

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



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*Sunday, March 9th, at 2 p.m.  
Ackert Hall, Room 112*

A special opportunity! Assistant Professor, *Alice Boyle*, will lead us through the collection of *bird skins* in *Kansas State University's Ornithology Department*.

Her interests span multiple areas of ecology, and have primarily focused on avian migration systems. (She also plays the fiddle!)

Come to learn how birds are collected, preserved, and used. Study some of your favorite species up close to see features you can't see through binoculars. Join us for a very interesting afternoon.



## prairie falcon

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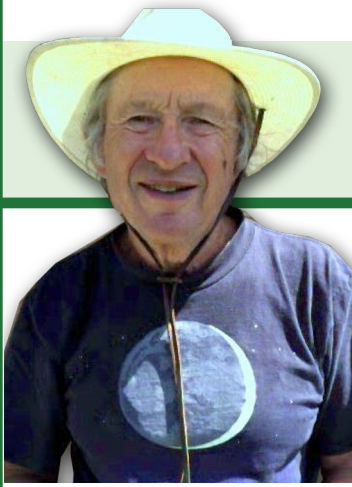
## Upcoming Events

**Mar. 3 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.**  
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

**Mar. 8 - Saturday Morning Birding**  
Meet Sojourner Truth Park, 8 a.m.

**Mar. 9 SUNDAY, AT 2 p.m.** Ackert Rm. 112  
Asst. Prof. Alice Boyle  
Ornithology Dept., KSU, "The Skins"

**Apr. 7 Board Meeting 6 p.m.**



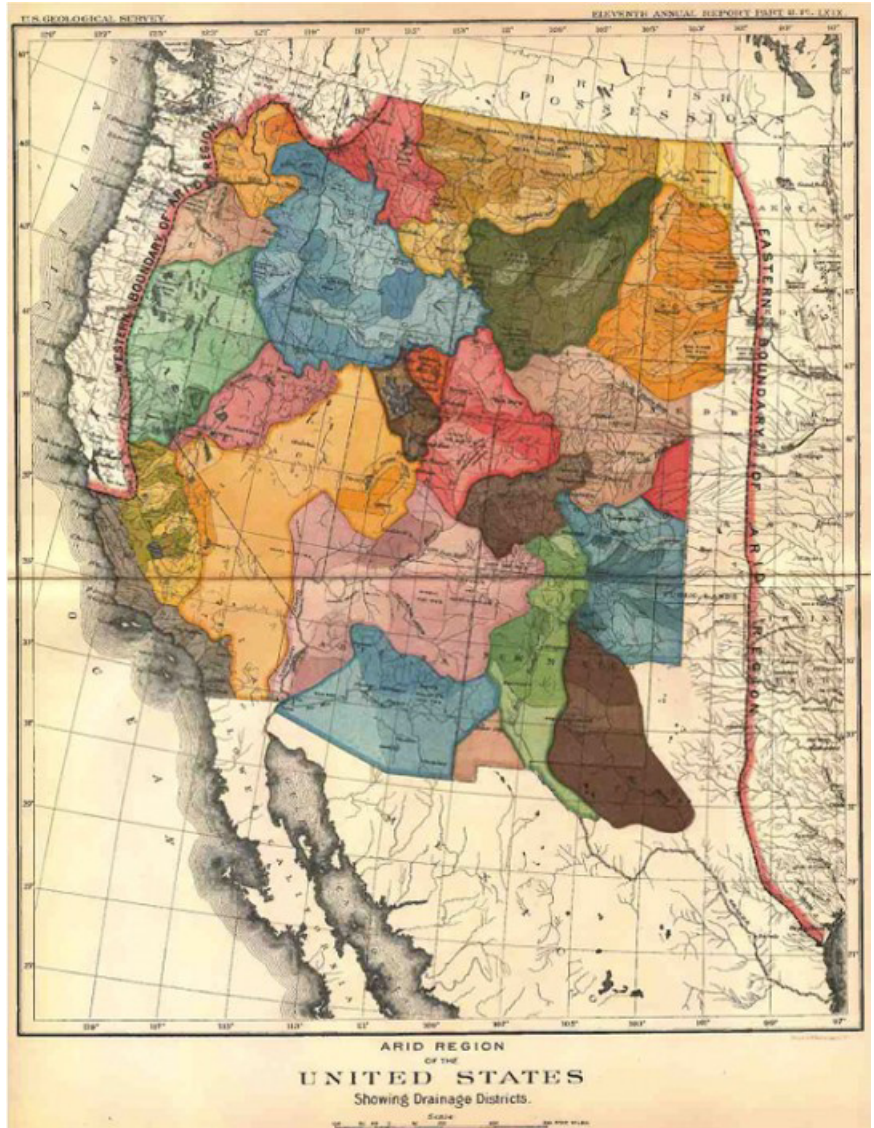
## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

What if— In this case, what if in frontier times the U.S. western lands had been made available for settlement with boundaries based on where water flowed, instead of by extending the indiscriminate grid pattern that had been put to use in the better rain-fed eastern terrain won from England by the Revolution? In 1879 explorer-geologist-ethnologist John Wesley Powell urged a map for the different lands of the West that looked like this:

It was not a new kind of idea. When private property had begun to replace feudal tenures and more precise measurements than metes and bounds were needed, what largely came into being as early surveyors extended their reach, were parcels that were long narrow rectangles. In the countryside that meant animal teams would have to plow fewer corners than if the same acreage had been squared, and more parcels could be butted against a stream course, with the areas in between left available as grazing commons. In towns it was more lots per block with abundant gardening space behind. But in the late 1700s the western world became engaged in efforts to make uniform all the hodge-podge of measurements then in existence, from loaves to cloth to casks, etc. As to land the Federal government was simultaneously in need of money, of ways to reward its Revolutionary veterans, and to manage the mass of land seekers crossing the Appalachians asking no one's permission. What could be more uniform therefore quickly plotted and sold, than equilateral squares? Later in The West, money was to be made by adding cheaply to watered holdings the land that was given up by people who went bust on the dryer squares, so, championed in the Senate by William Stewart of Nevada, the grid won out there, too.

Recently a blog by John Lavey ([www.CommunityBuilders.net](http://www.CommunityBuilders.net)) presents a map, reproduced here by permission, of what areas our states might cover if they'd been defined by watersheds. The blog includes varying speculations by himself and KU history professor Donald Worster that if the U.S. had been politically divided according to watersheds, people, thereby having a dependent/proprietary connection with that resource, might have been more protective of it. One could imagine more homesteaders





# THE UNITED (WATERSHED) STATES OF AMERICA

What if Powell's proposal had succeeded? What if all American states were defined by watershed boundary? It might look like this...

Before 1869, no one had successfully navigated the mighty Colorado River. But on August 13, 1869 John Wesley Powell, civil war veteran and geologist, and a small support crew stood at the confluence of the Virgin and Colorado Rivers after having done just that. Powell went on to float the Colorado again in 1872, and recounted the events of these adventures in his book later known simply as *Canyons of the Colorado*. Lesser known, but perhaps more important, Powell proposed in his 1879 Report on the Lands of the Arid Regions of the United States that the boundaries of the emerging western states be formed around watershed, rather than political boundary. This idea rested on the observation that because of an arid climate, a statewide organization decided by any other factor would lead to water conflict down the road.

But the railroad lobby, buoyed by Cyrus Thomas and his theory that "rain follows the plough", disagreed with Powell. This now discredited theory suggested that as new land was brought into agriculture, moisture from the soil was exposed to the sky resulting in increased precipitation. Since railroad companies owned substantial tracts of lands that would have been difficult – if not impossible – to capitalize on if Powell's proposal had taken root, they used Thomas' theory to successfully sway congressional opinion to accept state boundaries as we see them today.



able to keep their claims, coal mining operations being more regulated, Los Angeles being held to being only a port city with other, careful, development occurring closer to fresh water (albeit, as Mr. Lavey suggests, just as largely metropolitan), etc. Surely the Electoral College would be differently composed—for better or worse. There would still have been the pressures of growing population and economic opportunism as well as disagreements over best practices.

As is, in regard to water, we've long had local water districts, and broader based projects like the TVA and those of the Corps of Engineers. These, I think it's fair to say, are based on flood control, power generation, and barge paths--their goals are protecting property or providing commercial opportunities. Some of the downsides being that floods are a natural way of re-supplying subsurface moisture, and the impoundments that prevent them allow for more evaporation. In a way we have been exercising our muscles without giving sufficient attention to our vital arteries, veins, and capillaries that are affected by increasing threats from pollution, aquifer exhaustion, and climate change.

I read that here and there are efforts to slow the draw on the Ogallala, restore wetlands, and free rivers. But it seems that broad regional organizations

focused on preserving the water, and in a clean condition, could be perhaps stronger additions to the picture. And for moving in that direction I think this map, in addition to providing an uncommon and interesting way of looking at the nation, could be very useful.

Meanwhile in this month named for the Roman god of war the planet bearing his name starts rising brightly in the early evenings and keeps getting brighter. Mars, always the reddish one, forms a notable trio with the Moon and Spica in Virgo the 17-18th and with the Moon and Saturn 20th, though then a bit standoffish to the right Jupiter continues brightly, notably above the Moon above Orion the 9-10th.

Old Man Moon's other visits include with Aldebaran in Taurus the 7th, Leo's Regulus the 13th, and in the wee hours with Saturn the 21st and Scorpio's reddish Antares the 22nd. Then he takes a swim in the dawn light with Venus the 27th.

He begins March full at 2 a.m. on the 1st, gets full at 12p08 the 16th. Spring starts for us at 11a57 the 20th.

*Maps courtesy of John Lavey, The Sonoran Institute*

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## 300 Seconds

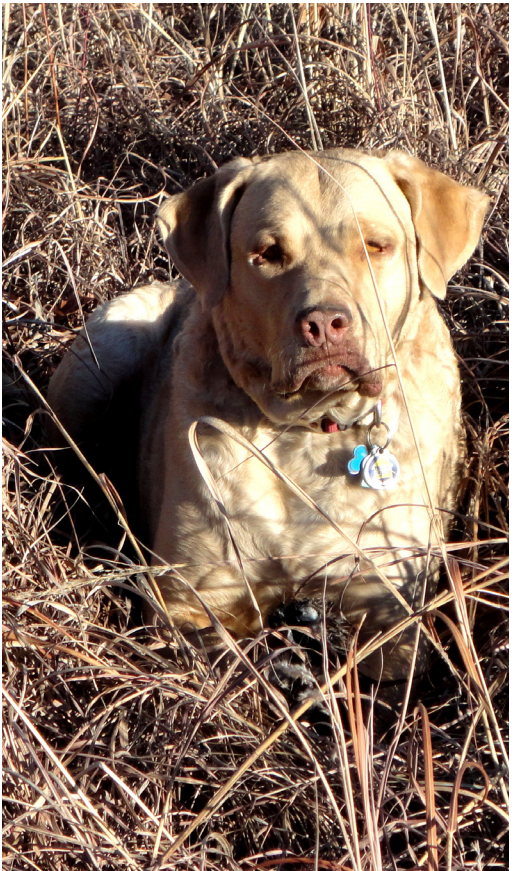
Dru Clarke

Midmorning, and still in the single digits, we had been occupied with choring and shopping. The dogs had gone on their daily run, checking the perimeter, but only Archie, the terrier, came back, running down the lane toward the house. My husband began to fret after a few minutes, called to warn me to keep an eye out on my way home then drove the back roads, calling for Tucker, our big Chesapeake Bay retriever. He is deadgrass colored, considered blonde or yellow if he were a lab, but Chessie breeders have their own color code. So he is hard to distinguish from the winter grass and fallen leaves. After three hours of searching, he still hadn't come home: I unloaded groceries, put perishables in the refrigerator, and then relieved my husband in driving our remote and lightly traveled roads while he walked to the big pond where the missing dog loves to swim, hoping not to find a break in the ice.

I slowly went a mile north, then west, south, then east two miles, then north two miles, then back down the frozen, rutted road I had first traveled, calling the dog's name all the while. Just a quarter of a mile from home, at a low water crossing, where a pile of deer hide, rib cage and vertebral column lay, a slight movement caught my eye: there, behind a barbed wire fence, lying on the ground, was a familiar shape and color, two amber eyes looking pleadingly at me. "Tucker, what are you doing? Can you come?" He tried to get up, but seemed either hurt or caught by something. I noticed a twisted, bright aluminum cable attached to the fence wire that snaked down under the dog: his right paw was trapped in a snare. Heart pounding, I tried as gently as I could to loosen the tightened wire, held snugly by a metal disc. Tucker whined pitifully as I worked on the snare: finally free, he leaped up and scrambled into the front seat of the pickup, carrying on in a whimpering voice I had never heard from him before. He licked my face appreciatively when I got behind the wheel. Luckily, his leg was not broken nor was the skin torn, although his other paw had blood on it, probably from his mouth in trying to free himself. Happily reunited with his friend, he slept on the couch the rest of the afternoon.

I called the neighbor, a cattle rancher, whose fence the snare was attached to, and he had not set it, although he did use leghold traps around his house to catch coyotes and bobcats. I had left the snare where I found it, but knowing that it had been set illegally, I went back to retrieve it so that no other non-target creature – what trappers call "bycatch" – would get caught. It had no name or address or KDWP numbers on it, and it was set close to a public road and without the landowner's permission, three egregious breaches of the law.

*continued on bottom of page 7*



## The Early “Bird Clubs” of America: an Unexpected Membership – Teenagers

M.J. Morgan



During the early years of the Great Depression, especially in states

where migrating birds thronged to nesting and resting habitat along great flyways, high schools often had nature or bird clubs. One of the earliest was the Harlingen High School Bird Club in South Texas, today, of course, a major birding destination. Yet this club may represent one of the earliest school-community partnerships in conservation.

A faculty sponsor, in this case a high school chemistry teacher named Anna May Davis, led the club in learning activities; but amazingly, students also collected nesting data, participating in such annual projects as *Bird-Lore* magazine’s “breeding census” count. (*Bird-Lore* was the national precursor to *Audubon* magazine and contains some truly remarkable stories and photographs; in addition to microform, bound issues of *Bird-Lore* are available through Hale Library Annex at KSU). The commitment of local birders and young people to the avian life of micro-regions represents a change in the mission of birding societies. In the late nineteenth century, formal ornithological clubs were composed of what one writer has called “bird-students:” almost entirely men, these career-minded collectors and taxonomists were fascinated by the scientific knowledge obtained through birding. They didn’t mind trapping or shooting bird specimens to further understanding.

After World War I, clubs began to shift toward a membership of bird lovers and observers; more middle-aged people joined, and more women. Across the 1920s, the wholesale slaughter of waterfowl in game hunting began to draw national attention. By the 1930s, hundreds of small birding clubs had formed in communities and micro-regions – like the Lower Rio Grande Valley – all across the United States. And in the late 1920s, nationally,

a movement was growing that confronted both market hunting and the collection of bird specimens and eggs. In 1929, a pamphlet appeared that may well have been read by the Harlingen High School Bird Club: *A Crisis in Conservation: Serious Danger of Extinction of Many North American Birds*. This pamphlet insisted that policy-makers consider the reality of species extinction; the authors (W. DeWitt Miller, Willard G. Van Name, and Davis Quinn) warned about impending loss of species such as the whooping crane, trumpeter swan, ivory-billed woodpecker, flamingo, buff-breasted sandpiper and the upland plover. Also listed were *twenty-six* other threatened species. This publication was issued as a wake-up call to the National Audubon Society, which, strangely, had not been vocal about extinction threats.

In American communities, *A Crisis in Conservation* became a critical publication for shaping grass-roots activism. In addition to school clubs, local societies began to meet, such as the Rio Grande Valley Nature Club. In Harlingen, this club was led by skilled ornithologist Irby Davis; his wife Anna was the faculty sponsor for the high school bird club. The joint interest held by school and community created a powerful platform for interest, research, and conservation. In reading through nesting census data and Christmas counts from the 1930s and 1940s, we find that teenagers are often credited with collecting data under the guidance of club and faculty sponsors. Seen here is a photograph of the Bird Club from a 1942 Harlingen High School yearbook. It is good to realize the role that *really* young people played in the early years of preservation. As we sadly recognize the centennial of the death of the last passenger pigeon in America – September 1, 1914 – let’s also note the bird species likely saved by hundreds of anonymous young researchers.

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Cover of *Bird Club* magazine of page 6





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# Take Note



"I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it.... People think pleasing God is all God care about. But any fool living in the world can see it always trying to please us back."

~Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, 1982

This applies to birds too - how do you not notice them!? cj

Snares were incredibly useful and efficient tools to primitive hunters whose lives depended on them to survive. Even today, tribespeople who eat and utilize game in other ways are adept at snaring. But snares are notoriously torturous: a "humane" neck snare is supposed to render the captured animal "irretrievably unconscious" within 300 seconds, or five minutes, although in most cases, if all else works as it should, it takes eight minutes for the struggling animal to reach that "ideal" state. An animal with a tough trachea – like a wolf or a large dog – may take longer. Large animals struggle more vigorously and may take *days* to die. Caught by a paw or leg, the animal may chew its own paw off to escape. This is one reason trappers and snare-setters are required to check their sets *daily*, something whoever set this one probably was not intending to do. I cringe when I think of the possible trauma or death our beloved companion may have suffered had I not seen him lying there: when I finally found him, it was the third pass we had made by that exact spot.

Of course the sheriff's office and the natural resources officer have been contacted: we'll keep the snare in case others are found that match it in the way it was made or attached. (I took a photo of it *in situ* before I removed it.) We know that we should not let our dogs run, and we walk with them daily,



but with their keen noses and an attractive, stinking carcass nearby, it is a challenge to keep them always within sight. And the neighbors know our dogs and know that they are not threats to their animals.

As I write this, Tucker is snoring loudly behind me, fast asleep on the couch, probably dreaming of licking the marrow out of the fractured femur of a deer, discarded after being field dressed, or paddling after a stick thrown into the big pond. Come spring, we'll be doing a lot of that, and we will have *millions* of seconds to enjoy each other.

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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, 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](mailto:list_serve@ksu.edu)> and join in the discussions.

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Contacts for Your Elected Representatives (anytime) Write, call or email: Governor Sam Brownback: 2nd Floor, State Capital Bldg., Topeka, KS 66612. KS Senator or Representative: State Capital Bldg., Topeka, KS 66612. Ph# (during session only) Senate - 785-296-7300. House - 785-296-7500. U.S. Senator Roberts <[Roberts@senate.gov](mailto:Roberts@senate.gov)> U.S. Senate, Washington DC 20510. Jerry Moran U.S. Capital Switchboard 202-224-3121.