



DAVE RINTOUL presents  
 Birds and Bird Conservation in New Zealand  
 March 14, 7:30 pm  
 Manhattan Public Library Auditorium

Join us for dinner with Dave before the program at the Tallgrass Taphouse at 5:15 pm.

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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### Upcoming Events

- Mar. 5 - Board Meeting- 6:00 pm  
Tom & MJ Morgan home
- Mar. 10 - Saturday Morning Birding 8 am-11 am  
Departing from Sojourner Truth Park
- Mar. 14 - DAVE RINTOUL- NEW ZEALAND  
Manhattan Public Library, Auditorium  
7:30 pm



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

An article in Volume 4 of Elevations, a magazine format publication of the University of Wyoming Arts and Science Department, reads somewhat like a Sherlock Holmes story, with patience and new technology substituting for instant erudition.

It begins by describing the “sagebrush sea” that extends from Mexico into Canada, occupying some 129 million acres in the eleven U.S. states in between, with Wyoming providing a very significant portion. Switching metaphors, it refers to the “sea” as a miniature forest of 150-year-old shrubs with a diverse understory of grasses and forbs that “give shelter and forage to more than 87 mammal species and approximately 297 avian species”. A number of the latter exist nowhere else, and nest amid the sagebrush, including the sagebrush sparrow, Brewer’s sparrow, the sage thrasher, and the greater sage grouse.

A decline in the nesting success of these birds was correlating with the arrival of gas extraction activities. The sagebrush environment was obviously being degraded, but in order to determine a best response, in 2008 Anna Chalfoun, an associate professor in the Zoology and Physiology Department, with her graduate students began trying to detail what was happening where the affected areas were providing less sagebrush nesting shelter.

Infrared video cameras operating 24 hours provided the first surprise. The usual suspects--winged predators from shrikes to kestrels to owls--were less involved than deer mice, chipmunks, and ground squirrels. The detectives then “tested the hypothesis” that coyotes, badgers, and birds of prey thinned out around gas fields, thus allowing the rodent population to boom. Surprise two, the “mesopredators” were actually more present, apparently taking advantage of a rodent boom.

Turns out to be elementary (as Holmes might have discerned at a glance and is now confirmed by devoted investigatory work) that the while the sagebrush attrition was robbing the rodents of their supply of favorite insects, invasive plants put out nutritious seeds and other succulence, and gas field structures were providing additional shelters, all resulting in more rodent nesting success and less for the birds.

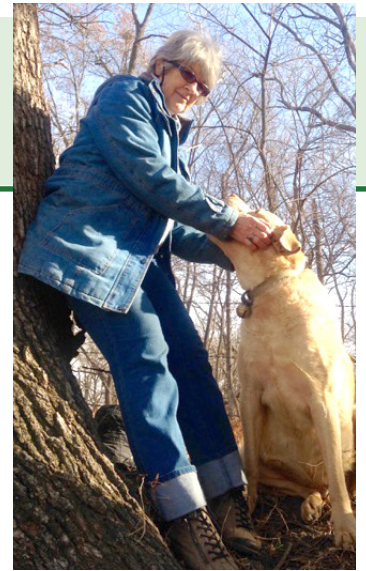
The needed response thus seems to be to restore the native environment to the gas field areas as soon as possible, a task that will likely require more than a consultation at 221B Baker Street.

By looking up on the 1st day of March one could see the rising full Moon to the left of Leo’s Regulus, and a lesser Moon rising about an hour ahead of Jupiter the 6th and 7th. While starting on the 5th and lasting through the 18th will be the marquee display of the month, a duet of Venus as the Evening Star with Mercury to the upper right; a sliver Moon to Venus’ left will make a trio on the 18th.

Meanwhile on the 10th the Moon will be the centerpiece of another trio, this one in the morning sky, with Mars to the right and Saturn a little below to the left. The Moon will be near Taurus’ Aldebaran at the end of day the 22nd, and bigger lunar disk will be back within speaking distance of Saturn in the wee hours of the 30th and 31st.

Daylight Savings returns at 2a00 the 11th, and the spring equinox occurs at 11a50 the 20th. The Moon will be twice full, on the 1st at 6p15 and 31st at 7a37, new the 17th at 8a12.

## THINGS (that make sounds in the night) Dru Clarke



Super Bowl Sunday -or the first Sunday in February, for those of you who don't follow football-a snow squall dominated the morning hours, so sequestered in the house (after bracing chores – brrr!) and awaiting the latest shipment of Brit crime books, I found, in a rescued old bookcase found in the cellar of our first shared house, a 1902 printing of Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Hound of the Baskervilles, my favorite Sherlock Holmes' chiller.

*"...There rose suddenly out of the vast gloom of the moor that strange cry... it came with the wind through the silence of the night, a long deep mutter, then a rising howl, then the sad moan in which it died away."*

By game time, I had almost all of it read, and was surprised at all the nuances of the legend I had forgotten (a function of age and lack of concentration), but the description of the hound's mournful howl led me to thinking of all of the weird and unexplained sounds we hear in the night hours.

It was only last year that I finally identified the shrill cries of a vixen fox and the toy flute 'toot- toot- toot' of a saw-whet owl. Piercing cries of an evening- foraging rabbit caught in the talons of a Great Horned owl – considerably larger than a saw- whet (or most owls and other flying birds) and infinitely more deadly- are heard more frequently, disturbingly, necessarily, for the owl. Great Horned voices are deceptively gentle and disarming, the stereotypical "Hoo Hoo" of the owl kingdom. Barred owls call so often in the late hours that they cause no anxiety or puzzlement with their "Who cooks for you?" call and response. (Many years-ago student teacher, Bob Broyles, taught me how to do that call, and I love to spring it on unsuspecting folks who have no clue what's coming.) Overhead, in the space above the east bedroom, there is an occasional shuffling, like someone with a decided limp, a searching for a more comfortable or warm spot to curl (or coil) up. No owl, that. This sound happens only at night.

Possums growl like something much larger than their ground-hugging, rolling selves. They make delighted lip smacking sounds when they lap up the milk I leave out for them when the dogs and cats don't drink all the excess from our prolific cow. (They eat ticks in season, so I like to keep them around.) There is a skunk who is silent, but her presence is known from her distinctive tracks left in mud and snow. When irritated or scared, they do whine, whimper, and screech in high-pitched tones – not particularly off-putting, as they depend on their more odoriferous defense. (My mom's skunk coat still wafts some of

that lingering scent seventy years later.) One skunk befriended our cats and came into the house one morning to have breakfast with us. I only knew of her presence by my husband's loud and profane protestations of her entry. A broom judiciously swept her outside again, unmolested.

Our dogs hear sounds every night, and even in the early morning hours. We think it is deer who venture close to the creek north of our house and who sometimes brave the electric fence to nibble on our fruit tree twigs and buds. They make no sound we can detect, so how do the dogs know they are there? But, when frightened, they 'blow.' Our neighbor's dog, who was 'the mayor' of our road, used to rouse their ire (or joy?) each morning when he came to visit. Sadly, recently he was mauled by something- another dog or coyotes?- during one of his forays and succumbed to his wounds. But it seems his buddies still hear him, or acknowledge his soul, because they continue to greet him with raucous barks every morning: we look and can discern nothing (visible) where they direct their barks. Rest in peace, Pick.

In the night, it is the wind that makes the most disturbing sounds. A doctor my husband was treated by as a kid wrote a book called, "How to Sleep on a Windy Night," but he couldn't find any remedy within the pages. The wind insinuates itself into the eaves and around corners and into your psyche and makes you wonder what it is carrying and what it will drop. It creates a frisson of anticipation, a tingling thrill; the wind is a howling hound that makes you glad you are safely inside.

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## WE NEED YOU!

This time of year we start thinking about new officers and board members. And this year, we are especially in need of new board members!

We will be losing Tom and MJ Morgan, as they are retiring and moving to Wisconsin.

We also lost our secretary, Deb Marshall in January.

AND Carla Bishop our long-time treasurer is retiring in from her real job at the University in about a year, and will no longer be in Manhattan, so is asking for someone to take her place, this year, when she will be available to train him or her.

Patricia is our President and willing to continue another year.

Cindy is newsletter editor and willing to continue another year.

Kevin Fay is willing to continue another year.

### WE NEED:

**Vice President**

**Secretary**

**Treasurer**

**Board member at large:**

AOK Representative

Education Chair

Birdseed Chair

The Board meets on the second Monday of each month. The meetings usually last about an hour. We have been meeting at the home of Tom and MJ Morgan, but will most likely start meeting at the Manhattan Library beginning in June.

Please consider giving a couple of hours a month to your Audubon chapter.

We don't bite! We do laugh a lot.



## Mike Blair Program

Over 100 people came to see and hear Mike Blair. We saw a video about nighthawks, who come here in the summer to nest and spend the winter in **South** America, juxtaposed with Snow Geese, who come here in the winter from their nesting grounds in the **North** - the Arctic.

We live in such a great place!

Mike also shared some tips about photographing wildlife, with lots of stories of his experiences.

The main message was just get out there and observe, wherever you are.



Bald eagle chasing snow geese





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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, PO Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250**. Make checks payable to the National Audubon Society and include the **code C4ZJ040Z**. 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

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