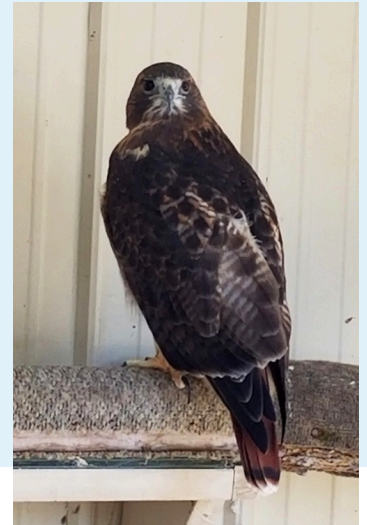


Milford Nature Center Tues. July 18th, 11:30 am

To Carpool - meet at Sojourner Truth Park at 10:45 am.



photos by Vanessa Avara



"Birds of Prey" program (30-45 min.), plus we will have an opportunity to tour the Center's exhibits, butterfly house, and outdoor areas of the hatchery, plus the nature trail.

The Milford Nature Center helps visitors understand the natural communities of Kansas. See and touch native animal furs, print your own animal tracks, and use your sense of touch to identify natural mystery items. Dioramas line the halls, and live animal exhibits feature snakes, amphibians, turtles, lizards, prairie dogs, and many more. A large bird of prey exhibit features many native raptors including a bald eagle and a golden eagle. The Butterfly House Exhibit is open from late May through early October (weather and butterflies permitting).

See page 4 for map.

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 51, No. 11, July 2023

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Upcoming Events

- July 8 - Sat. morning birding**
8:00 am Depart from Sojourner Truth Park
- July 11 - Board meeting - 5:30 Public Library**
- July 18 - Milford Nature Center 11:30 am**
Carpool - meet at Sojourner Park by 10:45 am
- No newsletter in August.**
- Aug. 1 - Board meeting - 5:30 Public Library**
- Aug. 12 - Sat. morning birding**
8:00 am Depart from Sojourner Truth Park



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

For those who take special pleasure in viewing the special arrangements that certain celestial sparks display when they appear close together, as StarDate will tell you, this could be a busy summer.

Leo's alpha star, Regulus, helps start July's displays by joining reddish Mars in adding their little bit of shine to the upper left of brilliant Venus, at nightfall on the 1st. Theirs is a valiant appearance, as Venus will be at its brightest for this stint as the Evening Star on the 7th. Before that, a bright Saturn and the Moon will perform a duet in the dawn of the 7th. Also in the evening of that 7th Mars and Regulus will begin a separate four-night show of their own, with the planet gradually wandering from below to the upper right of the star.

In the dawn, before they complete that passage on the 11th, a very present Jupiter will begin a two-days slide from the lower left to the upper right of the Moon. And in the early light of the 13th-14th the Moon, waning will show from above and to the upper left of Taurus' red eye, Aldebaran.

Then starting on the 19th things get busier. That evening the Moon will be to the right of Venus with Regulus above Venus and Mars to the upper left. On the 20th Mars will be close to the Moon with Venus and Regulus below or to the lower right, depending on your latitude's angle. Skip to the 22nd and the Moon bows out but a faint Mercury glimmers to the right of Venus if you've got a sufficiently low horizon. Next, from the 27th to the 29th, soon after sunset, above Venus, Mercury will move from the lower right to the upper left of Regulus.

And so to August when a hefty Jupiter will almost nudge a half Moon at night's end on the 8th. Then about the same time on the 9th Jupiter will be to the upper right of the Moon with Aldebaran below. Early on the 10th Jupiter has moved on but Aldebaran is still there.

On the 12th the Moon will be a small crescent presence, giving the Perseid meteor shower a chance to blossom little impeded.

On the 13th Venus takes a break to change into the Morning Star. On the 14th a lingering Moon will be below the Gemini Twins. On the 18th Mars gets to be part of a duet again, getting close to a reappearing thin Moon in the evening twilight, and the Moon moves to visit with Virgo's Spica at early dark on the 20th. Four days later, in all of the U.S. except Alaska, the Moon takes Scorpius Antares out of view as it passes in front of the star around 9 CDT, the time depending on where you are. On the 29th-30th the Moon will shift from the right of, to the lower left of Saturn.

And then: having been full the 16th, the Moon is full again on the 30th, marking a seldom occasion when a calendar month sports a second full Moon, known figuratively for a variety of possible reasons as a "Blue Moon". I'm told its glow was actually widely turned blue by the debris from the May-to-October eruptions of Krakatoa in 1883, less widely by those of Mount St. Helens in 1980, and Mount Pinatubo in 1991.

It can be noted that only certain stars get to participate in these displays because they are all set in their locations, and the ambulatory planets and the peripatetic Moon have their own orbits to adhere to, limiting interactions. Even bright stars like Auriga's Capella and the Lyra Bird's bluish Vega have to abide by advice that might go: 'Be beautiful, my dear, and let others have their juxtaposes'.

All that said, as an unrelated aside, we can note also that July 16th will be the 100th anniversary of the first legislation ever passed by the English parliament that was initiated by a woman. She bravely introduced it in February and after much consideration, Lady Astor's Law became the law six months later. It forbade the sale of intoxicating substances to anyone under 18, and is still in effect.

The Moon will be Full July 3rd (6a39), August 1st (1p32), and August 30th (8p36); New July 17th (1p32), August 16th (4a38).



The Grand Old Breed

(Conservation of One Heritage Breed)

Dru Clarke



Ascending a narrow unpaved track in the Scottish Highlands, I drove my mother, mother-in-law, and good friend Joann into unknown

territory. A treeless expanse, blanketed by shoulder-high gorse and heather, it ended abruptly in open sky. From the verge, suddenly, appeared an arresting-looking, shaggy, red-haired beast, with wide, curving horns and a curious eye that peered through a tangled forelock. My first look at a Highland cow and I was smitten for life. Twenty-five years later, three of them – two dun, one red – came home with me.

Where Highland cattle originated is unclear but it is thought they came from early Celtic migrants into the UK and, finally, to the remote regions of Scotland. Some – the west Highlands – inhabit the offshore islands, the Hebrides, and are typically black and smaller than the mainland Highlands, which are mostly red and dun and larger in stature, probably due to eating better forage. (They can also be yellow, silver, white, and brindle.) The island type, called kyloes, swims to the mainland in summer. Both types sport double coats, the fine, thick and downy undercoat, and an outer, longer-haired coat, somewhat oily to the touch. Calves are not supposed to lose body heat until the temperature drops below -20 F, hence, the breed's ability to withstand severe below-freezing temperatures and wind chills. In summer, they shed the inner coat. And it curries out as a fluffy mass similar to down. Characterized as thrifty – they love to browse as much as graze – as well as hardy, they also are arrestingly appealing, even handsome, beautiful, and, well... adorable, especially as calves.

The Livestock Conservancy, centered in Pittsboro, North Carolina, which lists endangered and threatened species of livestock (cattle, horses, poultry, goats, sheep) listed the Highland, billed as the Grand Old Breed, once as endangered, although today the registries, like the American Highland Cattle Association, are numerous indeed, as breeders began to appreciate the values inherent in the breed. At Balmoral, the now late Queen of England had for her 'fold' (the correct term for a herd of Highlands, derived from the shelters built to protect them in inclement weather) Scottish Highland cattle. The meat is lean and flavorful but we raise ours as 'yard art' and buy our meat from the grocer. (The first Highland meat, from Oz Highlands in Auburn, Kansas, I had was done up as andouille sausage and was delicious.)

James Cagney, the famous actor, kept Highlands on his property purportedly to prune undesirable woody growth. And, indeed, we discovered that they love to 'attack' red cedars, slashing at and mutilating the lower branches, often showing up with bits of green cedar leaves strewn across their backs. (It makes them smell fragrant too.) Often, I'll find them browsing in the understory of our deciduous woodland, selectively nipping off tender new growth whose properties they appreciate but remain a mystery to us. (The tendril tips of greenbrier vine I've eaten and find a satisfying texture and flavor.)

Why bother to try to maintain stocks of heritage breeds of domesticated animals? For one, the inbreeding that has occurred with commonly raised modern breeds has led to some genetic weaknesses, affecting longevity, thriftiness, and productivity. Having a diverse gene pool ensures that a certain largely forgotten (hence, heritage) population might be able to replace or modify the less desirable traits that can arise from inbreeding. Hybrid vigor, or heterosis, is one obvious outcome. (We've noticed that in our crossbreeds, faster-growing calves and attentive, defensive mothers.) Another reason is mostly aesthetic: they are nicely sized – not too big, not too small - as well as entertaining to look at (and live with: Highlands can be very affectionate and docile and most love to be curried, dropping their heads toward the ground in a submissive gesture).

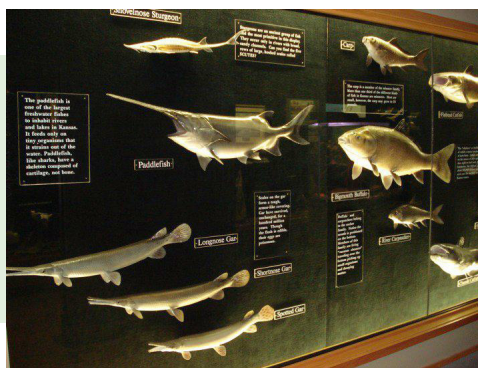
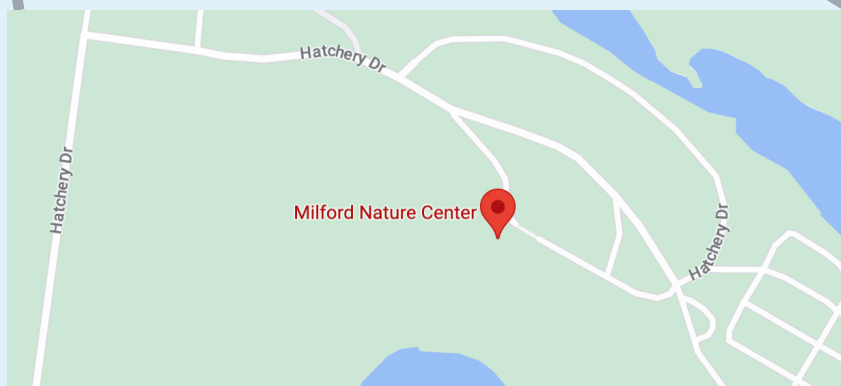
Right now, I am bottle feeding a purebred Highland heifer calf, Lilibet, daughter of Prince Harry, our blonde bull, who had to be pulled from her mother whose teats were enlarged and difficult to nurse from. We weren't sure the calf could obtain enough nourishment to thrive, so we made the difficult decision to bring her in. All is not always perfect with this or other breeds, and sometimes even birthing – purported to be easy with Highland cows – is problematic. She is eager to eat and has doubled her weight and size since she was born. And, she is behaving like a real cow, chewing on hay, alternately butting her 'toy', a cardboard box, and her corral mate, Juniata (named for the town that preceded Manhattan that was on the Leavenworth-Fort Riley military trail), a yearling brought in to be weaned. Lilibet, it turns out, is the dominant one, at two months of age.

Some ranchers choose to raise bison, the native bovine whose grazing helps to maintain the prairie biome, and we thought about it. But, after hearing of a seasoned Kansas rancher whose hand-raised 'pet' bull bison gored and trampled him to death in open pasture we were glad to have gone with Highlands who can fill the grazing niche well. Grazing, mowing, and the obvious tool of burning at regular intervals keep the prairie 'prairie.' And, with healthy prairie, habitat invites indigenous grassland species to thrive. A domesticated animal complements the wild ones.

My dad once worked for the Golden Guernsey Cattle Club and he took me on junkets to visit dairies around New Jersey, using me in photo ops. (Once a haltered calf stepped on my foot and its sharp hooves left a lasting impression on my psyche as well as my foot.) Life for me has come full circle and I wish my dad could see where I landed. I don't think he ever would have imagined it would have been in a grassy landscape surrounded by a fold of Highland cows. The Guernsey today is one of those rare listed breeds (its milk was high in butterfat content and fell out of favor with the New Age dieters): Dad would be chagrined by that, (we always had a quart or two of Guernsey milk in the fridge) but somewhat mollified by seeing that his daughter was conserving another heritage breed. Thanks, Dad, for planting and nourishing that love.

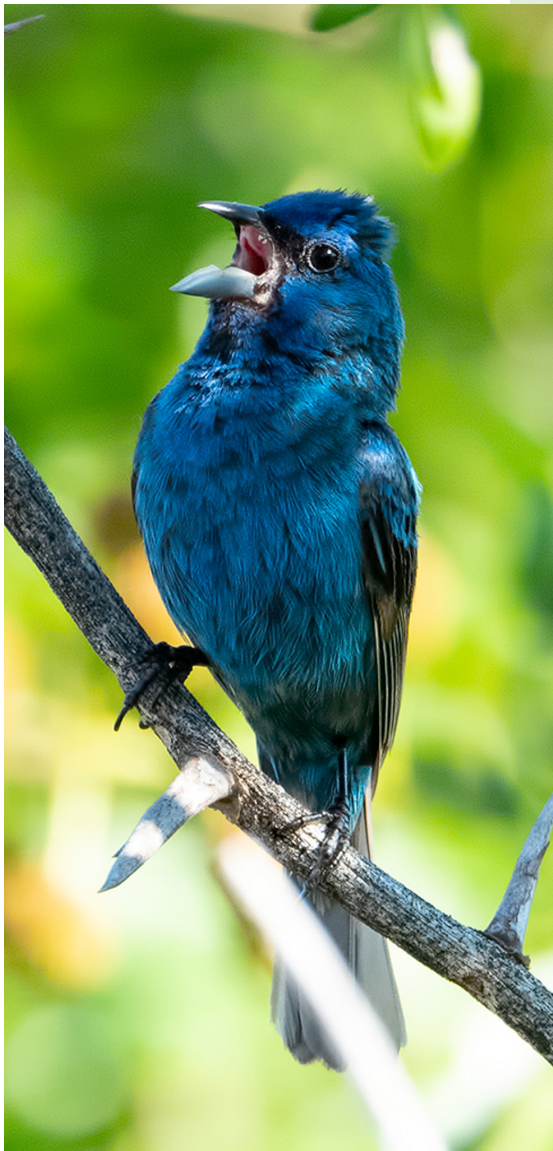
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Milford Nature Center



Indigo Bunting

Passerina cyanea



Indigo Buntings migrate at night, using the stars for guidance. Researchers demonstrated this process in the late 1960s by studying captive Indigo Buntings in a planetarium and then under the natural night sky. The birds possess an internal clock that enables them to continually adjust their angle of orientation to a star—even as that star moves through the night sky.

photos by Dave Rintoul



These brilliantly colored birds whistle their bouncy songs through the late spring and summer all over eastern North America. Indigo Buntings (*Passerina cyanea*) form “song neighborhoods” in which breeding males in an area share nearly identical songs. The sequences of notes are unique to local song neighborhoods, where buntings share or match the same song theme. These neighborhoods average three or four males, but may have as many as 22 males all singing the same song theme. A local song may persist up to 20 years, gradually changing as song themes are modified when new singers add new twists to the song tradition from generation to generation

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/indigo_bunting/overview



Indigo Bunting



Snow Bunting



Lazuli Bunting



Varied Bunting



Painted Bunting



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The purpose of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society is to teach people to enjoy and respect birds and their habitats. NFHAS advocates preservation of prairie ecosystems and urban green spaces thus saving the lives of birds and enriching the lives of people.

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