

# PRAIRIE WALK & CAMPFIRE - 5 P.M. ON SEPT. 21

Margy Stewart has invited us to her home the evening of Sept. 21 for a prairie walk and a lesson in native grasses. If you have not had the privilege of meeting Margy know that you will find her a gentle easy going teacher and a fun friend. The prairie stroll will start about 5 p.m. and we will enjoy a **Potluck around the campfire** afterwards. Her home is on **Lower McDowell Creek Rd.** which is a beautiful drive in itself.

Gather at the Stewart house, #11140 Lower McDowell Rd. Directions are: from Manhattan, cross the river on K-177, take the first right after the viaduct onto McDowell Creek Rd., past the Konza Prairie, across the interstate, and continue south exactly 5 miles to #11140, little white house with green trim on the right (west) side of the road. McDowell Creek Rd. becomes LOWER McDowell Rd. when it crosses I-70 (Exit 307). You get to the Stewart house just before you reach the entrance to Bird Runner, on the other side of the road, at #11003. After crossing I-70, stay on the paved road--if you get off on gravel, GO BACK!! Call if you need further directions: 785.539.5592

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

**Sept 7 - Saturday Birding 8 a.m.**  
**Meet Sojourner Truth Park**  
**(Cancelled if raining)**

**Sept 9 - Butterfly Garden Cleanup**  
**6:30 p.m.**

**Sept 11 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.**  
**Home of Tom & MJ Morgan**

**Sept 21 - Prairie Walk & Campfire Potluck**  
**Margy Stewart's - see above**



## Skylight plus Pete Cohen

I must have missed noticing a press release about a five million dollar grant to K-State, but I have noticed a back page article about a 23-acre experiment

at a Minnesota community college involving the same subject. It was the name of the subject that caught my eye: "camelina."

Among the songs I learned as a child was one from the Civil War era titled "Dear Evalina" and I guess the euphony resonated, so I've read more, and begging the patience of those who are ahead of me, here's what I've found.

Camelina is older than Evalina by over two thousand years. First technically described in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, its name in part is derived from the Greek for flax, and it's a/k/a as "False Flax." Apparently it would dress up resembling flax and mingle in the fields, enjoying the same soils and thus retarding the vigor of the flax. In return it offered seeds rich in oil and kept other intruders away, insisting on being the only weed in the rows.

The folks at the Anoka-Ramsey Community College in Cambridge, MN are working small scale at some relay planting. Putting in the cold-resistant, quickly-emerging camelina early, then inter-seeding soybeans and harvesting the camelina seeds before the soybeans really get going.

Larger scale experiments are ongoing at various locations from Kansas to Washington State, because camelina has already been demonstrated to be a great contributor to biodiesel and it is already in use as aviation fuel by the military and some commercial operators, greatly reducing foul emissions.

According to the sources I've found it yields 65-70 gallons of oil per acre, with about 60% of itself left over as mash that might be used as animal feed. And it would not, as with corn and sorghum, be a case of turning a human food supply into fuel. However, some ground given to camelina would mean that much less given to food production. And in one particular case its being used in conjunction with a large turkey manure supply to make fuel and this has deprived farmers in that area of a renewable fertilizer, forcing them to buy the other kind.

One farmer in Washington State is quoted as being on the verge of supplying all the fuel for his operation from the camelina he raises. Where the energy came from to provide his machinery remains a separate question.

And, unsurprisingly, I learn that there are economic problems involved with the plant's broader production. At the same time a researcher at Washington State Univ. happily reports that the plant is quite amenable to modification by transgenesis, which may be helpful enough that someday there will be a song about "Dear Camelina."

In the musical, "Annie Get Your Gun," Annie sings happily that,

*I've got no checkbooks, got no banks,  
Still I'd like to express my thanks:  
I've got the sun in the morning  
and the moon at night.*

This month, regardless of one's finances, there'll be Jupiter in the morning (as well as the wee hours) and Venus in the (early) evening. *StarDate* assures us that September starts right off with Jupiter aloft directly above the Moon, buttressed by faint Mars off to the right and Procyon, the bright and almost lone star in the constellation called the Little Dog, to its left. On the 2<sup>nd</sup>, Mars will have moved to the Moon's upper right.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> Venus will start passing by Spica, in Virgo, on the way to be close by the Moon on the 8<sup>th</sup>, with Saturn above them to the left. On the 9<sup>th</sup> Saturn swings around to keep the Moon and Spica apart and then dallies around Venus by himself a few nights after the 15<sup>th</sup>.

The Moon meanwhile has drifted above red Antares in Scorpio as it begins swelling up for its Harvest Moon appearance on, and a couple nights before and after, the 19<sup>th</sup> when it will be technically full at 6a13. It will be at its new phase at 6a36 in the daybreak of that 5<sup>th</sup>. Autumn comes officially at 3p44 CDT on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

(By the way, two of Annie's lines before the ones quoted above, go

Sunshine gives me a lovely day,  
Moonlight gives me the Milky Way.  
even though a dose of celestial moonshine will blur away the Milky Way. But no matter: it scans well.

©2013 Peter Zachary Cohen

# The Feeling is Mutual

Dru Clarke



Every day we do a head count of our stock to make sure they are doing well in the summer's often oppressive weather. My husband checks horses, I check cows.

Coming through the dense, grabbing understory and out of the woods I saw the cows grazing in a long strip of high grass. It was mid-afternoon, hot and still, and everything seemed torpid. April, one of the Highland heifers, stood facing me, munching rhythmically, only her jaws moving. Something about her usual appearance was off. Perched on the tip of her right horn was a brown bird: it looked like flycatcher, maybe a phoebe. Occasionally it would flutter up and pick something off the top of her head – the flies are terrible this year – then retreat to the horn tip. After a few of these quick forays, it must have seen me, and it flew to a head-high branch of a tree at the edge of the woods. Then, it made a tentative floppy loop around April, and disappeared into the trees behind me. How extraordinary, or was it?

I wondered about the original (modern era) North American grazers – the bison and bull elk and pronghorn, buck deer, all horned or antlered – and if they provided perches for birds. And if so, are the relationships mutual, where both benefit, or commensal, where one species clearly benefits and the other may or may not, or is neutrally affected? We've all seen the oxpeckers or tick birds in Africa riding the backs and massive horns of the Cape buffalo, probing the ears of giraffe, rhino and impala, clinging to the bellies of these large herbivores, and thought what a nice (mutual) service they provide for them. It appears that they consume not only 'bugs' but dead skin, mucus and other secretions, like ear wax. (!) But we know now they prefer blood, often contained in an engorged tick, or from an open sore, keeping it from healing quickly, and they may have little effect in controlling the ticks they are named for (Weeks, Paul: "Red-bellied Oxpeckers: Vampires or Tickbirds?").

Brown-headed cowbirds follow our domestic herds of cattle and horses, feeding on the insects kicked up by their hooves, and at least one source I found said they sometimes ride on their backs. Cattle egrets – relative 'newcomers' from Africa via South America – opportunistically hang about as well. (In Africa, they have been seen riding on buffalo backs.) More related to herons than to other egrets, they are oddly adapted to drier terrestrial habitat: grasslands are typical ones to find them in. A lone cattle egret visited our place this spring, mistaking a white ceramic gull (a gift from my mother-in-law) screwed on top of a fence post for a potential mate. It repeatedly flew to an adjacent fence post and looked quizzically at the fake bird, cocking its head and positioning

itself so that its 'intended' could get a really good look at it. Finally, after two days, in frustration, it left, more than likely in pursuit of a more responsive partner. These birds are commensal in their relationship with herd animals; they seldom can be found other than associated with them, and they clearly benefit from their proximity, but there is no recognizable advantage to the herds. In fact, there is no environmental disruption that has been documented by the arrival of this hunchbacked bird to our continent.

The native cowbird, however, is the ultimate opportunist. It has galumphed its way across the land, following settlers and their domesticated animals with their accompanying grain stores and fenced pastures to glean the leavings and insects easily picked off closely grazed grasses. Mowed lawns offer a similar repast. And, as a brood parasite, little energy is wasted on parenting: many neotropical migrant birds that nest where cowbirds live are convenient and devoted foster parents for the chicks that emerge from their earnest nests. Two new species of cowbird – the bronzed and the shiny – have immigrated to our shores from the tropics and may, once firmly established, usurp a native's niche. For now, the bronzed is primarily in Gulf coast states, the shiny, in southern Florida.

Much of the natural world seems to adapt to change; if it doesn't, it disappears. On June 26, 1804, William Clark (of Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery) noted when they arrived at the confluence of the Kansas and the Missouri Rivers "a great number of parrotqueets," the Carolina parakeet. The last wild one was shot in 1904, and the last individual died in captivity in 1914, the same year as the Passenger pigeon, Martha. While the Carolina parakeet may be gone, so could have the wild turkey, noted by the Corps of Discovery to be 'abundant' in 1804. It was extirpated in the Missouri Valley of Nebraska and Kansas by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it is here today, in numbers that allow for annual harvests. Why? because human beings reintroduced it and planned for its management and protection.

The bird on April's horn was a flycatcher of some sort, probably a phoebe, but not a cowbird. What matters is that these glimpses of how the natural world *is* are revelatory, and show how little we really know or understand about it.

©Dru Clarke, Aug 5 2013

*(In memory of my brother, a USFWS fisheries biologist, who would have been 78 today)*



## Cheyenne Bottoms

### The Wetlands Are Wet This August!



The morning breeze was actually chilly at Cheyenne Bottoms on August 18 when we stopped to walk the refuge roads. Considered “the most important ecosystem in Kansas,” and designated a “Wetland of International Importance,” Cheyenne Bottoms has received a nourishing and restorative amount of rain this summer, especially recently.

In nearby Hoisington, newspapers are running articles about “the Hoisington flood.” In the Bottoms, water diverted

from Walnut Creek is roaring from a culvert, sunflowers are head-high, and everywhere is a green lushness almost magical for Kansas in mid-August.

Waterfowl are eating abundantly from invertebrates, in turn flourishing in the rich water levels. We saw many groups of mixed waterfowl and other birds, content in their best habitat. Bobbing, wading, poking for food, swaying on the tall reeds, hiding in the rushes, skimming the rippling water were many cattle and snowy egret families, several white-faced ibis, a heron that may have been one of the green herons spotted recently by the refuge manager, a flock of black-necked stilts, redwing blackbirds, and killdeer pairs. We heard dickcissels calling across the wide waters (did you know a dickcissel is a member of the cardinal family? Helpful bird lists available at the refuge entrance taught us this)! By the end of October, waterfowl migration to Cheyenne Bottoms can reach hundreds of thousands of birds. But just now, with the brilliant and subdued colors that water can bring to a wetland, the flashing of one pair of white egret wings in a clean arc above a stand of rosy-blooming smartweed seems just about perfect.

*MJ Morgan, with photos by Tom Morgan*



ALSO REPORTED: Patricia Yeager and Susan Blackford saw Whooping Cranes from an Amtrak train window on Aug. 10th just before passing through Cut Back, Montana.

# Participate

As the weather cools down and fall migration is underway it is a great time to get outdoors. Please consider yourself invited to participate in one of your Northern Flint Hills Audubon Activities.

## **The Work Helper:**

If you are able bodied and like to work in the dirt, the butterfly garden at Sojourner-Truth Park and the Alsop property at 17th and Laramie await your tools and know how. Specific tasks needs are: weeding (anytime) , watering (requires a key and some coordination with others), rototiller, stonework (pavement and/or wall).

## **The Enthusiast:**

Whether you enjoy bringing cookies to the laborers or sending your opinion to Congress, there is no doubt that your support in whatever way you show it provides momentum for our chapter.

Know that simply attending any activity is a great morale booster to those who are able be more involved. So join us in any way you wish and it will result in a pleasurable year for all.

## **The lifetime Learner:**

Attend a meeting or give a talk yourself. Keeping in the know and connecting with others of like mind is the fertilizer of inspired action.

## **The Financial Supporter:**

We are a frugal board of directors and all volunteer. Our greatest costs have been to pay property taxes on our two properties and maintain the Northeast Park restored prairie area, Cecil Best Trail and the butterfly garden. Postage to bring a paper Prairie Falcon to you is another.

We will need more dollars than usual to create the Alsop bird sanctuary. Walkways, a fountain, benches, bird-friendly plants and long-term maintenance are being planned. Help us make this a reality.

## **Volunteer to be on the Board:**

We are always in need of more voices and input. We welcome anyone with an interest in moving our chapter forward, engaging our membership and educating the public about birds.

-Patricia Yeager



Giant Swallowtail - photo by Donna Roper - taken at the Butterfly Garden

## **BUTTERFLY GARDEN - CLEANUP SOJOURNER TRUTH PARK**

**Cleanup - 6:30 p.m. Sept. 9th**

Just over the railroad tracks south  
of Howies Recycling on 10th St.

**THANK YOU** to Ron and Judy Parks, Dick Oberst, Jacque Staats, Kevin Fay, and Eve Parks, for all their help with the Butterfly Garden this summer. They also helped with removing invasive trees from the restored prairie in Northeast Park.

Also thanks to those who helped remove the invasive honeysuckle on the Alsop property.



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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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