGHT PLUS

PETE COHEN

'Tis the midst of the gardening season, and a garden plot is one place where one can confront things as they are with one's own

decisions and resources. No guarantees, while verses can spring up like herbs, with a little French dressing added--

I do not look much like a cloud  
and yet I bring the rain  
as I wriggle my plastic tail  
a-down each garden lane.  
I am quite non-discriminatory  
with my flexible hose;  
I point it at the rhubarb,  
I aim it at the rose.  
I give every target  
just the dose it needs  
whether I covet its stems  
or instead prefer its seeds.  
And the value I see  
in an edible root  
equals the worth I find  
in a ripening fruit.  
The apologies heard  
by the mulching hay  
are meant for the spiders  
who go racing away  
from a deluge they don't desire,  
but which their shading hosts,  
all of them, require.  
And what do I think  
as I go around  
turning dry dirt  
into soggy ground?  
I think "What a difference  
I make for these plants."  
And then I think:  
"Vive le difference!"

The sky differences for June, without any input from here, include a get together high up at sundown of Mars and Regulus at the bottom of Leo's reversed question mark. They switch sides on the 6th-7th looking like tiny bright peas from the same pod, except Mars is reddish and Regulus is blueish, so I suppose KU aficionados can claim some celestial representation.

Jupiter, rising in the wee hours in Pisces will seem only a pencil-width from Uranus the 6th. Uranus will be a tiny blue blur a little up and to the left of the closer and bigger Jupiter, but with a waning Moon reflecting on the situation from a little higher what might have been a special dark night sight for really keen eyes seems set to require binocs.

*StarDate* speculates that because that little blue blur can become visible to sharp eyes it was seen many times through history without being noticed before William Herschel discovered it in 1781. And it goes on to note that Uranus being four times the distance from the Sun, with a diameter of 32,000 miles compared to Jupiter's 88,000, it glows less than a tenth of percent as brightly. How much of this is due to pure math and how much to the reflectivity of the two bodies isn't addressed.

On the 14th Old Man Moon having waned away to zero will be quite visibly visiting the Gemini Twins as he starts waxing again, a little left of gleaming Venus. Next on the 16th he'll be joining the Mars-Regulus discussion as he keeps growing, and half-full passes below Saturn on the 18th before sliding below Spica on the 20th. Then, despite being in a fattening gibbous condition he'll get above Antares on the 23rd, on the way to being partially (less than half) eclipsed as he hits full on the 26th at 6a30 when the Earth's shadow will be falling upon him.

Meanwhile the summer solstice will occur at 6a28 CDT on the 21st. The Moon will be new the 12th at 6a15 am.

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## A SURPRISING VARMINT DRU CLARKE



A bright warmish day entices us on long, slow walks, best done with a good dog or, in our case, two good dogs who know enough not to get too far ahead but enough so to encourage varmints to move aside. Actually, I look forward to varmint encounters as long as they aren't of the snake clan. While I appreciate snakes, I really don't like them to surprise me.

In late April there was such a day, so the two dogs and I made our way north on our dirt road. Pastures and hedgerows were to the west, thick woods to the east, then the reverse, then woods on both sides flanking the road as it sloped down to Possum Hollow, a favorite spooning spot for local lovers, next to Hopkins Creek. We heard a heavy scurrying, a lumbering rustle, and I immediately thought "out of shape squirrel": there it was, clinging to a sapling like a woody burl. This was not your woody fluffy-tailed rodent, but a woodchuck, *Marmota monax*, up a tree! The shade was pretty dense already but I could make out its shape all right and see its shining piggy eyes. The dogs didn't see it, so ambled on down to the creek for a wade and a drink.

Woodchucks are members of the ground squirrels tribe, or marmots, and are at home in a wide range that's expanded as a result of settlement and agriculture, creating a host of ecotones of field and woods. Hence, they are significantly more populous now than when First Nation peoples were the chief inhabitants of the continent. They are fond of alfalfa, being mainly herbivorous, so farmers are *not* fond of them, nor are cattle ranchers because they are accomplished diggers.

The woodchuck name has nothing to do with a proclivity for cutting down trees (they are sometimes called land-beavers, because of their resemblance to the much larger aquatic rodent) but comes from an Algonquian or Narragansett word "wuchak." In the highlands of New Jersey, I used to hear them "whistle" (they are sometimes called whistle-pigs) and often confused the sound with woodland bird calls. This one appeared to be a youngster, or a slimmed down adult who may have recently emerged from its winter burrow. They do so in late March, not on Groundhog Day in February to predict how many more days

of winter we can expect. Woodchucks, or groundhogs, experience what is known as profound hibernation, with body temperature dropping to just a few degrees above freezing. They do this deep in their extensive burrows, often with 50 total feet of tunnels at a depth of five feet. It has been calculated that in excavating them they move about 700 pounds of soil! That's one big heap of dirt. Other wildlife appreciate this underground construction and move in: raccoons, skunks, rabbits, frogs, and snakes have been found hanging out in woodchuck "digs."

Woodchucks looked "frosted" because of the pale guard hairs of their double-layered coat, but no one seems to think it is particularly valuable fur, for which the woodchuck might be grateful: the hair has been used to tie trout flies and First Nation folks used the skins for moccasin soles.

Interestingly, woodchucks are important for testing medical therapies for hepatitis B – induced liver cancer as 100% will come down with it when infected. I have no idea how they discovered this fatal flaw in them.

I was glad today that the dogs didn't see or investigate the 'chuck as I remember well when our terrier had a close encounter with one and got ripped up pretty badly before we could shoo the very growly and tenacious animal away. The dog survived but never got close to one again.

Climbing trees was something I wouldn't have believed was in their escape repertoire had I not seen it. I talked to it a bit, reassuring it that I was not intending to hurt it, and walked on down to the creek to join the dogs. On the way back, I saw that it had climbed down the tree trunk and was sitting at the foot of the tree looking as much like a small boulder as it could. It stayed rock-still until we had passed, then very slowly swiveled its wedge-shaped head to watch us go.

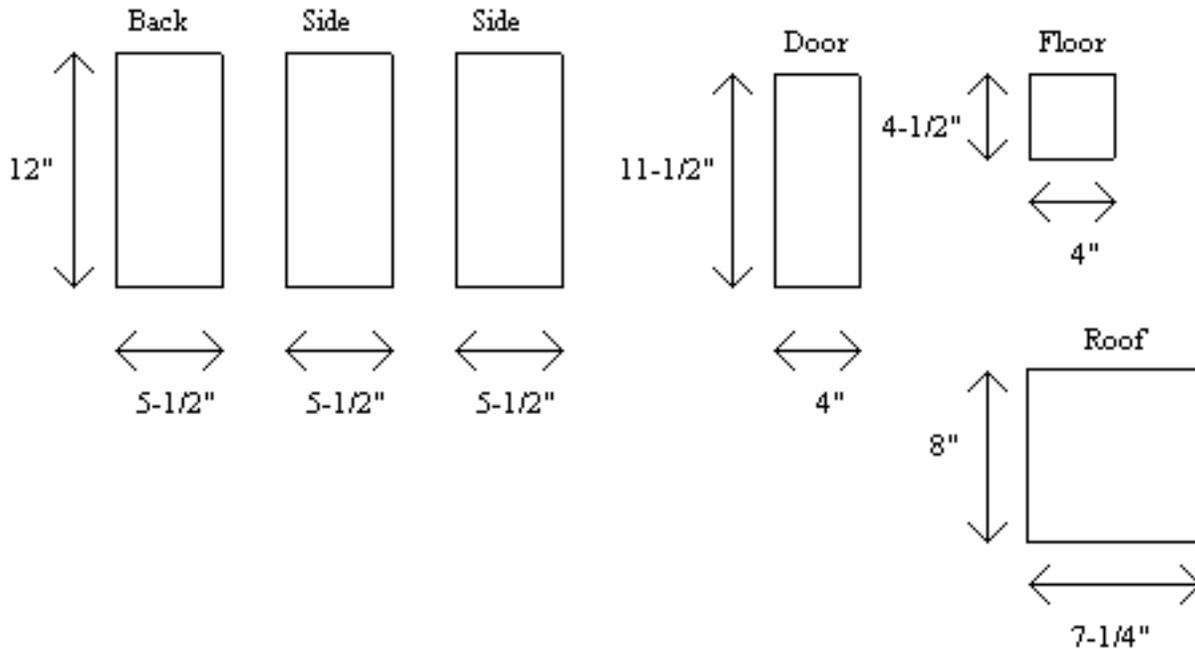
These long spring walks seem to offer each time some welcome surprise, sometimes even a varmint who is a marmot. (That rhymes in case you didn't notice.)

© 2010 Dru Clarke April 30, 2010

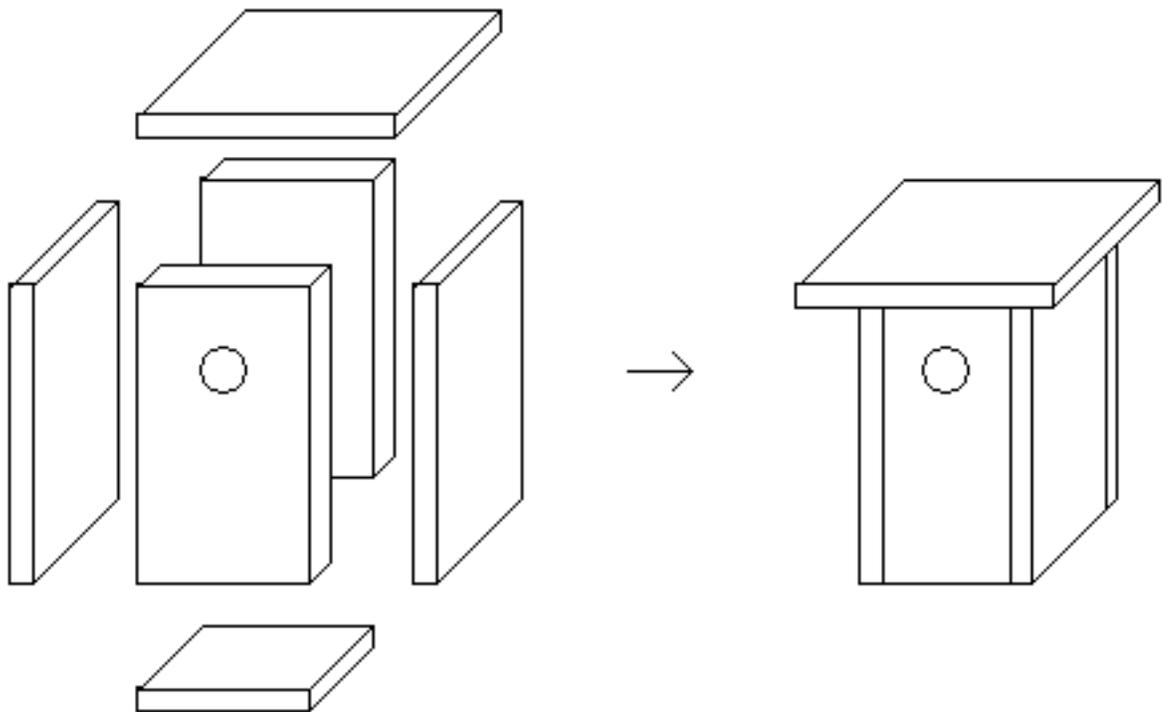
## BUILD A BLUE BIRD HOUSE FOR FATHER'S DAY!

To replace the damaged ones at Pillsbury Crossing and Pott.Co. Lake #2 on June 20th! Contact Patricia Yeager

[www.bygpub.com/bluebird/](http://www.bygpub.com/bluebird/) or [www.nabluebirdsociety.org/nestboxplans.htm](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/nestboxplans.htm)  
or [ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/CA/news/Publications/wild\\_habitat/blue\\_bird\\_house.pdf](ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/CA/news/Publications/wild_habitat/blue_bird_house.pdf)



The back is nailed to the two sides. The roof is nailed on top of the back and the two sides. The sides are then nailed to the floor. The door is nailed to the two sides so it pivots from the top, and is held in place at the bottom by a latch.



## WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE NFHAS? LOTS!!

The NFHAS has become the sole trustee for the **Inez Alsop Foundation** – which oversees her property at 1646 Laramie St. Inez Alsop had wished for this to be a bird sanctuary. The board has been brought up to date regarding back taxes, who is occupying the old house now, the condition of the house and property and what needs to be done. A development plan is in the works, and any members interested in being involved in this new project should contact Patricia Yeager.

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The NFHAS approved giving \$1,000 to the group of students headed for **Louisiana coast to help with the oil spill clean-up**. This group of nine KSU students belong to the KSU Students for Environmental Action organization. The money is primarily for gas for the three vehicles trip down and back, and some meals. We are proud of this group of volunteers! Ellen Welti presented the request. She also said they would be gathering information and taking photos for presentations when they return. Our October program is tentatively going to be their presentation.

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Members are invited - encouraged! - to share their birding experiences: favorite bird, what you're seeing now, what did you see on a trip? Please contact Cindy Jeffrey - [cinraney@k-state.edu](mailto:cinraney@k-state.edu), or call after 5 p.m. 785-468-3587 (home).

Doesn't need to be long -- but photos are always nice.

For example: Gary and Cindy Jeffrey enjoyed California Quail each morning and evening in Washington State - did you know that the frieze (or bas-reliefs - not sure of the correct architectural term) on KSU's Hale Library (SouthEast face) has a row of California Quail - not bobwhite!!





NORTHERN FLINT HILLS  
Audubon Society  
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 66502

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society.  
Edited by Cindy Jeffrey, 15850 Galilee Rd., Olsburg, KS 66520. (cinraney@ksu.edu)  
Also available on-line at [www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html](http://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](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, 66502-1932

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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