

Dr. Alice Boyle hails from Canada, has worked in wet tropical forests, and most recently, the tallgrass prairies of Kansas. She has been a professor at K-State since 2012, teaching Ornithology and mentoring many graduate and undergraduate students in avian research as part of her job. She is fascinated by bird movements—from local movements of tropical birds to the crazy dispersal movements of grassland birds. She will talk to us a bit about why Kansas is such an interesting place to study bird movement, and an exciting new initiative that will dramatically improve our understanding of how birds use and move through our local grasslands.

FEBRUARY PROGRAM: Dr. Alice Boyle

Feb. 16, 7pm

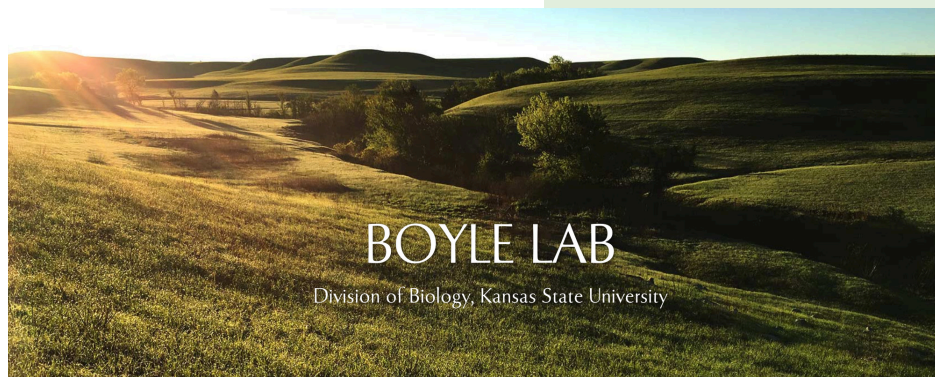
Manhattan Public Library Auditorium

Masks required



NOTE:

Check our website for updates on Covid guidelines. If cases increase in Manhattan we may have to go virtual.



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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 50, No. 6, February 2022

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Upcoming Events

- Month of Feb. - JAYHAWK Audubon Society Photo exhibition
<https://www.jayhawkaudubon.org/photo-exhibition>
- Feb. 12 - Saturday morning birding 8am
 meet at Sojourner Truth Park
- Feb. 16 - PROGRAM - Alice Boyle
 Manhattan Library Auditorium 7:00 pm
- Feb. 18-21 - Great Backyard Bird Count
birdcount.org



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

February's here, by cracky;
To say not so would be whacky,
for, dressed in denim, silk or khaki
you could be cooler than in June.

That's generally speaking, nowadays. After we came to the Flint Hills in 1961 our kids grew up through six weeks of winter each year, building snow caves and sledding. It would ease off in February. By then the water would have drained away from under the ice on ponds and creek pools. But the ice kept firm awhile, and unsupported would tilt to some edge so that we learned to skate upslope and down.

Their growing up seemed to cause the climate to change and our thermometer, as everyone's, began getting more up-and-down exercise than it was used to. I've read that the sense of smell and memories are close companions, thus I find myself recalling how, in winters years before, the air in my grandparents' small town clothing store would become thick with the aroma of the wool in the monolithic supply of red-and-black checked Woolrich shirts, pants, and jackets, and of the rubber in the rows of four- and five-buckle galoshes and the pale green Hood rubber boots which were feather-light compared to much of the footwear I find available today, which seem heavy enough for use as ship's ballast.

So I wondered what other changes February has seen. I've found that the first tax supported school in this country was The Latin School established in Boston, Mass. in February 1685, and the 16th Amendment, making a federal income tax constitutional, was ratified in February 1913. The Latin School building was torn down in 1745, but the school moved around and survives, having gone co-ed in 1972. As to the school's support, one of the remarks in the legacy of Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., is this one, given in reply to a complaining clerk: "No, young feller, I like paying taxes. With them I buy civilization". At least the latter part of that view was expressed by others before and after ratification, and engraved now on the IRS building in Washington, D.C. it reads: Taxes are what we pay for a civilized society.

Meanwhile in February 1582 Pope Gregory XIII, completing prior attempts, ordained a change in the calendar that had been established by Julius Caesar in a year we now refer to as 46 b.c.e. Caesar had that Roman year last 445 days in order to bring the calendar in conformance with the seasons. Among the Gregorian changes, October 4th of 1582 was immediately followed by the 15th. Other countries hesitated to follow the Catholic lead and England did not do so till 1752, Russia not till 1918. As a result for a time various people in giving dates had to designate NS (New Style) or OS (Old Style). George Washington was born February 11th OS, February 22nd NS. And that may be the reason Wikipedia gives the date of The Latin School's founding as February 13th, Google as the 23rd.

Another February milestone is Mathew Brady's taking the first photograph of a sitting U.S. president, James K. Polk, in 1849. And in the sky, on February 12th, 1957, a meteor came into our atmosphere, blazing brighter than the Sun. It exploded mid-air and StarDate reports that 23 tons of material survived to fall on Russia's Sikhote-Alin mountains. One can find pieces of it for sale on the internet.

Anticipated in the sky this month, Jupiter will have bright brief settings in the SW evenings early on, but the main planetary action will be in the pre-dawns, the more so later on. Venus will prevail, at its brightest for this run of appearances going into the morning of the 12th. Mars will be a dim companion below throughout the month, while Mercury keeps appearing, a little higher each day but off to the lower left of the Venus-Mars duo. Saturn may be glimpsed even more lower left.

The Moon has a full social calendar, waning but gibbous-bright to the lower left of Jupiter the evening of 2nd, then thinner as it glows above the Taurus' star, Aldebaran, as night comes on the 9th. It will be in a line between the Gemini Twins pre-dark the 13th, next above, then below, Leo's Regulus the same time the 15th-16th, and making the same moves with Virgo's Spica late in the evening the 19th-20th. During the early hours it will be in the constellation Libra the 22nd beside a faint star named Zubenelgenubi, to the left of Scorpio's Antares the 24th, and to the left then between the Venus-Mars pair the 26th-27th.

The moon having been full January 31st, will be full February 18th.

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Downed Wood

Dru Clarke



What kind of woman receives a chain saw as a gift? Easy: one who has a need for a tool to cut downed wood. The saw was especially welcome after the terrific (and terrifying) December windstorm that drove not just limbs but big trees to the ground, creating a scene like the aftermath of a giant's temper tantrum. Here, a Kentucky coffee tree, splayed across the road; there, an osage orange, flattened in the meadow; creekside, a chinquapin, creating a treacherous bridge from bank to bank. And, not all were dead and awaiting a laid-to-rest event: some, still alive and thriving, were cut down in their prime, their trunks split or shattered by a malevolent force. There is a need for a memorial service.

Fortunately, we have a secondary use for all this sequestered carbon. While we have no fireplace or wood-burning stove inside the house (my husband has asthma) we do have jerry-built heaters in our major watering tanks set up for our cows and horses. Recycled 50-gallon oil barrels, ballasted by gravel, chimneyed by leftover metal remnants from various ag implements, these get fed twice a day the downed wood, nicely cut and sized by the new chain saw. (It happens to be an electric model, powered by a lithium battery, with a short 12" blade, perfect to be wielded by an older woman with delusions of a pioneer spirit.)

The wood is often lovely, sometimes grotesque, 'telling' in its growth, with each piece holding its own history. One is a swizzle stick, shaped by a once-clinging vine that climbed up toward sunlight. Another two-foot long slab sports three one and a half inch size, perfectly round, holes set vertically equidistant from each other. Who engineered that pattern? Some wood has been tormented into bizarre shapes, often resembling gargoyles or mythic animals. The Osage orange (also known regionally as ironwood or hedge apple) wood is burnt orange, with yellow-brown striped bark. It is heavy and dense and sparks when burned. Our recently built fence has anchoring posts made of 'hedge,' purported to last a lifetime. Some is riddled with bark beetle paths, reminiscent of early forms of writing, hieroglyphics in cambium, and more, with white threads of fungus, bound and determined to break down the lignin into a powder. Others are hollow within, the heartwood already turned to dust, encased within a cylinder of unmolested younger and

stronger wood maintaining the tree's symmetry. Fresh cuts emit different fragrances, some sharp and astringent, some like vanilla, some musky. Holding a piece to my nose, I am carried to some wild and exotic room whose door was just flung open.

Almost all the downed wood hosts a species of lichen, symbiotic fungal-algal organisms that can't resist a solid and stable substrate. Most found on bark are of the foliose (leafy) type, like 'tiny shield' or 'rough speckled,' and it is with reluctance that I toss a hunk of wood with a grey-green coat of lichen into the fire; knowing how wondrous a 'creature' it is, it seems a sacrilege to consign it to a flame. The crustose type exists primarily on rocks and can be a dazzling array of colors, with names like sunburst and rock jewel. In a graduate course in Ecology, I did a study on how lichens colonized a former quarry slope. While they produce both sexual and vegetative means of reproduction, I discovered that when they dried out and curled their edges and broke away, they bounced downhill, in a process called saltation, giving the lichen a new surface to colonize. Someday I'd like to find the species known as smoky eye (common names are so resonant)!

The battery on the saw lasts about forty minutes, about the length of time I am feeling industrious. The pile I've accumulated lasts a few days, and I've been warmed once. The second warming is for the water, to be drunk by our animals. If we had lived a few centuries ago, our sleeping quarters would have been above that of the bedded-down animals. A second warming from downed wood.





Lethal Beauty - Adornment

Jay Jeffrey

Now excited, the novice birder held binoculars to her eyes with one hand as she pointed with the other to the multi-colored bird and said, "Holy smokes! What's that bird!?!"

The dove-sized bird was perched on a telephone line peering down toward the ground and would occasionally bob its tail, seemingly to maintain balance, and also make a circular bob of its head as if to stay awake or rid itself of an unseen annoying insect. The expert birder replied, "Ah, that's an escaped pet, an Australian Resplendent Parakeet." With a huge smile, the novice simply replied, "Wow, that makes sense, its colors are stunning – just beautiful!" Now a third person, the senior birder, shook his head and chimed in, "He's just messing with you, that's our native American Kestrel, and they are indeed gorgeous. Good eye, lass, I looked over that way and missed it." The senior looked at the expert and rolled his eyes with another quick shake of the head, although while walking away he thought to himself, "Actually, American Resplendent Parakeet wouldn't be too much of a stretch...as a predatory parakeet."

Both the senior and expert recently had to adjust their understanding of birds in the raptor world because, based upon DNA studies, falcons were no longer considered closely related to hawks and eagles, rather they had been firmly established to be completely independent of all other raptors and now most closely related to *parrots*. So, considering this, the knowledgeable birders were entertaining some humor as they related attractively-colored similar-sized parakeets to brightly adorned kestrels.

This birding story is fictitious, but its reference to falcons being more closely related to parrots is not, that's entirely true based upon seminal DNA research published in 2006 and 2008. And given those extraordinary findings, in 2012 the AOU reclassified falcons by separating them from other birds of prey (falcons with their own order, Falconiformes; and all other diurnal raptors placed in Accipitriformes). Additional comprehensive phylogenetic studies using advanced DNA sequencing, published in 2014 and 2015, further verified results of the previous studies and gave sound credence to the novel reclassification and latest understanding of the avian Tree of Life. But unchanging is the fact that falcons are birds of prey, in contrast to their tropical fruity and nutty long-lost cousins. Falcons are meat-eaters.

Falcons and parrots do share some fascinating traits: virtually identical wing and tail molt patterns (both being different

from hawks and company), fleshy orbital skin around the eyes, and some parrots have similar customization of their beak integrating a tooth-like protrusion, a "tomial tooth," which all falcons have. Such parrot beak modifications likely assist with

a species' dominant dietary items, such as cracking nuts. For falcons, well, we'll get back to that later – but it isn't for cracking nuts!

Regardless of name and ancestry, when seen in the field it's often both thrilling and serene to absorb the exquisite beauty of American Kestrels. Up close, both males and females are absolutely striking to behold; even more so when viewed through binoculars. They are considered to be amongst the most colorful raptors in the world. In 1874, the ornithologist Elliot Coues stated, "The prettiest and jauntiest of our Hawks, and yet no prig." -- a sentiment common to many ornithologists of past and present (although the prig judgement is arguable considering the propensity of kestrels to harry several raptor species).

American Kestrels are one of the few raptor species to exhibit conspicuously bold sexually dimorphic plumage -- male and females have exceptionally different coloration and are easily told apart. Doubly unique is that young in the nest are also sexually dimorphic and closely resemble their parent's plumage. Males are ridiculously resplendent. Trying to summarize a description of their plumage is also ridiculous, ridiculously tough, like attempting prose to adequately describe colors of a Claude Monet painting. In 2016, famed Pete Dunne wrote, "...the colorful male is on everyone's short list for most striking bird of prey."

Attempting ridiculousness -- First, conjure up an imaginary bird that is vividly colored, a royal representative of a beautiful tropical species of parrot, and then set that image aside. Now consider the contents of a male American Kestrel adornment file:

Face and throat white with black tear-like stain or moustachial stripe below eye, a second thicker black sideburn stripe over ear coverts at rear of face, top of head bluish to slate-gray with reddish cinnamon-rufous or chestnut crown patch, nape tawny to apricot-buff split in center by dark blue, slate or blackish stripe descending from top of head, on each side of nape stripe the apricot-buff surrounds a black nape spot behind the second sideburn stripe (moustache, sideburn, and nape spot are on each side of head).

Thus, on the back of the head, a black nape spot pairs with the one on the other side of the nape stripe and creates "false eyes" with the dark center nape stripe resembling a "false beak." This can be considered a false face, creating an illusion that's thought to distract, deflect, and deter ill-intended actions of enemies (predators, nest invaders, mobbing birds). A second false face is formed on the side of the head with the forward moustache and rear nape spot representing eyes and the center sideburn stripe becoming a false beak – as if the kestrel is looking sideways or over its shoulder when it is in fact flying forward or looking down at the ground. The fleshy eye ring, fleshy base of beak, and legs and feet, all range in color from lemon yellow or amber to orange to reddish cadmium. Eyes are dark brown. Beak is pale and light bluish or slate-gray near base and transitions to black and horn at the beak's deadly tip (more on that later). That's just the coloration of head, legs and feet.

The back, scapulars, and tail vary among individuals from orange to rufous, pale cinnamon-rufous to diversified degrees of brick, shy of cardinal red, to subtle hues of red-tinged apricot. The orange-red spectrum of back and shoulders is sparsely covered with short black scalloped bars, some resembling wide



Photo: Kristen Mauzy
Audubon Photography Awards



Photo: Dan Dietrich
Audubon Photography Awards

inverted delta symbols; the tail is clean and immaculate, ending with a broad black band dipped in white. The upper wing coverts, wrist, and trailing edge of secondaries are sky to powder blue and overlaid with small to medium-sized black diamond shaped spots. Upper wing primaries range graphite to jet black with oval white bars on trailing edge.

A white to cream belly transitions to chest infused with subtle shades of orange to rufous wash, imperfectly sprinkled with dark to black markings in shape of circles, hearts, teardrops, or diamonds; all of which deviate among individuals. So that's our candidate for avian beauty pageants with parrots.

Although they possess exquisite beauty, American Kestrels also possess skills and tactics of exquisite lethality. In 1939, legendary wildlife biologists and falconers – brothers John and Frank Craighead -- wrote of kestrels as “smallest and brightest” in their book, *Hawks in the Hand*. While “brightest” surely refers to the species' vivid colors, it's not entirely clear that they weren't also referring to being the brightest in terms of their clever hunting strategies. We are now prepared to delve into the arena of lethality, of hunting prowess and agile aerobatics, and shall resume with that deadly beak tip and specialized “tooth.”

“Ounce for ounce, no raptor packs more superlatives into such a small form.”
– Pete Dunne, 2016 (note: AMKE weigh less than 4 ounces).

To be continued...

© Jay Jeffrey

MANHATTAN CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS

Dec. 18th was a cold day and a bit windy, but 43 observers in 19 parties plus 9 feeders counted a total of 94 species -27880 individuals.

Misses: Greater White-fronted Goose, Ross' Goose, Am. Wigeon, N. Shoveler, N. Mockingbird, Red-Shafted ssp. Northern Flicker, Killdeer.

Low numbers: Mallard (335), Common Merganser (17)

15 Pileated WP is a new high count vs. 13 in 2018.

Some highlights were, a Townsend's Solitaire, a Hermit Thrush, a Lesser Goldfinch and Gray Catbird!

The full report of the Manhattan CBC results can be viewed on [nfhas.org](https://www.nfhas.org/) website.

<https://www.nfhas.org/>

For more information go to

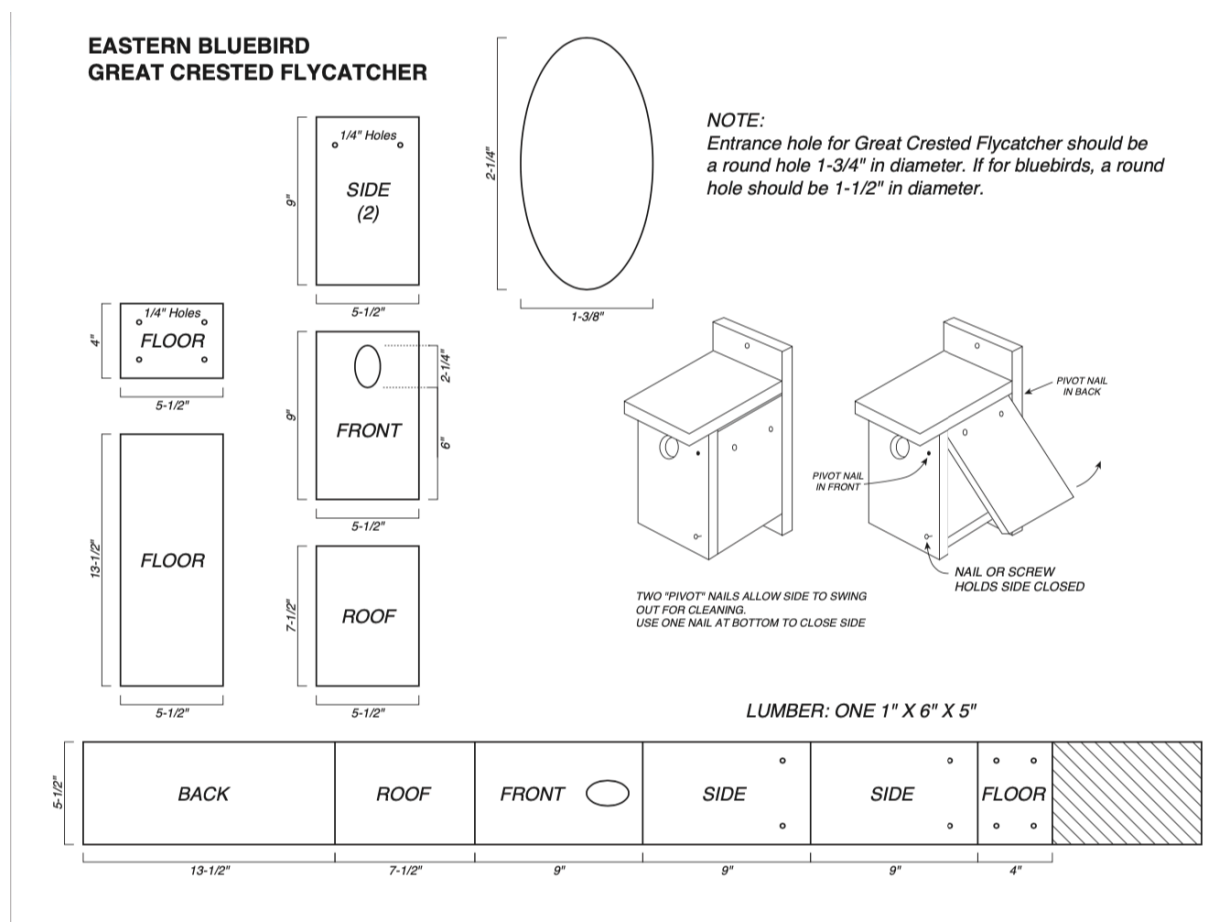
<https://www.birdcount.org/>

Bluebird houses

March is the time to clean, restore and replace Bluebird houses. (As well as a good time to clean your birdfeeders.)

Many of our bluebird trails are in need - Carnahan Creek Park, Cecil Best Trail, Stagg Hill, and our sanctuaries. If you know how to build a bluebird house please consider making a few for us. If you would just like to contribute funds for bluebirds houses let us know.

Contact Patricia if you can help. (pyeagerbirder@gmail.com, or call 785-776-9593)

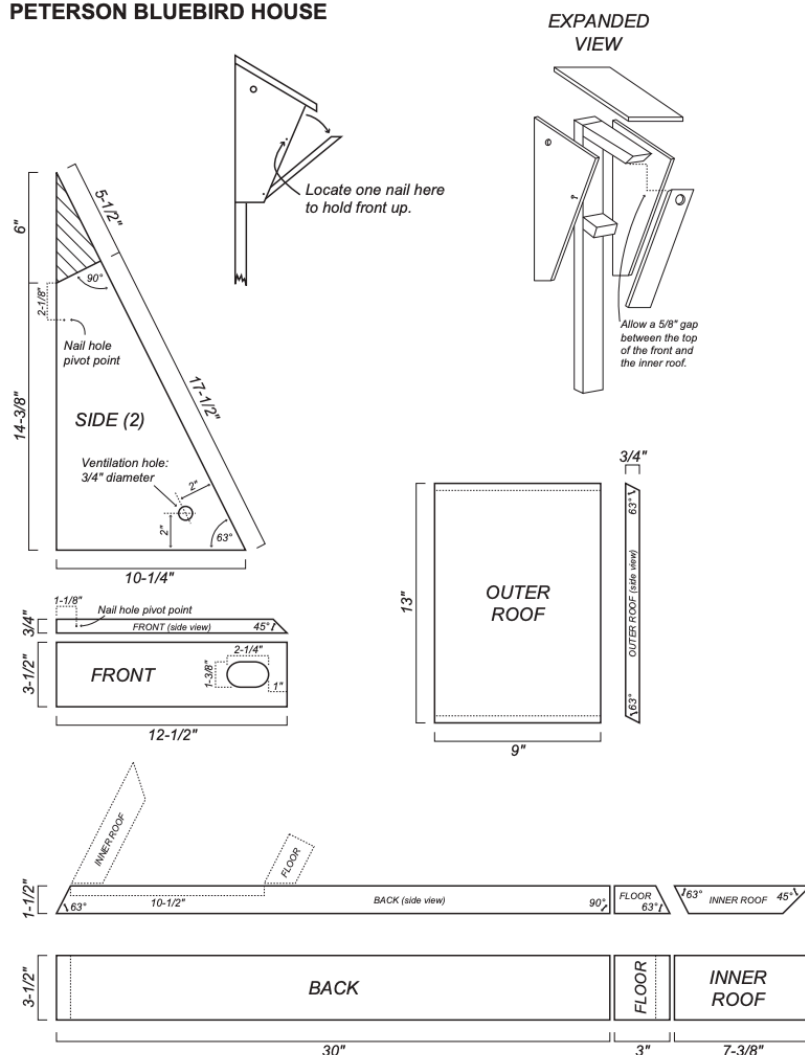


Bluebird houses

Both designs follow the criteria recommended by the North American Bluebird Society (NABS), including the following specifications:

- Use natural, uncoated wood such as cedar or redwood which are more durable than pine or exterior plywood. Use at least $\frac{3}{4}$ inch boards.
- Make corner opening on the floor bottom of the box to allow drainage and facilitate ventilation
- Never include an under-the-hole perch.
- The roof should provide sufficient overhang beyond the box entrance or vent holes to protect the birds from the elements.
- The roof should have a minimum of $\frac{1}{2}$ inch overhang at the back.
- The nest box should have watertight construction at all seams.
- Cross ventilation is strongly recommended.
- Include one hinged, side panel that opens for easy monitoring and cleaning.

PETERSON BLUEBIRD HOUSE



<https://www.tn.gov/twra/wildlife/woodworking-for-wildlife/eastern-bluebird-nest-box.html>



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The purpose of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society is to teach people to enjoy and respect birds and their habitats. NFHAS advocates preservation of prairie ecosystems and urban green spaces thus saving the lives of birds and enriching the lives of people.

Also available online at nfhas.org

Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society.
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Also available online at nfhas.org

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. 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

WE NEED YOU! PLEASE consider joining our NFHAS Board.

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