

## Saturday, Dec. 16, 2017 68<sup>th</sup> Manhattan Christmas Bird Count see pg. 4

Other area CBCs:

Friday, Dec. 15- Olsburg Cindy & Gary Jeffrey  
gjeffrey@twinvalley.net or cinraney@ksu.edu 785.565.3326

Sunday, Dec. 17, Wakefield  
Chuck Otte otte2@cox.net 785.238.8800

Tuesday, Dec. 26, 2017 Junction City  
Chuck Otte otte2@cox.net 785.238.8800

For a list of all the Kansas CBCs go to Kansas  
Ornithological Society:  
<http://ksbirds.org/kos/2017CBC.htm>



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



## prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 46, No. 4 ~ December 2017

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### Upcoming Events

Dec. 4 - Board meeting 6 p.m.  
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

**DEC. 2 - BIRDSEED PICKUP - 8-11 a.m.**  
**UFM Parking Lot**

Dec. 9 - Saturday Morning Birding 8 a.m.-11 a.m.  
Departing from Sojourner Truth Park

**DEC. 16 - Manhattan CBC**



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Through the wonders of the Internet you may still see Charles Coborn (1852-1945) singing

a hit song he first sang in 1888. It's titled "Two Lovely Black Eyes" and refers not to some alluring lady, but to a young fellow who gradually learns not to express his political opinions before knowing whether or not his audience agrees with him.

I've been occasionally and conversely reminded of the song when noting the two bright adjacent stars, like two lovely white eyes, Castor and Pollux, that represent the heads of the Gemini twins in the constellation named Gemini. Its stars form a long, narrow rectangle with two other notable stars forming their feet just behind Orion's raised right arm, with the bright star, Procyon below the center of the rectangle. Following behind them is a lot of mostly dark sky populated by the dim stars of Cancer the Crab to the south (nearest Pollux), with Leo Minor to the north (nearest Castor).

This month the Twins rise in the early evenings as if they were abed, traveling feet-first but as each night progresses they shift into a more upright position and in setting at dawn seem to walk down to the western horizon.

As with many mythic figures their story has many forms, but generally they are the offspring of Hera, wife and sister to Zeus, who seduced her while appearing as a swan, or perhaps a cuckoo. They participated to their credit in the search for the Golden Fleece and in the Trojan War. From the former they became patrons of mariners and the source of St. Elmo's fire. In the latter Castor was killed, having actually had it seems a different, mortal father. But Zeus re-united him with the god-fathered, and thus immortal, Pollux, in the sky. Some ancient coins depict them half surrounded by egg shells.

Through a sufficient telescope Castor is a grouping of six stars whose movements result in its

having a pattern of glowing now a little brighter, now a little dimmer. Pollux appears as a giant with a circling planet.

The Geminids, the meteor shower that appears to originate amid Gemini, is unlike other showers for being associated with dust trailing off an asteroid, instead of the mostly icy debris from a comet. The asteroid is named Phaethon, and is the named asteroid whose orbit brings it closest--apparently regarded as potentially perilously close--to Earth. The display becomes visible from December 4th to 16th, peaking the evening of the 13th into the wee hours of the 14th. With the Moon demurely thin at the time this year, estimates I've seen range from 50 to 120 darting lights per hour could be visible.

As for the rest of the sky, planet-watchers will again have to be mainly early risers, with perhaps the most interesting event occurring before dawn of the 31st. Jupiter and Mars will be close in the SE. Between them will be Zubenelgenubi, one of the dim stars of Libra the Scales. Its Arabic name means "southern claw", which would seem more applicable to Cancer the Crab. However, the "claw" once belonged to Scorpius who neighbors to the east. A group of other, also dim, stars, also representing the Scorpion's claws, including eastward, Zubeneshemali ("the north claw"), were separated into a set of scales. The general theory is that this was done because the Sun visits in those stars' "house" during the fall equinox, and something was needed to symbolize/recognize the equality then of day and night.

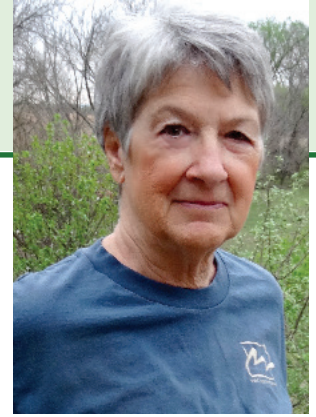
Other occasions this month occur when Jupiter and Mars gather beneath Virgo's star, Spica toward the first light of the 13th and 14th, then on the 15th waning Moon adds in to form a Moon-Jupiter-Mars-Spica diagonal with Spica at the upper end. Also, the Moon moves from the right to the left of Leo's star Regulus early on the 8th and 9th. Then a bulky Moon crowds out Taurus' Aldebaran the 29th, but lets the star shine beside it the 30th.

The winter solstice occurs at 10a28 the 21st. The Moon will be full the 3rd at 9a47, new and at its furthest distance the 18th at 12a30.

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# Rural Hands

Dru Clarke



I worked at a polling place in Pottawatomie County during the recent election and checked in the voters by asking for their photo I.D.s to scan and to verify their registration. Pott County, nearly 700 square miles – that's 70% the size of the state of Rhode Island – is a traditionally rural farming and ranching chunk of the Northern Flint Hills, once 'huts and ruts' on the Oregon Trail, limestone outcrops and thin soil except for the bottoms. Many of the men and women who come to vote are wobbly in gait and bent from years of heavy lifting, wrangling livestock, and coaxing reluctant machines to run just one more season. Many used canes, some, walkers. Their eyesight is improved by sturdy glasses. The men – those who still worked on and with the land and what it required- wore canvas Carhartt jackets, frayed at the blackened cuffs, mended on the sleeves (usually with pieces of worn out denim jean legs), embellished with smears of grease, mucus, sometimes other dried animal fluids. What I noticed most about them was their hands. Their fingers were thickened and calloused, some crooked to the point of being painful to look at, and some had bandages – a few freshly applied, others, soiled – on various joints. All were browned by days in the sun (most of these folks are genetically white) but had gone ashy in the cold weather bearing down at this season.

Some, I knew, owned – or were stewards of – thousands of acres, and they were taller, straighter, slimmer and appeared more well-heeled than the others. Most, though, were scraping by and hanging on to their parcels they were tied to, financially and emotionally. Their land, grazed and cultivated, is crucial for the survival of wildlife, both native and migratory. Those wild edges that aren't grazed or 'turned' provide cover and forage for all sorts of creatures. The inaccessible outcrops of rock have niches for 'hides' and sunning spots for the collared lizards, and crannies for burrowers like the woodchuck. Forbs – wildflowers growing with our native grasses – hold up their seed heads throughout the winter months for birds that persist here, or those that make their way here from northern climes. Many of these landed folks stay, too, because they love the land and all that it promises to not only produce but reveal to them as the seasons pass.

They talked at the polls of the big buck they saw by the creek, or the covey of quail that burst from the cover of ragweed. They shook their heads at the dearth of rain but know it will come again if they're patient. And, they were glad they built that terrace and grassway before the rains return.

Much of the county along major traffic corridors, is being converted to subdivisions, houses being built cheek to jowl, and roads being turned from dirt to gravel to asphalt or concrete, making them impervious to water absorption, exacerbating rapid runoff and

erosion sometimes far from the source. Much agricultural land and its associated wild places are being lost, not to be replaced. As we embrace 'growth' and 'development' we need to keep in mind the cost not just in dollars but in natural losses, and in that innate need we all have for a connectedness to the land that sustains us and all life. New communities are emerging, and the population of the county is changing: Need its character and its ties to the land change too?

These folks will go home after voting, look out of their living room windows or sit on their front porches, and survey the landscape, uneasily sensing inexorable changes, hoping to survive them. Most have no retirement fund: they are invested in the land and sometimes are forced to sell

sections of it to continue paying the bills. The land has become their 401K's.

The ones with smooth white hands in suits and dresses who voted may be the children of those with rural hands. Let's hope they remember their childhoods fondly and not just the chores they reluctantly carried out, but the fragrance of sweet milk, the fleeting glimpse of a running deer, the lilting song of a woodland or grassland bird. Will they and the rest of us keep the land productive and a destination for all of life? For all our sake, I can only hope.

© 2017 Dru Clarke,

Photo by Dan Clarke  
(Dru and Mike Clarke's son)





# Christmas Bird Count

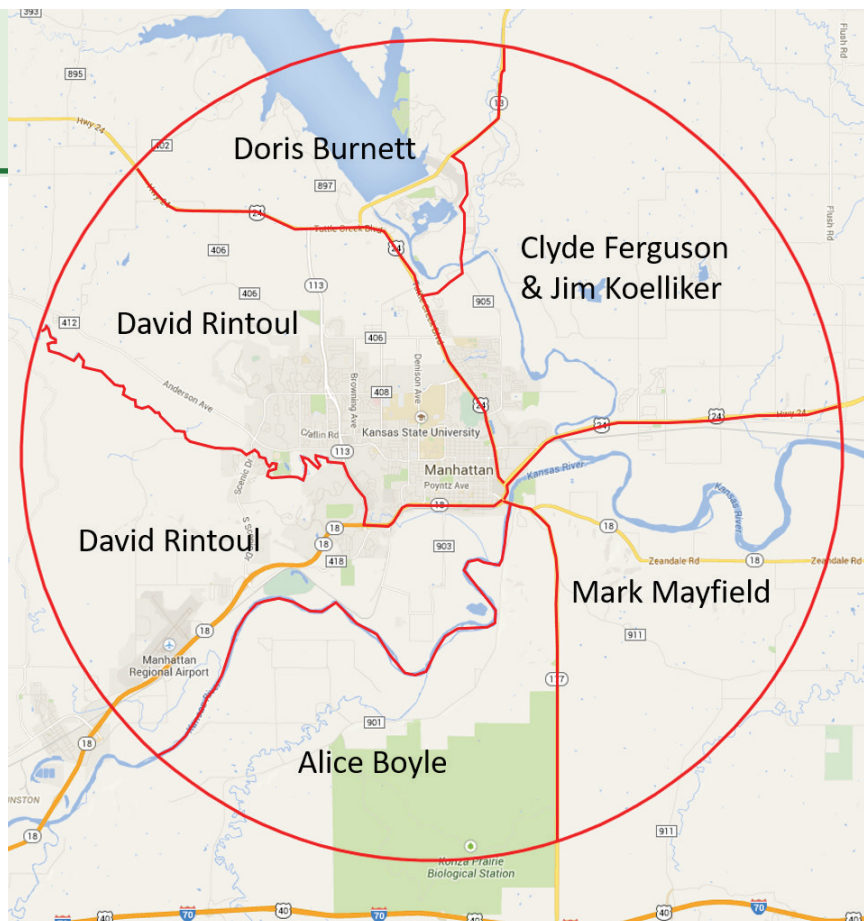
Mark Mayfield, Compiler,  
SE sector Leader  
785-410-3073, markherb@ksu.edu or  
ferguson.mayfield@gmail.com

David Rintoul,  
NW AND W Sector Leader  
785-537-4143, drintoul@ksu.edu

Jim Koelliker, (Co-led by Clyde  
Ferguson) NE Sector Leader  
785-323-7157, koellik@ksu.edu

Doris Burnett,  
N Sector Leader  
785-532-9411, dburnett7750@gmail.  
com

Alice Boyle, South Sector Leader  
785-477-9064, aboyle@ksu.edu



## 68<sup>th</sup> Manhattan Christmas Bird Count Dec. 16, 2017

Six teams of bird watchers will look for birds on December 16th in the Manhattan Christmas Bird Count circle (see map above, 7.5 miles in radius and centered at Anderson Hall). New participants are always welcome and expert birding skills are not required! If you would like to participate, please contact Mark Mayfield (see contact info above) he will assign you to a group that needs extra help. If you live in the area and wish to join a group in one of the six sections, you can also contact the group leaders by phone or email.

The count will start at dawn and end at dusk, unless you are part of a dedicated group looking for owls in the dark. The count will be held in sun, rain or snow, but arrangements can be made if you can only participate for part of the day. We would also like to invite folks who live within the count circle to count birds at their feeders on December 16th as part of the surveys. If you would like to help with feeder-watching, send Mark an email for instructions and a checklist. Count numbers and number of species will be compiled for all groups and participants at the end of the day at the chili supper. Please join us to hear reports of the day's sightings and stories from the day's adventures!

If you have bird records to provide and cannot attend the compilation, please give those to the sector coordinator for the area prior to the compilation if at all possible. If you don't know who to send them to, please report them to Mark. We encourage all participants to submit their observations to eBird and can provide assistance if anybody wants to learn more about this important resource for birding in Kansas!

### Manhattan Christmas Bird Count - Compilation and Chili Supper

Join the NFHAS and fellow birders after the day of birding for a potluck supper at 6 p.m. on December 16<sup>th</sup>, at the Seniors Service Center, 412 Leavenworth, Manhattan, KS. A few volunteers will prepare chili but please feel free to bring a side dish to share. Free-will donations to NFHAS are also welcome. We encourage you to bring your own tableware to help us reduce the amount of trash. Enjoy good food, good companionship, and find out how this year's count compares to previous years! If you have any questions on what to bring for the supper or can help with setup, please contact Tom or MJ Morgan by phone 785-539-8106 or email morganmjt2@gmail.com.



## Take Note



MJ Morgan and Kevin Fay  
“clippers ready”



Michell Ross Preserve  
Birding and clean-up:  
**Thank you**  
Tom & MJ Morgan,  
Kevin Fay,  
and Patricia & Kent Yeager

Tom Morgan



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Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society.  
Edited by Cindy Jeffrey, 15850 Galilee Rd., Olsburg, KS 66520. (cinraney@ksu.edu)  
Also available on-line at [www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html](http://www.ksu.edu/audubon/falcon.html)

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

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Newsletter:	Cindy Jeffrey - <a href="mailto:cinraney@ksu.edu">cinraney@ksu.edu</a> 565-3326
Fieldtrips:	Patricia Yeager, Kevin Fay 776-9593
At-large:	Tom Morgan

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.