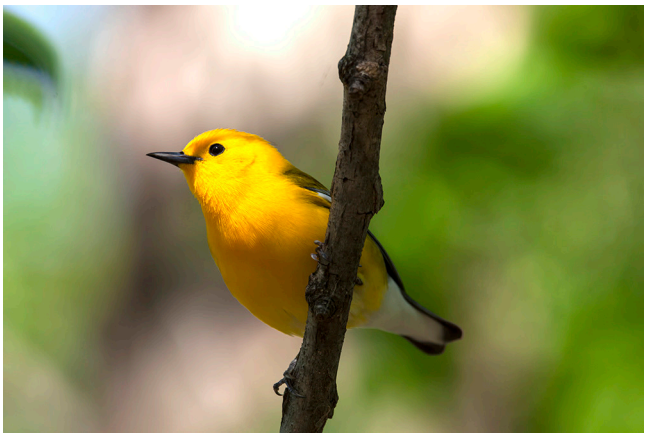
Male Prothonotary Warbler, photo by Dave Rintoul



International Migratory Bird Day
Jim Campbell

The spring International Migratory Bird Day count will be held on **Saturday, May 14th**. There are several parts of Riley County that were not covered last year, so if anyone wants an area or wants to join an existing group, please e-mail me at **jf3campbell@att.net.** The expectation is that you identify and count all birds heard or seen in your assigned area, and provide a list to me with some trip information. I will then compile the information for the county, and submit the list to eBird.org. This is a great excuse to spend the day birding, and hopefully the weather will be beautiful, so please consider joining us.

International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) is the brainchild of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center (SMBC). The Center is dedicated to fostering greater understanding, appreciation, and protection of the grand phenomenon of bird migration. In the early 1990s, SMBC staff recognized that a public program would enable thousands of people to learn about migratory birds, their migrations, and their conservation. IMBD was created in the early 1990s, and the first celebration was hosted at the National Zoo in Washington D.C. in 1993

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

prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

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Inside

Upcoming Events

May 2 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

May 10- Butterfly Garden WORK DAY

May 14- International Migratory Bird Count Day
See above

Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

You might think a tree known commonly as Stinking Cedar, would have few friends. But in a special report in "The Economist," (that initiated my past three articles), it tells of a group of people organized to rescue this species (scientifically referred to as Torrey taxifloria). This species has been reduced to a small pocket in Georgia and Florida by fungi that are doing well in the warming climate. Because T. taxifloria is hemmed in by hostile territory, the Torrey Guardians (the name of the rescue group) are collecting seeds and finding homes for them in North Carolina, and experimenting further north.

Thus, to the previously mentioned responses to global warming, A) inhibit the causes, (B) intercept more sunlight, and (C) geo-engineer the climate processes, can be here added (D) adapt, by migration or other action.

As to adaptation, other reports indicate that certain hardwoods are adapting by moving north through natural processes into territory that the boreal conifers are being forced to abandon.

But the conifers do not have an unlimited north into which to retreat. Higher (cooler) elevation species may not be able to cross low deserts to reach higher elevations. Footloose species may depend on food that is unable to re-locate at comparable rates, and new environments may be welcoming in some respects, but not in others. Local species may have ways to endure atypical spells of weather—extended droughts, deluges, freezes—that newcomers have not developed. The newcomers may develop ways to cope, but then they will not be exactly the same species. Change will out.

Another example of adaptation comes from Asia where certain human shore dwellers are building higher coastal embankments, moving their dwellings up-ground on higher stilts, and finding ways to farm saltwater shrimp instead of the fresh water varieties. But while that will render encroaching seas and their increasing storm surges less damaging to buildings and activities, it still leaves the dwellings vulnerable to the winds of enhanced typhoons. Additionally, advancing technology has been making it possible, as well as sometimes necessary, for more people to move to the cities (that incidentally have sturdier structures) altering the wider environment further. One could compile a long list of other adaptations in progress. Combining it with the components of A, B, and C, would present another showing that, however innovative we might be, to have a livable environment we are now in the position of playing defense. The results of which I doubt will be available by next month.

However, clouds willing, some bright lights will be visible all during May. On the 3rd, Saturn will be opposite the Sun from our vantage, thus fully reflecting, and with its rings wide open in Ophiuchus, the widespread dim constellation that balloons above Scorpius. Mars, at one of its closest positions to the Sun, will be reddish bright, its brightest for the next two years, as it retrogrades (moves from W to E each night as we pass it on our inner orbit).

Look in Libra, the dim constellation that moves ahead of Scorpius. They'll be traveling all night, while Jupiter, brighter than both of them, will be high up in Leo the Lion as darkness comes on, and will set with him around midnight. Spica, the bright star in Virgo, will be following Jupiter at a distance.

Jupiter will be a nearby witness to a right triangle formed by the Moon, the bright star, Procyon of Canis Minor, below, and the twin stars, Castor and Pollux of Gemini to the Moon's right, on the 11th. It will let the Moon and Leo's bright Regulus have some time to themselves on the 13th, then draw closer to them the 14th, and be alone with the Moon the early evening of 15th, before passing from the right to the left of Spica the 17th and 18th.

Then, on the early evening of the 21st there will be a notable square with Mars, just in front of Scorpius' head in the upper right corner, and Antares (Scorpius' bright reddish star) a little below, with Saturn off to its left, all three of them sparking through the bright glow from the full Moon at the upper left corner (it will have been technically full at 4p14).

Back on the 9th, Mercury will be a tiny dot passing across the face of the Sun, an event that for sake of one's eyes must be observed through special glasses or by indirect arrangement.

The Moon will have been new the 6th at 2p30.

Darwin's Tubercle

Dru Clarke

I should have seen it coming. Some hay had fallen off the pitchfork outside the feed bunk and I had reached for it to toss it back in. The horse laid his ears back and charged, hitting me – hard – in the right temple and knocking me to the ground. I lay there, with our big dog snuffling in my ear, and, in a stupor, wondered what I hadn't understood – the warning, brief as it was.

Ears do more than pick up sound. Outer ears, or pinna, tell us much about the intent of the animal possessing them. Cottontail rabbits and other bunnies let us know they are 'happy' by putting one ear up, the other down. Bunnies in my friend's yard do this when she greets them. A Flemish Giant rabbit owned by a close neighbor used to visit us and convey its contentment by just this ear posturing as it sprawled in an easy chair. Tame animals usually do have floppy ears. Horses, with their ears pricked, are curious, alert and unafraid. A woman who was looking for a horse to buy had heard the tale of my knockdown and immediately picked out the one who did it. I asked her how she knew: She said that she looked at his ears.

The pinna, the shell-shape of the visible ear, has a curving outer portion, the helix or auricle. A complex geometry of ridges on its inner surface is the acoustic equivalent of a fresnel lens used in lighthouses to amplify the reflection of light. A knobby protrusion on the rim of the pinna, the Woolnerian tip, corresponds to ear tips in some mammal brethren. Darwin so named it after T. Woolney, a sculptor, who faithfully reproduced it in his works. Feel the rim of your ear and you can find it. Also known as Darwin's tubercle, he thought it to be an atavistic echo positioning system. It lingers in us to remind us of our evolutionary forebears.

A lot of birds and mammals sport ear tufts. In some these tufts are oriented directionally in a vertical plane, alerting the carrier to twigs and branches and low lying 'ceilings' and somehow, deadening the sound they make as they move through or under them. It is thought they don't enhance sound, but the caracal, an elegant African cat, has tufts approaching 2 inches long (another source said 10 cm, which would be 4 inches) and they live mostly in a desert world where there isn't much cover encountered. Cats have 30 muscles in each ear and can rotate them independently 180 degrees (and they don't appreciate their ear tips being touched). Dogs have 15 – 18 muscles in each ear, and we, 6. Can you wiggle your ears? Blood hounds, which track by scent, have pendulous ears that direct scent to their noses. The fennec, an African desert fox and the smallest canid, has enormous ears for its size: its ears are thought to thermoregulate, as are the ears of elephants. Bats, known for their echolocation or sonar, can change the *shape* of their ears. Tiger moths can jam bats' sonar by emitting clicks -450 in 1/10 second!- effectively hiding their location.

Owls' ears, hidden by facial discs of feathers, are positioned asymmetrically in their skulls, enabling them to precisely locate a scurrying rodent. (This, unfortunately, does not help them in avoiding speeding vehicles, and many are killed while they are in tenacious pursuit of prey.)

While ears help in sensing sound, other structures can pick up vibrations in the acoustic environment. Some fish have Weberian ossicles (a string of articulated bones) and a swim bladder, others, otoliths or 'ear stones', like those smooth, ivory ones in drum; snakes, their jawbones; insects, hairs on their legs and tympani, drum-like membranes.

The inner ear has a whole different suite of functions (like, dynamic and static balance and equalization of pressure) and is a theme for another time. Today we muse about the ears we can see and are mildly amused (or annoyed) by politicians who make fun of others with big ears (or small hands) and wonder more about the size of their Woolnerian tips – their Darwin's tubercles- and if they can detect the mood, or, more accurately, the positions, determined by that atavistic echo positioning system posited by Darwin, of their adversaries. And can our vestigial ear tips tell us beforehand, which are friendly and which are not? The bump on my head reminds me that we aren't as astute as we think.

2015 Christmas Bird Count Summary
Brett Sandercock

The Manhattan CBC was run on Saturday, December 19 in balmy weather with clear skies and a high of 55 deg F. We had great coverage with 59 observers in 20 parties, who invested a total of 145 hours and 584 miles of effort. Our tentative tally for the day was 61,716 individuals of 94 species.

Best birds of the day included flocks of Eared Grebes on the face of Tuttle dam (last recorded on the count in 1979), an Osprey over the Kansas River (last recorded 1981), and a pair of Yellow-headed Blackbirds east of Fairmont Park (last recorded 2004).

Single sightings included a one Ring-necked Pheasant, a Prairie Falcon at Ashland Bottoms, one Red-headed Woodpecker at Pott 2, a Marsh Wren at the beaver pond near the Tuttle ponds campground, and a Swamp Sparrow.

New record high counts for the Manhattan CBC included a whopping 14 Eared Grebes, 7 Pileated Woodpeckers, 205 Yellow-rumped Warblers, and 9 Savannah Sparrows. Good news for Northern Bobwhites with a total of 107 birds, which was a 107-fold increase from the single bird found last year. A total of 6 Greater Prairie-Chickens at Konza Prairie was an even better improvement on zero birds recorded last year.

Birds missed on the day of the count but sighted as count week birds included White-winged Doves, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Purple Finch. Egregious misses of birds encountered on the Manhattan CBC in at least 1 of 3 years, but unfortunately not found in 2015 included at least five species of ducks, snipe, neither shrike, Bewick's Wren, Field Sparrow, Rusty Blackbird, or Common Grackle.

Thanks to all participants who joined the count and to the Northern Flint Hills chapter of the Aududon Society for sponsoring the compilation.

Regards, Brett

Brett K. Sandercock, Professor of Wildlife Ecology
Division of Biology, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, 66506

Eastern Phoebe *sayornis phoebe*

One of our most familiar eastern flycatchers, the Eastern Phoebe's raspy "phoebe" call is a frequent sound around yards and farms in spring and summer. These brown-and-white songbirds sit upright and wag their tails from prominent, low perches. They typically place their mud-and-grass nests in protected nooks on bridges, barns, and houses, which adds to the species' familiarity to humans. Hardy birds, Eastern Phoebes winter farther north than most other flycatchers and are **one of the earliest returning migrants in spring.**

The Eastern Phoebe's eponymous song is one of the first indications that spring is returning. It's also a great way to find phoebes as they go about their business in quiet wooded neighborhoods. Just don't mistake the Black-capped Chickadee's sweet, whistled "fee-bee" call; the phoebe's is much quicker and raspier. During early summer, a great way to find phoebes is to quietly explore around old buildings and bridges. Look carefully under eaves and overhangs and you may see a nest.

Similar Species Pewees are darker and they have longer wings, but they are most easily separated from phoebes by the phoebes' distinctive tail wagging. Empidonax flycatchers have eye rings and wing bars, which are absent in the eastern phoebe. An empidonax flycatcher flicks its tail upward; only the gray flycatcher dips its tail downward.

Sojourner Truth Butterfly Garden Rehabilitation Project
Tuesday, May 10, 2016 9 a.m. til done

The Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, City of Manhattan, KS, Parks and Rec. Department, Westar Energy Green Team, Partners for Fish and Wildlife and Ecological Services of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, have collaborated and coordinated to update Sojourner Truth Butterfly Garden in Manhattan, KS.

As part of the USFWS Monarch Initiative, a conservation approach to assist the Monarch Butterfly and other pollinators in need of management assistance, the Partners will assist to restore and augment Sojourner Truth Butterfly Garden. The collaborative efforts not only beautify the park but also provide plant species that are critical to the life history of the Monarch Butterfly, specifically Milkweed which is crucial for the Monarch larvae and adults.

The materials and plants were provided by FWS KS Partners for Fish and Wildlife and Westar Energy Green Team. Volunteers from all Partners will provide the good ol' elbow grease to upkeep the garden for many years to come.

Tuesday, May 10, 2016, beginning at 9 a.m. has been set as the date and time to convene on Sojourner Truth Park to work on the rehabilitation of the Butterfly Garden. The improvements will probably take most of the day depending on volunteers and available staff or it might be shorter. The plan is as follows but several items can be taking place at same time:

1) Weed out garden, remove invasives
2) Stain and add 2X6 and 2X4s to bench
3) Place weed barrier under walkway stone
4) Lower perimeter rock to soil height
5) Plant pollinators
6) Spread wood chip mulch

If you've got some time and would like to help, we'd love to have you!!! Come for an hour or the day. Sojourner Truth Park is at the corner of 10th St and Riley Street, across the railroad tracks south of Howie's Recycling.

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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, 66505-1932

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>and join in the discussions.

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