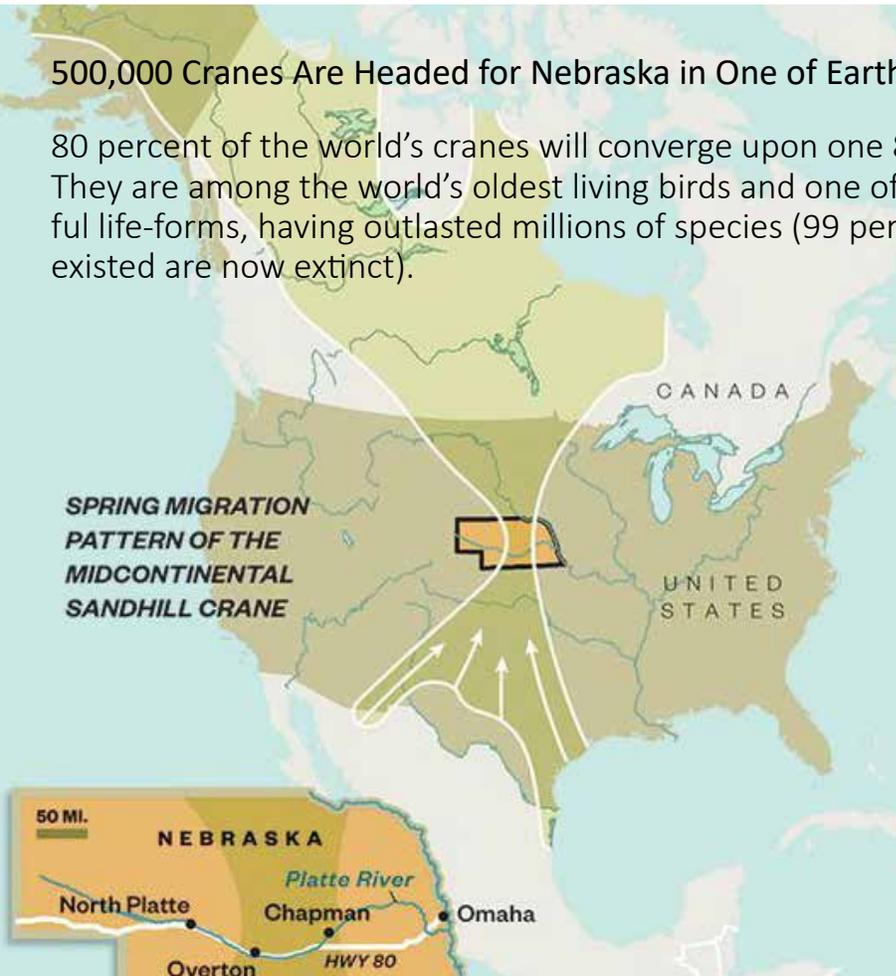


500,000 Cranes Are Headed for Nebraska in One of Earth's Greatest Migrations

80 percent of the world's cranes will converge upon one 80-mile stretch of land. They are among the world's oldest living birds and one of the planet's most successful life-forms, having outlasted millions of species (99 percent of species that ever existed are now extinct).



From around Valentine's Day to April Fool's Day – the cranes come through Quivira National Wildlife Refuge.

Recent sightings at the refuge have included sandhill cranes in the thousands on the west side of Big Salt Marsh.

Kansas is a part of the “central flyway” – a migratory route for a variety of birds between Canada and Central America and the marshes and wetlands of Quivira National Wildlife Refuge provide an ideal resting and refueling spot.

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 47, No. 7 ~ March 2019

Inside

- pg. 2 Skylight
Pete Cohen
- pg. 3 Warm Memories
Dru Clarke
- pg. 4 Thank you Ryan Klataske
And Alsop Property Update
- pg. 5-Take Note

Upcoming Events

Any warm day - consider walking Stagg Hill property and take a trash bag to help keep litter picked up.

Mar. 4- Board Meeting 6 p.m. Friend's Room,
Manhattan Public Library

Mar. 9- Sat. Morning Birding - Weather permitting
(ice, or wind over 15 mph and temp below 25 cancels)
8 a.m. Sojourner Truth Park

March- Sandhill Cranes

Apr 1- Board Meeting- (yes, on April Fool's Day)
6 p.m. Friend's Room,
Manhattan Public Library



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

It's relevant this month to take note of those often-colorful banners that adorn the walls of chemistry labs, classrooms, and elsewhere, and that appear also in encyclopedia and certain text books, and

now of course on computer screens. They have blocks of squares sometimes with variously shaded backgrounds, all scaled to fit the surface provided. Each block contains a letter or two, a number, and some other information.

The Periodic Table of the Elements it seems informs those who can interpret it a great deal of all that has been discovered about our physical world, and what is yet undiscovered, based on the atomic theory.

Both the table and theory have a history. About 2500 years ago, Heroclitus, a philosopher in what is now Turkey, proposed (as I understand him) that the basic element of the universe was fire--everything eventually was reduced to ash by one method of decay or another. About 100 years later, Democritus, a Greek, theorized that all matter was composed of an agglomeration of individually shaped particles that were, in his word, *atomos--indivisible*. The atomic theory was born, positing that these particles move about, colliding, aggregating and thus temporarily forming everything that comes into being, and that eventually disintegrates because the particles don't stop moving. In his view all these particles floated in an indescribable void.

A hundred or so years on, Aristotle disagreed, professing that the essential elements were earth, fire, air, and water, present everywhere. And he could show that the substance of things, as they eroded or putrefied, 'flowed' naturally into becoming one or more of his elements. It was harder to demonstrate the existence and actions of particles too small to be seen. Also, the idea of randomly appearing self-propelled particles ran into religious objections from those who believed in a creator and regulator God. So atomism gained little traction.

Yet Epicurus, another Greek, and the Roman, Lucretius, kept the idea alive, and, by my understanding, several hundred years after the latter, the Renais-

sance was begun in part by people who took up Aristotle's claim of the value of experiment, and they began to find that, for resolving their experiments, it would be handy if there existed in nature some solidly dependable building blocks. Then in the first decade of the 1600s, an English chemist, John Dalton, proposed anew an atomic structure of the elements, based upon relationships among perceived structures. Though apparently his discoveries were not sufficient to produce a comprehensive picture.

Then in 1869, 150 years ago, when it was February in Russia but March on calendars elsewhere, Dmitri Mendeleev, in attempting to write a textbook on inorganic chemistry, discerned a way to provide a template upon which those relationships could be meaningfully arranged. His first draft--five short vertical lines of letters paired with numbers--was quite skimpy compared to its present-day form. But it was like a small seed that had drawn in the "surrounding minerals"--i.e. the work of various scientists as well as his own--to produce a small publication from which a giant plant of information has risen and bloomed.

Along the way it's been discovered that that very, very, very small particle, the atom, is not indivisible, has separate parts, in fact well-separated. I find that the single electron of a hydrogen atom is at a distance of over 13,000 times the diameter of its central proton. So that a lot of the void that Democritus spoke of may exist within atoms themselves.

What can't be avoided is a dance performance by the Moon, Venus, and Saturn during the pre-dawn of the 1st-3rd. In close proximity above the stars forming Sagittarius' "Teapot", they will be trading places each night with Saturn recognizable as the weakest glow. Reddish Mars will move from above to below the Moon the 10th-11th, then the Moon moves close to Taurus's reddish eye, Aldebaran, the 12th-13th. It visits Leo's Regulus the 18th and pays respects to Virgo's lonely bright Spica 21st-22nd.

As it lowers on the 25th it will be at the right of a long line traced by Jupiter on the left and Scorpius' reddish Antares in the middle; they'll form more of a triangle on the 26th. Jupiter will then be to the right of the Moon in the early hours of the 27th, and the Moon and Saturn will come up together a little ahead of the Sun the 29th.

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Warm Memories Dru Clarke



Sitting here with the outside temp at 10 F, I began thinking about warmer places and times. When our son was stationed in Oceanside, Ca. (US Navy) we drove out to visit him, taking a southern route west. Sonora Desert Museum, an arid gem of preservation, was a must stop that allowed a protected window into an unfamiliar and somewhat daunting environment. Feeling adventuresome, we crossed the border into Mexico and headed for Puerto Penasco, known to Anglos as “Rocky Point.” A biology professor from KSU used to take his students there, ostensibly to do research but often descending into delirious cerveza-soaked late night partying (according to some who were in attendance).



There is a shrimp industry and offshore oil platforms: at dinner that night we were treated icily by the wait staff, and we found out later that they thought we were employed by Pemex (the oil company with whom the locals had an antagonistic relationship). When a bilingual acquaintance set them straight – that we were simple touring gringos – things warmed up considerably. The temperature during the first day reached 116 F and took our breath away. Exploring the beach – the town is on the Sea of Cortez (Gulf of California) – we gathered heavy chalky bivalve shells, sunburn, and little else. Emerging from a dip in the briny water, our skin became taut with salt as the water evaporated quickly.

A drive around town showed us homes made of corrugated tin and even some cardboard refrigerator boxes as well as some of more substantial materials. One house belonged to a fisherman and in his front yard was a pyramid of very large

bones – those of a beached grey whale. Grey females swim into the Sea of Cortez to give birth to their calves, and to my thinking, its draw is the highly saline water that, being dense, buoys up the newborn, making it easier to stay on the surface where it can breathe. These bones may have belonged to one of them. In halting Spanish, I asked the grinning, gap-toothed man if he would sell a bone, and I purchased a rib that we laid on the back seat of our Renault. Today, that rib is used to hang my husband's favorite hat. (As an educator, USFWS permitted me to hold this and other artifacts for the purpose of teaching. I still use them today in presentations.)

Because our lodging left a few things to be desired – fitful air conditioning and a door that didn't quite fit the frame – we left at 3 a.m. to drive north. The only wildlife we saw was a very large rat that scurried across the road into an alley. About a half hour's drive from the U.S. border, we were stopped by a group of armed military-looking men who brandished their M-16's with great bravado. I was driving and pretended not to understand what they wanted, fearful the entire time that they would confiscate my newly acquired whale rib that lay in full view in the back seat. They finally and with great disgust waved us on, not even searching our modest vehicle.

California was cooler, and the beach at Bolsa Chica beckoned, so Dan, his wife and young son accompanied us to the popular seaside park. On a subsequent visit to Long Beach, we witnessed a grunion run. During certain spring tides (spring referring to the highest monthly tides, when the moon, sun and Earth are aligned and the water “springs up”) the grunion, a thin, silvery fish, come ashore with the breaking waves and engage in an age-old mating ritual. The females wriggle their bodies into the wet sand until they look like they've been planted. A male (or sometimes several males) encircle her now vertical body and deposit their milt (sperm). Her fertilized eggs develop in the sand high on the beach and hatch, washing out to sea, on the next spring tide. We watched as land-bound fishers ran, shrieking with excitement, to grip the slippery fish and toss them into waiting baskets. Patches of bioluminescence on breaking waves illuminated the wild scene.

Back on the couch, watching basketball – our winter escape – I am warmed by these memories. The whales in the gulf are thinking about beginning their northward migration in March. The grunion are still at sea. And we are anxiously awaiting spring.



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Thank You



Thank you, Ryan Klataske, for a most interesting presentation. Namibia is a fascinating place! Your photos and stories informed us all about how problems and challenges here relate to problems in other places in the world. The comparison of Namibia's grasslands and wildlife to the Great Plains in the U.S. illustrated the connections we have with the world. And how we are all in this together- and together we can find solutions.

Start seeds now for planting in the Alsop property this spring



Our area's official first frost free date is May 1. So now is the time to plant seeds inside that is. Read on the back of the seed packet of your favorite flowering annuals and have fun growing seedlings to share with the Alsop Bird Sanctuary come May. I hope that you will start many so we will have lots of donated plants for the pollinators.

Our area has approximately 160 frost free days for your flowers to thrive. Keep the seedlings away from the cold window but still in a place with lots of light. I offer this idea to ward off the winter chill and help at the garden too!



A trip to Arizona is always nice this time of year! Besides seeing Sandhill cranes along the Rio Grande, this roadrunner gave us a good look and wasn't shy at all.

Have you checked out the refurbished bridge and platform the Scouts from Manhattan Boy Scout Troop 75 and several of their friends and family volunteered to refurbish on the Cecil Best Birdwatching Trail?



When recycling at Howie's remember that if you are depositing aluminum cans, you can donate to the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society- but you must go into the office and tell them it is for NFHAS.



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Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society.
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WE NEED YOU!

PLEASE consider joining our NFHAS Board.

The Board meets on the first Monday of each month. The meetings usually last about an hour.

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