

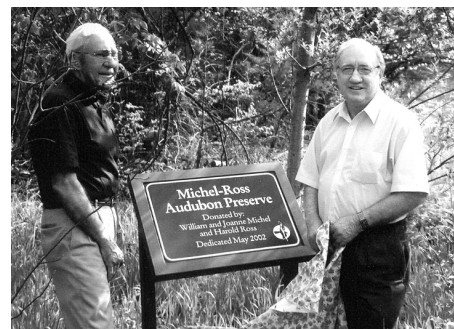
# *In Memory of Bill Michel*

Our friend and supporter.

Beginning in 1998 Bill Michel approached the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society about gifting a parcel of land for preservation. Hoogy Hoogheem was President and Jan Garton was treasurer. They met with him many times and walked the property on Stagg Hill. How would the land be used? How would it be cared for? These are some of the issues that needed to be decided.

Then in May of 2002, everything was final and ready for the dedication of "Michel-Ross Audubon Preserve" by Bill and Joanne Michel and Harold Ross.

Hundreds have enjoyed this piece of solace in the city.



Bill Michel

Harold Ross



Bill Michel

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



## prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 41, No. 9~ May 2013

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### Upcoming Events

**May 1 - Crow program 7 p.m.**  
Goesbeck Rm. Public Library

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

**May 11- Saturday Birding 8 a.m.**  
Meet Sojourner Truth Park  
(Cancelled if raining)

**May 11 - International Migratory Bird Day**  
(see page 6)

**May 13 - Butterfly Garden Cleanup 6:30 p.m.**

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



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Let's start with water. For examples, I read that Wichita's reservoir water supply is shortening, a Nebraska irrigation district is losing out

to an interstate agreement that shares the Republican River's flow, even with a spring rise expected Great Lakes shippers will be leaving 15% of their possible cargoes ashore because of low levels, etc. Meanwhile recent heavy snows in northern Minnesota are starting to melt and it's a question how much will replenish and how much flood away.

Then there's temperature. A recent forecast says to expect the 2013 summer around here to be warmer and drier than last.

That leads to climate. I do not write "climate change" because a recent book convinces me, at least from my lay perspective, that that would be a redundancy, because climate always changes. The book relates that much of the how and the where and for how long at a time climate has changed has and is becoming increasingly well-deduced, but much of the why of those changes remains to be understood. Much seems to depend on the myriad interacting effects of a garden of astronomical cycles upon the dynamics and chemistry of the Earth and its atmosphere – a boggling array of input. And being short in knowing the why puts an obvious limitation on the ability to use the past, however voluminous, to give insight into the future.

In the 1970s scientists were warning of the potentially imminent return to crop-killing cold conditions. The book explains how the shift now to front-burner concerns of global warming are decidedly rational, concomitant with there still being chances of returning cold, and in human, not geological, time spans. One can think of the abrupt chills beginning around 1300 CE that put an end to settlements in Greenland, and to the Chaco civilization in New Mexico. And the benign warm-up that helped along our western frontier movements

and beginning industrialization starting in the 1850s and led to the brief belief that "rain followed the plow." Those were relatively local results, all part, the book shows, of broader ones.

It is rather personally written by a geologist at Washington State Univ., and oddly seems to have a self-contradictory title, perhaps because the publisher's marketing department thought that "*The Whole Story of Climate*" would be more attractive than a more accurate "*What We Know of Climate and What We Need to Know*."

The author does offer an interesting worldwide project that could/should be undertaken to mitigate an overactive warming trend, but that and a more detailed summation is too much for one article. If you want to get ahead of me, the book is by E. Kirsten Peters, Prometheus Books, 2012.

Meanwhile among all those astronomical cycles (which one can encounter by referencing the Milankovitch Cycles – a fondness for math will help), Saturn provides some of its brightest light throughout the night, hosted by the constellation of Virgo and doing a three-some with Virgo's leading star, Spica, and the Moon on the 21<sup>st</sup>, getting cozier with the Moon the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Jupiter, though going to bed early, has a couple brief duets with the Moon the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. Then El Nath, the notable star marking the far reach of Taurus' upper horn, becomes the stellar part of quartet with three planets. From the 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>, tiny Mercury will shift past the star from just lower left to upper left, while just below them Jupiter slides from upper left to lower left of Venus.

While in the background an arm of Orion will wave good-by in the evening twilight, gradually followed simultaneously by the brighter stars of Gemini and Auriga, then Leo, trailed faintly by Coma (the Hair of) Berenices, then bright Arcturus in the large kite-shaped Bootes, next the little half-circle of the Northern Crown, next Hercules, with Cygnus the Swan and Auriga the Eagle just starting to come up with the Milky Way at midnight.

The Moon will be new 7p28 the 9<sup>th</sup>, full 11p25 the 24<sup>th</sup>.

© 2013 Peter Zachary Cohen

## Four & Twenty... or Maybe, A Hundred plus? Dru Clarke



(March Madness)

I still use lard for my pie crusts, but don't tell folks in advance: they usually really like the pie, even rave about how tender the crust is, and sometimes I don't even tell them then. But I've never tried bird in a pie, except once a chicken pot pie with a runny filling. I've left that version to Marie Callender since.

Evidently in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, for fun, live birds were put into pies and flew up when the pie was cut: how they survived the baking is a mystery unless the chef had a way to insert them after the pie was done. Some folks theorize that the birds were folded up in the guests' napkins. The original version of the song "Sing a Song of Sixpence" published in *Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book* had boys in the pie instead of birds. When Randolph Caldecott produced the book by that song's name it seemed to be innocent enough as a children's song, but 60 years before when the rhyme "four and twenty blackbirds" first appeared, 24 men, one of whom was black, plotted to murder the entire (British) Cabinet. When they were discovered, many ratted out the others in hopes of saving their skins – thus, "the birds began to sing." Restrictions on public meetings and literature by Parliament led to a plethora of seemingly innocuous poems with hidden meanings. Old nursery rhymes and songs had particularly dark (or hidden) themes, and maybe that is why blackbirds and not more colorful songbirds like robins figure largely in their lore. Some would be surprised that blackbirds and orioles are in the same family, *Icteridae*. Crows and ravens, the 'other' black birds, along with jays and magpies are in a different family, the *Corvidae*.

Blackbirds recently came through in droves (early March), and several mixed flocks lingered for days, coming in around four o'clock to decorate the branches of the oaks by Iris' (our Jersey) corral. They chortled constantly, as if tickled to congregate after a day afield. Mostly Brewer's blackbirds, with their topaz-eyed males and grulla (grey-brown) feathered females, they seemed to be encouraging Spring to hurry so they could be on their way. Cowbirds, too, with their bronze hoods, joined them, and I wanted to see Rusty's as well, but couldn't be sure, although I distinctly heard a 'rusty gate' sound intermittently. Some of the plumage's iridescence appeared blue- greenish black, and not the more prevalent purplish black of Brewer's. The Rusty blackbird's populations are greatly diminished, so if they found hospitality here, I'd keep rolling out the welcome mat. When they thought I'd gone, a few timidly flew down to feed on the ground by the round bale, picking through hay strewn on the muddy ground. After I saw them a few

times, I began tossing coffee cans full of sweet grain out for them to enjoy. After I came back from my Blues quest to the Delta of Mississippi and Memphis during spring break (March 16 – 25) the flocks were gone. And, I didn't see flocks there, several degrees latitude south of here; evidently they had already passed through and were here on the prairie, headed north.

A red-winged blackbird male had arrived a few weeks before the larger flocks and visited our feeder each morning. He is still here, having been joined by a host of others, not at the feeder, but out and away from the yard, perhaps seeking courtship and nesting sites.

There seems to be larger numbers of birds sitting on electric lines now, spaced like beads on an abacus, but always facing into the wind. (It is easier to take off and land in this position.) Many of these are blackbirds, but more are starlings, none of which (I gleefully relate) have shown up at our farm. Birds in their middle ear have a sensory mechanism called the Vitali's organ which detects rapidly falling air pressure and its feedback may encourage them to rest on power lines, anticipating weather changes. Perching there, too, allows for a better view of their surroundings, and there is increased safety in numbers. A Cooper's or sharp-shinned hawk (I didn't see it to verify its identity) used to hang out around Orscheln's and pick off the sparrows roosting there, and a rough -legged hawk the kids on my husband's school bus call the "traffic cop" perches on a pole near the intersection of Rte 24 and the Flush road, always alert for easy pickin's.

There are numerous references to blackbirds in popular culture: Lord Byron, Agatha Christie, the Beatles (Paul McCartney's "Blackbird" a response to '60's civil rights issues), the Showtime series the Tudors (in which Henry VIII presented a pie filled with birds), the band Radiohead (in their song "Faust Arp" mentions blackbird pie) and others.

Some folks may not like blackbirds, probably because their large numbers and noisy displays can be intimidating, but I think they are delightfully boisterous, a birdy counterpoint to the stereotypical March Madness, and not unlike the upstart Florida Gulf Coast University basketball team who plays (or played, until last night when they lost to Florida) with wild, unbridled abandon. Maybe some of those bad boys would like some of my pie, too. Instead of birds, I could try some 'gator.

©Dru Clarke March 30, 2013

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## Finally - A Triple Dove Day

Jim Koelliker

As I have watched my feeder area intently for many days this winter, I was hoping for the day when I would see all three species of our local doves on the same day. The mourning doves are daily and nearly constant visitors. I can count on a Eurasian-collared dove or two about every other day. The newest doves in the area, the white-winged one, are now visitors about two days a week. But, the triple day for all three on one day had yet to occur until today, March 24, and it was a great 69<sup>th</sup> birthday present! The snow on the ground must have encouraged them to drop by for some scratch.

I suspect that many of you have not had the fortunate opportunity to see the white-winged doves that have been in Manhattan for about two years. They are working their way north and are staying for the entire winter in urban areas despite reports others have seen them with frozen off claws. They have taken up residence in Manhattan and further north, too, it must be a result of the global warming process.

Eurasian collared-doves were a rare sighting in Manhattan until about 2000 and I have had them fairly regularly since 2001 at my feeding area. In the last several annual Christmas Bird Counts about as many of the Eurasian as Mourning doves have been reported. Eurasians stay mainly in the urban areas and their fringes. I have been through many small towns across Kansas and it is easy to find these newcomers in almost every one of them.

It was only a matter of time until I got my triple day. Just a few minutes ago I filled my feeders and two mourning doves were sitting together with two white-winged doves just waiting for me to finish.

I hope you will find all three species of doves at your feeders, soon, too. Maybe, too, I will get a picture of all three of them feeding together. Ah, another goal worth looking forward to enjoy.



Ever-present and familiar Mourning Dove feeding under my hanging feeders.



Most-recent arrivals – White-Winged Doves. Note the distinctive white wing-patch that is always visible as a narrow strip along the lower edge of the folded wing. The patch opens to a highly-visible white band on the wing when they fly.



Eurasian Collared-Dove feeding in the snow on March 24. Note the squared off tail, the ends of the black collar that continues around the back of the neck, and the stouter body compared to the other two species.



## *Bubo virginianus*

The first published description of the Great Horned Owl was made in 1788 by Johann Gmelin. It was first seen in the Virginia colonies, so its species name was created from the Latinised form of the name of this territory (originally named for Queen Elizabeth I, the “Virgin Queen”). Great Horned Owls are sometimes known as Hoot Owls, Cat Owls or Winged Tiger.



Another incredible photo by Dave Rintoul! Great Horned Owl with chick.... April 6th.

Young start roaming from the nest onto nearby branches at 6 to 7 weeks, when they are called “branchers”, but cannot fly well until 9 to 10 weeks old. Territories are maintained by the same pair for as many as 8 consecutive years, however, these Owls are solitary in nature, only staying with their mate during the nesting season. Average home ranges in various studies have been shown to be approximately 2.5 square kms (1 square mile).

Great Horned Owls are found throughout North America from the northern treeline and then in Central and South America. They are resident year-round, however, birds living in the northern part of the species’ range may migrate south. It is the most widely distributed true owl in the Americas.

Great Horned Owls have a large repertoire of sounds, ranging from deep booming hoots to shrill shrieks. The male’s resonant territorial call “hoo-hoo hoooooooo hoo-hoo” can be heard over several miles during a still night. Both sexes hoot, but males have a lower-pitched voice than females. They give a growling “krrooo-oo” or screaming note when attacking intruders. Other sounds include a “whaaa whaaaaa-a-a-aarrk” from disturbed birds, a catlike “MEEE-OWww”, barks, hair-raising shrieks, coos, and beak snapping. Some calls are ventriloquial. Most calling occurs from dusk to about midnight and then again just before dawn.

# International Migratory Bird Day

Jim Throne has coordinated the Migratory Bird Count since 2007! A big **Thank you** to Jim and best wishes as he is leaving the Manhattan Area. However, he was so considerate and responsible to find his successor, Dr. James Campbell, Research Entomologist.

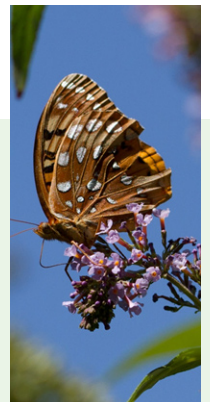
The spring International Migratory Bird Day count will be held on **Saturday, May 11**. We have several parts of Riley County that were not covered last year, so if anyone wants an area or wants to join an existing group, please e-mail me at **jf.campbell@cox.net**. The expectation is that you count all birds heard or seen in your assigned area, and provide a list to me with some trip information. I then compile the information for the county, and submit the list to eBird.org. This is a great excuse to spend the day birding, so please consider joining us.

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## BUTTERFLY GARDEN - CLEANUP SOJURNER TRUTH PARK

Second Monday of each Month

May 13th, 6:30 p.m.  
June 10th  
July 8th  
August 12th  
September 9th



## Take Note



Visit us online  
[nfhas.org](http://nfhas.org)

E-Newsletter: If you wish to opt out of the “paper” Prairie Falcon newsletter and get it on-line as a pdf - send your name and email address to Jacque Staats - [staats@wildblue.net](mailto:staats@wildblue.net)



## Name that bird...

Correction:  
FOX sparrow - not  
song sparrow!

Red rump and tail, triangular rusty spots on the breast, and overall robust/plump look are all indicative of Fox Sparrow.



*photos by Jacque Staats*





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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

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