



Photo by Dave Rintoul

Bewick's Wren

This species is named after British engraver Thomas Bewick—a friend of pioneering bird artist John James Audubon, who collected the first recognized specimen.

These master vocalists belt out a string of short whistles, warbles, burrs, and trills to attract mates and defend their territory, or scold visitors with raspy calls. The male learns “his” song before leaving his parents’ territory, before the first winter. He doesn’t learn it from his father, but from

other males in the area, changing it a bit to make it his own.

Bewick’s Wrens are still fairly common in much of western North America, but they have virtually disappeared from the East. Their severe decline coincides with the expansion of the House Wren, which frequently removes eggs from nests.

The adult has a long tail that is often bobbing or held upright. It has a long, slender bill, is dull brown above and ashy gray below.

(Similar to Carolina Wren - Carolina is chubbier with shorter tail and has rich buffy underparts instead of dull gray. The Carolina Wren’s song is sweet and rolling much different from the jumble of notes of the Bewick’s. Their ranges now overlap only in a limited part of the central U.S.)

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 42, No. 3~ November 2013

Inside

pg. 2 - Skylight Plus
Pete Cohen

pg. 3-4 - Mudlarking
Dru Clarke

pg. 5 - Save the Date
Squaw Creek Field Trip
upcoming CBCs

Upcoming Events

Nov. 4 - Board Meeting 6 PM
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

Nov. 9 - Birdseed PICKUP 8:30-11:30 AM
UFM Parking Lot

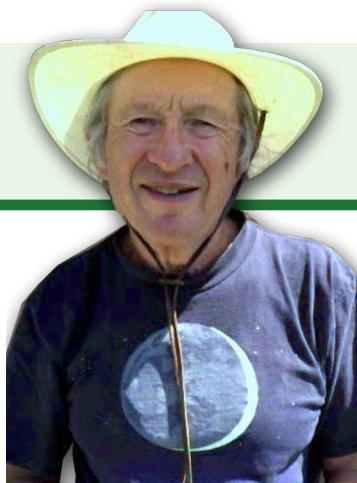
***Nov. 23 - Squaw Creek NRW Field Trip**
See page 5 for details

Dec. 2 - Board Meeting 6 PM
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

Dec. 14 - Manhattan CBC contact Dave Rintoul
More info in Dec. newsletter

Dec. 15 - Olsburg CBC contact Gary Jeffrey
785-468-3587 or cinraney@k-state.edu





Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Folks interested in astronomy have been growing “comatose” for some time and the syndrome is becoming more intense with

the attendant fever expected to break, one way or another, November 28th. The cause has been designated C/2012 S1, a/k/a Comet ISON, because it was discovered telescopically by two Russians of the International Scientific Optical Network at Kislovodsk, in the second half of September last year. It is expected to be a great show, or – by historical averages – a no-show.

Hopes spring because in several ways it seems to be replicating the approach of the Great Comet of 1680, the first comet, incidentally, whose approach was detected by telescope, and the one that Newton used to verify Kepler’s Laws. (Thus, it is also referred to as Kirch’s or Newton’s). It’s also called a “grazer” because it came close to the Sun. It came within Earth’s orbit by November 17th, burned (almost literally) a hairpin-tight U-turn around the solar disc, and was on its way out past the orbit by January 5th 1681, holding together and performing brilliantly. It displayed an exceptionally long tail, shown in one depiction as being more like a stretched out thread of yarn than the more common fulsome filmy tresses. The word “comet” derives from the Greek *kome*, meaning hair, and it used to be that that “hair” was referred to as a beard as the comet approached the Sun, not becoming a tail till it went past, but that distinction has faded away.

It seems certain that ISON is not the 1680 ball of ice, which has a period figured at some 9000+ years. Whether ISON has the same stamina literally remains to be seen.

As I write its nucleus is being given as 3.1 miles in diameter, and I learn it may become visible to the naked eye after the first week of this month, joining the conversation between Mars and Regulus, then moving to listen in on Saturn and Spica. Expectations/hopes, as I write, are that as it reaches perihelion (its closest to the Sun) it will be as bright as Venus. It

should then remain visible though dimming through December and pass close to Polaris on January 8th.

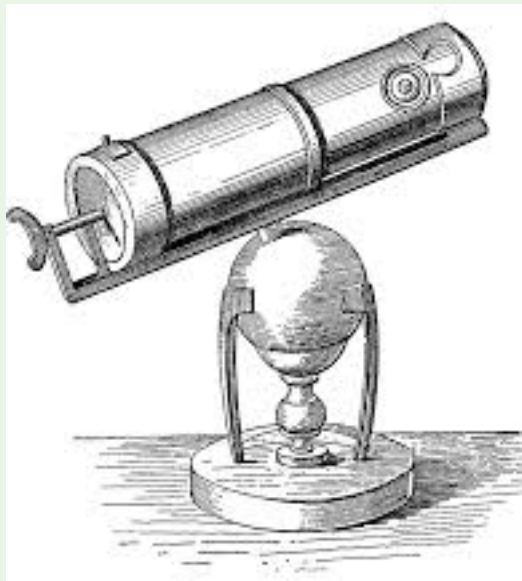
The Great Comet of 1811 was held responsible by some for causing the great New Madrid, Missouri, earthquake of that year, and praised by some for providing an especially fine wine crop in France. What acclaim or blame will come along with ISON is another question mark pinned to the calendar.

What seems much more certain is that Venus will be

seen moving closer to the Moon from its left on the evenings of 5th and 6th upcoming, and on the 18th she will mark the top left edge of the handle of that famous, if modest, Teapot that Sagittarius keeps carrying at the southern end of the Milky Way.

Jupiter and the Moon will make a bright pair as they rise mid-evening on the 20th -21st. And those up early can watch furtive Mercury, actually glittering brighter than Saturn, as they perform a partial *pas de deux* the 25th and 26th. Saturn will be below to begin, then above.

On the 29th, Spica will be close enough to the Moon to tell what it heard as ISON passed earlier. The Moon will be new on the 3rd at 6a50, and full the 17th at 9a16.



©2013 Peter Zachary Cohen

Mudlarking

Dru Clarke



"They may be seen of all ages, from mere childhood to positive decrepitude, crawling among the barges at the various wharfs along the river; it cannot be said that they are clad in rags, for they are scarcely half covered by the tattered indescribable things that serve them for clothing; their bodies are grimed with the foul soil of the river, and their torn garments stiffened up like boards with dirt of every possible description."*

So appear the earliest mudlarks, folks who eked out a living by river combing, the fresh water equivalent of beachcombing, enriched occasionally by pilfering barges, ships and docks of goods to sell "secondhand." Some of us mudlarking on the Big Blue and the Kansas Rivers today may resemble these scruffy beings, although we probably don't earn our livelihood this way.



A recent canoe float down the Big Blue, from Rocky Ford to the Route 24 bridge, on a brilliant autumn day, yielded some treasures, both "worked" and "natural."

Near the sole reach of rapids on this portion of the Big Blue that we careened crazily through, amid peals of panicky shouts and laughter, we watched a kingfisher, that javelin of a bird, aim upstream on a rapid trajectory. The first "worked" find was among the riprap, positioned along the outside bank to stabilize it against strong flow. Two gargantuan round and flat stones with concentric grooves - millstones, probably from Rocky Ford's old grist mill (?) - reclined like fallen monuments. They seemed museum pieces, now destined to act as sentinels to be admired only

by those who float or fish the river.

Further downstream, a sandbar was hunting ground for "peeps" who scuttled to and fro. A killdeer, our most familiar shorebird with its distinctive double collar, motored along the beach.

Negotiating around trotlines with bleach bottle floats to identify their location, we passed a great blue heron, statuesque and elegant. Its proximity to the trotline made us think it was a good fishing spot.

A recent trip to a beachcombing conference in Maryland took me to Chesapeake Bay where crab pots were set, their buoys dimpling the water and warning our launch away from them. On a deserted barrier island I was lucky enough to find an English reed pipe bowl in the last strand line left by the tide: our leader dated it to the 1840's and said it was the find of the weekend!

An oxbow, a former portion of the river



channel cut off by changing conditions, we decided to explore, having "discovered" it many years ago. Then, it was newly formed and lay behind a high sloping bank of sand, and it was unvegetated but populated by enormous carp who breached and slapped loudly on the water's glistening surface. Now, looking from the river, it appeared to be

simply an extension of riparian forest: instead, it was a thicket of willows standing in knee-deep water with tiny, larval fish swimming among the thin trunks. Cicadas buzzed and crickets chirped, a Kansas version of jungle. On the berm, the broken edge of the sloping bank, large gravel lay in a distinct stratum, a good place to comb. My husband picked up a scraper and I, some chipped pieces of chert, a broken fragile pink paper shell (a species of freshwater mussel), with opalescent pink nacre on its inner surface, and a piece of frosted glass worn smooth by tumbling in sand. Downstream we found that the ox bow had not been completely cut off and that a shallow, narrow channel connected it to the main river. It was a relief to know that the tiny fish could escape during low water.

Most of the river's reach had an earthy fertile smell about it, but one portion, just above where we debarked, was fetid, perhaps caused by a housing development with leaking sewers. The water here was fouled with fluffy brown puffs that I did not want to examine too closely. We pulled out at the river access, sweaty and tired, but decidedly cleaner than the mudlarks of old London working the banks of the Thames.

A few days before this float on the Big Blue, canoeing in the Kansas River just upstream from St. George's river access (Boggs Landing) we passed a bar with one lone Canada goose, honking sonorously and padding frantically back and forth, but not fleeing as we approached. It was there, still alone, when we returned, and we weren't sure if it could fly. A few years ago a similar bar, just downstream from this one, was a nesting site for the endangered

least tern and the USFWS used an airboat to monitor the nests. If successful nesting is possible, it is only polite and right to avoid landing on these bars, as we avoided the goose's.

Mudlarking is alive and well on our rivers: a friend has a world-class collection of artifacts he has found river combing. My collection is much less valuable, but, still intriguing: a copper dipper bowl, a porcelain doll's head, a fossil bison vertebra, a partial mammoth tooth, a broken Kansas catlinite amulet, shards of pottery. But, being out and on the water fosters a quiet state of being and a chance to observe nature from a different perspective, that of a mudlark.

©Dru Clarke
October 2013

*Henry Mayhew, "London Labour and the London Poor"



Photos by Dru Clarke



Save the Dates...



Birding Field Trip:
Squaw Creek NWR

GUIDE: Eve Parks

Contact: Patricia Yeager pyky@flintheills.com 776-9593

Sat. Nov. 23

7 a.m. Leave Manhattan

Car pool: Meet at the First Assembly Church Parking lot (corner of North Seth Child and Gary Rd.) You may leave your car there.

Drive through Seneca KS into Nebraska and east to Falls City, about 110 miles and a good pit stop. Then continue east to Rulo and across the Missouri River to Squaw Creek. Total miles 146 – it will take about three hours.

10:00 a.m. Arrive at Refuge

There are good restrooms even if the Visitor Center is closed. If it is open, there is a nice gift shop, a 10-minute film about the refuge, and interesting displays.

Birding: Mostly done by car with stops along the drive. There are few trails if any along the loop through the refuge. On the 10-mile loop drive there are no facilities. We can leave the loop at any time and make a pit stop back at the Visitor Center and then get back on the loop. We will spend about six hours birding on the loop and eating our lunch along the way.

4:00 p.m. Depart for Manhattan

7:00 p.m. Arrive in Manhattan

Christmas Bird Counts are a-coming!

December 14 - Manhattan CBC - contact Dave Rintoul drintoul@k-state.edu

December 15 - Olsburg CBC - contact Gary Jeffrey 785-468-3587

To find other area CBCs - go to the Kansas Ornithological Society website for a complete listing <http://ksbirds.org/kos/KOSindex.html>



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

AND don't forget to check our website nfhas.org



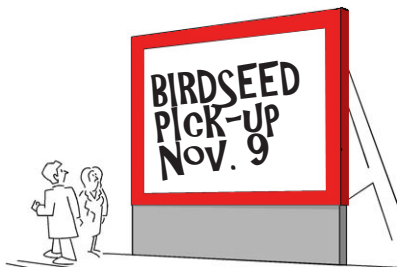
Northern Flint Hills
Audubon Society
P.O. Box 1932
Manhattan, KS
66505-1932

Printed on 100% post-consum-
er recycled paper



Non-profit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 662
Manhattan, KS 66502

Return Service Requested



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

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. Website is 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> and join in the discussions.

NFHAS Board

President:	Patricia Yeager - pyky@flinthills.com 776-9593
Vice Pres.	MJ Morgan - tom.morgan@juno.com
Secretary:	Donna Roper - droper@k-state.edu
Treasurer:	Carla Bishop - cbishop@k-state.edu

COMMITTEE Chairs:

Membership:	Jacque Staats	537-3664
Programs:	Kevin Fay	
Conservation:		
Butterfly Garden:		
Education:		
Land Preservation:		
Bird Seed Sales:		
Newsletter:	Cindy Jeffrey cinraney@ksu.edu	468-3587
Fieldtrips:	Patricia Yeager, Kevin Fay	776-9593
At-large:	Tom Morgan	
Audubon of Kansas Trustee:	Hoogy Hoogheem	

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> U.S. Senate, Washington DC 20510. Jerry Moran U.S. Capital Switchboard 202-224-3121.