

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY SPRING BIRD COUNT RESULTS

JIM THRONE

Cheryl and Frank Arthur, Susan Blackford, Kevin Fay, Clyde Ferguson, Jim Koelliker, Jacque Staats, Janet and Jim Throne, Paul Wiedhaas, and Patricia Yeager participated in this year's migratory spring bird count

Results were similar to last year – 3,167 birds and 110 species counted by the six counting groups. It started out as a beautiful day for birding, with little wind, overcast skies, and cool temperatures. But by 3 p.m. we had steady rain and eventually torrential rain and strong winds – not so great for birding. It was a good year for owls, with two great horned owls and thirteen barred owls. Some species that had conspicuously lower counts were red-headed woodpeckers, eastern kingbirds, and dickcissels. This doesn't necessarily indicate a problem; the weather this spring is very different than last year's, with most plants blooming/leafing out about a month later.

It's always nice to see warblers in this area, and species identified this year were Nashville, northern parula, yellow, yellow-rumped, Blackburnian, blackpoll, black and white, American redstart, and common yellowthroat. We also counted six red-breasted grosbeaks, which are beautiful to see. Chipping sparrow, Harris' sparrow, and American goldfinch counts were quite high. Overall, it was a great excuse to be out wandering around in the woods and fields. Please contact me at jim.throne@sbcglobal.net if you'd like to participate in next year's count (9 May 2009); we can always use more people and it's a fun way to spend a spring day.

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:

July 10 BOARD MEETING, 6 p.m.
TOM & MJ'S HOME

July 12 MONTHLY BIRDING
8 A.M. MEET AT SOJOURNER PARK

NO NEWSLETTER OR ACTIVITY IN AUGUST

SEPT. 6 BUTTERFLY GARDEN CLEANUP

SEPT. 13 MONTHLY BIRDING

SEPT. 14 ICE CREAM SOCIAL/BUTTERFLY GARDEN
2 p.m. SOJOURNER TRUTH PARK

SEPT. 30 BIRDSEED ORDER DEADLINE
(LAST YEAR'S SEEDS AND PRICES)



SKYLIGHT PLUS PETE COHEN

"Do you hear that whistle down the line ...?" If you do it's most likely one of those occasional railfan steam

excursions. More than likely what's heard is the blare of a diesel locomotive's horn. Years ago it was in the news that a lady in Chicago had a dog who howled terribly at a certain time. A time it was discovered when a certain Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific engine went by their apartment, sounding for a crossing. When contacted, the railroad discovered the engine's horn was out of tune, re-tuned it, and the dog no longer howled. One hopes the Union Pacific, into which "The Rock" has been subsumed, would be as obliging.

At any rate there are evidently going to be more and more diesel horns to be heard. An article in the April 28th issue of the *Washington Post's* national edition, dealing with the current financial good times for the rails, noted that a diesel loco can haul 423 tons of cargo a mile on one gallon of fuel. Just imagine, as a mechanic friend of ours has suggested, a gallon of liquid fuel stretched out for a mile -- what a gossamer thread, and what power therein. The article said that represents three times the efficiency of what are called tractor-trailers to eastward and semi(trailer)s to westerly. Overall, the United Parcel Service, it reported, is the rail industry's biggest single customer.

Ever more track is being laid, the Norfolk Southern is shown raising the roof of a tunnel to accommodate higher container loads. Elsewhere I've read how water-travel is more fuel efficient than rails, but even if global warming opens an Arctic passage, it seems doubtful how much that would affect the inland requirements for rail. I can recall when Pinedale, Wyoming, made a tourist-attracting virtue of being the town furthest from a railroad than any other in the country (it's 100 miles north of a UP main line). At the same time, at the town of Alta Vista, Kansas, (pop. 400) a Chicago-Los Angeles train stopped daily and a person could get on and ride to within sensible driving distance of almost anywhere else in the country.

One could suppose, though I think hyperbolically, that those wonderful bike trails that have replaced rail lines under the Railbanking Act, might someday carry trains again, which was one of the forward-looking reasons for the Act, and that with the price of gas some roads may willy-nilly become bike trails. (The seven major rail conglomerates now operate a little less than half the 300,000 miles of track they once ran on.) But for sure the 25,000 locomotives just on our rails (down from 64,000 steam units in the 1920s), plus some 40,000 to 60,000 vessels at sea (the figures depending on different sources), are still burning fossil fuels, and they require a great deal more power than a Prius. So what I expect that one hears whistling down the line is some kind of change approaching. Some kind.

The celestial schedule for July-August seems more predictable. The timetable, as it appears in the *Old Farmer's Almanac* has Mars passing by the star. Regulus, at the bottom of Leo's big forward sickle on the evenings of July 1st-3rd. On the 4th (as the Earth reaches its farthest point from the Sun) those two are in the same yard with Saturn and a crescent Moon, Saturn being highest, Mars next, and the Moon lowest. However this group will be setting before midnight while across the sky Jupiter will be up early in the evenings and at its brightest for the year: fully opposite us from the sun on the 9th, closest to us on the 10th.

On the star tracks Scorpio will be swimming along the southern horizon, for part of the season separating into head and tail as his middle section dips below our horizon. In *A Skynwatcher's Year*, Jeff Kanipe reports that the Navajo regarded the head section as "the Big One," its first appearance each year telling them that summer was emerging from spring. At its other end they referred to the stars of the curved stinger tail as the "Rabbit Tracks." The curve being opened upward as it reappeared each spring marked the end of their hunting season. Through the summer one could watch that curve turning till gradually it dipped downward enough to re-start the hunting season. In the middle times comes the Perseid meteor shower, peaking in the early hours of August 12th. New Moons July 2nd (9p19) and August 1st (5a13); full July 18th (2a59), August 16th (5p16).

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JOHNNY FLIES UP THE CREEKS TOM MORGAN



Some farmers exclaim there's "Johnny Flies Up the Creek" whenever they spot a great blue heron. I'm captivated by the suggestiveness of claiming that Johnny flies up the creeks.

In a novel, *"Wild at Heart,"* by Barry Gifford, one fellow was admiring another's ability to hide his intelligence. He said, "I am reminded of the time I saw a blue heron working next to a river. He looked like a Chinese gentleman in a blue coat wobbling along the rocks." But neither the heron nor the gentleman were lacking in shrewdness. It is difficult to know how much thought goes on in the mind of a heron, but I would image that if Johnny flies upstream, he does so for a reason. He flies up the creek because of a love for pure, unmuddied water, a love for the thrill of standing motionless in the shallows while a minnow swims nearer.

Perhaps you take exception to my writing about a bird loving its environment, but what I mean is the bird loves its life, just like an athlete feels happy when he's in a mental state where he can do whatever

he wants to, precisely without effort. Johnny's life is all about ability to see clearly. When hunting, he may walk upstream to keep silt disturbed by his toes behind him. And he invariably leaves the water before defecating. Although he isn't fastidious about the condition of his nest, the opportunities that are present in clear water are necessary for his survival. Like a desperado who cares more about the cleanliness of his weapons than anything else, he keeps his feathers and his beak clean and his vision. Looking at Debbie's photos (see page 4) of Johnny Flying Up the Creeks, I wish to be Johnny, I wish to be flying to unmuddied water.



Photos by Debbie Clark 2008

(note - Debbie lives near Chapman and lost her computer with many of her photos in the Tornado)

HEY! Surely someone out there is seeing something of interest!!

Got a good birding story/encounter? Please share it with us - in "Bird Tales"

WAITING TO HEAR FROM YOU! Send me your "tales" photos welcome! e-mail cin-raney@ksu.edu, or mail them to me at 15850 Galilee Rd., Olsburg, KS 66520

GREAT BLUE HERON ROOKERY

MJ AND TOM MORGAN,

PHOTS BY DEBBIE CLARK

On a research trip to Clay County last December, MJ and her KSU history students drove past Mall Creek School site, commonly known as “Mall Crik” located at the intersection of Welsh (Broughton) Road and Utah Road. Mall Creek School served a tiny rural community of children until the mid 1940s. The school is gone now, leaving only a flat expanse of grass on the southeast corner where it is easy to imagine children playing.

Swerving along the banks of Mall Creek are tall hardwoods, each containing a dense stick nest. These heavy nests, six or seven bristling black in bare, tall trees, were eerie against the cold December sky. Nothing was visible within the nests. Nothing flew near them. Students speculated that they might be a cluster of eagle nests. One went so far as to vehemently insist that they were the home of a fox squirrel colony. But eventually, the word “rookery” came up. Five months later, a skilled wildlife photographer, Debbie Clark, drove to the Mall Creek Rookery to try to determine what birds were using the nests in the sycamores.

Mall Creek runs south through the Milford Wetlands, lying on the floodplain of the dammed Republican River. The Milford Reservoir and spillway were constructed in the mid 1960s from farms and homesteads in the Republican Valley, but the official Wetlands were created twenty years later. Standing under the enormous nests along Mall Creek, Debbie soon saw that this was a Great Blue Heron Nursery. Some of her photographs that day are included here. Great blue herons sometimes fly as far as 20 miles to look for food. They hunt, using their vision to locate their prey, which may be almost anything catchable, but mostly they ambush fish in clear water. In the Flint Hills of eastern Kansas, stands of sycamores along streams serve as sites of numerous breeding colonies of great blues. These birds prefer sycamores above all others, knowing the strength of the sycamore’s limbs, its open branching pattern, great height, and the characteristic presence along the sinuous banks of clear-flowing streams where water flows like molten transparent crystal and fish are seen.

The widely spaced sycamore limbs are clothed with smooth, exfoliating bark which may challenge nest-robbers to move quickly & quietly. And security is part of what a great blue heron longs for at end of day, flying in from far away, then gliding down, settling gently into sturdy arms, a sycamore’s welcoming branches.



Photos by Debbie Clark 2008





TAKE NOTE



SPRING WILDLIFE



Black rat snake -
GREAT CLIMBERS!



There will be no newsletter in the month of August.



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If you do not want to receive the national magazine, but still want to be involved in our 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, 66502-1932.

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