

The **Spring International Migratory Bird Day** count will be held on **Saturday, May 13th**. There are several parts of Riley County that were not covered last year, so if anyone wants an area or wants to join an existing group, please e-mail me at fha@ksu.edu.

You identify and count all birds heard or seen in your assigned area, and provide a list to me with some trip information. I will then compile the information for the county, and submit the list to eBird.org. This is a great excuse to spend the day birding, and hopefully the weather will be beautiful, so please consider joining us.

~Frank Arthur
fha@ksu.edu

See page 7 for more information about the International Migratory Bird Day

Your contributions to the past two Global Big Days have set back-to-back world records for the most bird species seen in a single day. Last year's Global Big Day featured more than 60% of the world's bird species in a single day, with sightings coming in from more than 17,500 eBirders spread across 154 countries.

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 45, No. 9 ~ May 2017

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Upcoming Events

May 8- Board Meeting 6 p.m.
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

May 13 - MIGRATORY BIRD COUNT
SEE ABOVE

June 4 -2017 Konza Prairie Wildflower Walk
6:30 p.m., \$10/person – free to
Friends of Konza Prairie members



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Fracking in the Flint Hills-- It seems like the start of a lively jingle.

Just how lively the verses form, what voices will be raised, will soon become known, for it's reported that the Quail Oil and Gas

Company of Garden City has filed with the Kansas Corporation Commission to permit an injection well to be sited near Burdick in SW Morris County.

A story in the March 24th Emporia Gazette defined an injection well as one that can be used for fracking or for storing waste water. It quoted James Aber, a distinguished geology professor at Emporia State, that the site "directly overlies a buried basement uplift known as the Nemaha Ridge, which is flanked on its eastern side by the Humboldt Fault zone with multiple, parallel faults trending generally north-northeast. Faults of the Humboldt zone have been active historically."

It's not news that such wells have been identified as the cause of earthquakes that have been felt in this area. Or that there are complaints from various areas where such wells exist of polluted seepage into aquifers relied upon for drinking water. It would appear to behoove people to establish now baseline tests on the existing quality of their wells and springs, however the usual tests do not look for all the components of injection well pollution, some of which are apparently proprietary and secret, so recourse must be had to special labs.

No one can predict what effect the subsurface pressures and percussions of such wells may have on the Flint Hills' cat's cradle of underground water channels, and it has been shown that their large surface structures by degrading the view-scape will exact a cost on land values and tourist-based opportunities. This became apparent during the tens of fully attended hearings and community meetings in the region through 2002-04, and were two of the reasons Wabaunsee County banned completely industrial-sized wind turbines which require a lot of blasting and present large surface structures. A move the state Supreme Court agreed was reasonable. (Mere regulations would not do, for regulations, to pass legal muster, must allow for conditioned entry, and thus for endless and expensive arguments over whether various actions comply with the conditions.)

The widespread aroused alarm fifteen years ago recognized that the Flint Hills are the last 2-3% of the once widespread tall grass prairie. They are unique on the planet and irreplaceable for the relationships among their living creatures, geology, and chemistry is far from understood, so that interrupting their ecology is like tossing away information that could be vital. They were seen as much more valuable than the amount of energy that could be exported from their limited extent. (Cyclosporin, the drug that first enabled human organ transplants to succeed, was discovered in a Scandinavian bog. If that bog had been turned into a waste pond, lives would have been needlessly lost, and even today we would not know it.) In 2004, Governor Sebelius appointed a Cabinet Team to address the issue. Their report, taking into account areas that already contained significant intrusion, proposed the designation of an area to be known as The Heart of the Flint Hills, bounded by U.S. highways 24 on the north and 77 to the west, and by Kansas highways 400 on the south and a combination of 99 and 4 on the east. Beyond those borders, turbine proponents were encouraged to do the utmost, but within that area preservation should be a priority. The Governor made that designation, urging everyone to voluntarily respect it.

To my knowledge within The Heart of the Flint Hills voluntary restraint seems to be working. But the injection well applied for would be in the heart of the Heart, and that kind of activity was not under consideration at the time.

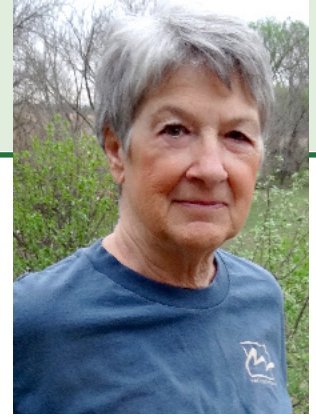
So the rest of that jingle is soon to be written. And I don't know if any sky show in May will match what we saw April 11th when in the dark twilight, the setting Sun was a round disk not as glossy as a tomato but every bit as red. Then an hour or so later it had gone around at the Earth and was rising in the east just as red. Well, it was the Moon in the east, but they're both the same size and with being the same color the down-in-the-west-then-popping-up-again-in-the-east seemed a neat trick. Reminded me of that hit song by Jerome Kern and Otto Harbach, "Smoke Gets in Your Skies".

A paler Moon can be the main guide-on ahead. It ducks from the right to the left of Leo's bright star Regulus the 3rd and 4th. It should be above brightly shining Jupiter, who's above Virgo's Spica, the 6th-8th, then rise above Scorpius' Antares the 11th, and prefer to rise near Saturn around and past midnight the 12th-13th. Then it shares attention with Venus (appearing as the Morning Star) at the dawning of the 21st and 22nd. Full the 10th at 4p42, new the 25th at 2p44.

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The Cross Timbers: A Relict Environment

Dru Clarke



After reading George Frazier's book, "The Last Wild Places of Kansas," featured in last month's NFHAS Prairie Falcon newsletter, I had a hankering to get on the road to visit at least those accessible to the public and maybe, in the future, take along a few folks who would appreciate those places. So I had to limit my choices. The old pecan groves along the Missouri River at Fort Leavenworth seemed most enticing, but no clear path and the difficulty of gaining access nixed that idea, so Cross Timbers seemed the most promising. But, what was this Cross Timbers?

I was embarrassed by my lack of knowledge of this unique belt of green, gnarly growth that cinches together southeastern Kansas, parts of Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. Memorialized in song ("The Oklahoma Hills") by Woody Guthrie, I found some historical references to it that made a journey to it mandatory. Described as an ecotone, a region where two large biomes – the eastern deciduous forest and the prairie – meet, Cross Timbers may reveal through its wildness the struggle for survival of each kind.

According to the Ancient Cross Timbers Consortium, this ecotone preserves some of the largest tracts of relatively undisturbed ancient forest and woodland left in the eastern United States. While lacking any commercial importance, they have 'high ecological integrity' and are a link in the chain of oak islands that extend from southeastern Canada to Central America, and provide essential habitat for a diversity of species, including neotropical migratory birds. According to David Costello, in his "The Prairie World," the area is geologically interesting since the Cross Timbers existence is traceable to 'beaches' left by the retreat of the sea in Cretaceous times. (To me, they seem to be inland versions of the cheniers found along the Gulf of Mexico coast.) The terrain, then, is hills and ravines through which intermittent streams run during wet times.

The stunted, but ancient, trees- likely retarded in growth by frequent prairie fires- are mostly post oak and blackjack oak and a dwarf the hunters call 'shin oak.' (Gregg, Josiah. 1844 "Commerce of the Prairies".) While historical accounts don't mention the bur oak, I suspect there may be some burly specimens as their bark is thick and resistant to fire: a lone tree on an expanse of prairie is usually a bur oak. A dense undergrowth of vines and shrubs create impenetrable mats called 'roughs,' lending them to be compared to the hammocks of Florida (Gregg, *ibid.*) Washington Irving in his "A Tour of the Prairies" (1866) was heartily vexed in trying to navigate his way through these roughs. No one knows for sure how the Cross Timbers region got its name, although it was first referred to in Spanish chronicles, but it is likely that it was that jumbled forested band that had to be traversed to get from one side to the other, either through it or along its flanks.

The Consortium has organized a cooperative network of research natural areas from Kansas to Texas and a memorandum of understanding unites universities, private and government groups and individuals in advancing understanding and sustenance of this unique ecological wonder.

Getting there is a pleasant enough journey. Traveling south from Wamego through Alma (Wabaunsee county) on Rte. 99 you wind a sinuous route between old farmsteads fronted by heritage dry lock stone fences restored by amateur stone masons. On toward Eskridge you drive on what seems the top of the world where you can see thirteen miles in all directions over freshly burnt, greening prairie. South of Emporia, across the Verdigris River where you can still find beds of freshwater mussels, to Madison, through Olpe, home of the nationally famous Chicken House (where we stopped for a box of their delicious chicken on the way home), on to Rte. 54 east. We passed through Lyon, Greenwood, and Woodson counties, where premier bluestem prairie nourishes cattle through the summer, then



The Cross Timbers: A Relict Environment

continued



Young Blackjack oak leaves



turned south on 105 to Toronto, a tiny village named in 1863 by a family from Toronto, Canada, the gateway to Cross Timbers State Park (12 west of Yates Center, or, as they called it locally, Krautville, as it was settled by Germans). It seemed the ideal introductory place to explore by walking its one mile long Ancient Trees Trail. There are other trails, from 0.5 to 11 miles in length, so folks could pick from those that fit their abilities or desires.

After a lunch served with local color by three generations of women who, unsolicited, shared their even more colorful lives' stories, we walked the mile-long Blackjack Trail. Leathery oak leaves blanketed the forest floor, but flowering blackberry vines, spring beauty, blossoming chokecherry trees, violets and verbena brightened everything. Orange goatweed leafwing butterflies and a few pearl crescents and blues drifted through the humid air. Everywhere, rivulets from the previous evening's shower ran downhill, over slabs of sparkling sandstone and coverlets of moss. Large boulders harbored feathery ferns in their crannies. We missed the king snake and the smooth green snakes that

a fellow hunting morels had seen. This trail is designated 'moderate' but is minimally maintained so one has to climb over or around windfalls and large rocks, and cross slippery drainages. The one mile Ancient Trees Trail, the trailhead adjacent to the Point Road permit station, has interpretive signage that offers lessons in history dating back to encounters with the Spanish explorers, the French, Lewis and Clark, and 19th century traveler Washington Irving. Their ages were determined by cores taken in 1982. Many of the trees so marked have died, but their hollow trunks still provide organic material for the living. One still alive – we could see buds and flowers on the upper limbs- was over 250 years old! An unexpected find on this trail was a natural shelter created by massive layers of sandstone with a stone bench and fire pit for hikers (or vagabonds!) to rest in. This trail, while on a gentle slope, had, on level places, expanses of open savanna dominated by what looked to be canary reed grass.

Getting undressed for bed, we discovered some ticks who had hitchhiked home with us. Anyone contemplating hikes on these trails should be prepared to apply repellent. They should also be prepared for a more challenging hike than the literature might imply, especially after a rain. A trip in the fall, during the fall bird migration, when the leaves are about to turn and temperatures are cooler, would be promising. Anyone game?



Photos by Dru Clarke

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Butterfly Garden Clean-up

Jacque Staats



A HUGE SHOUT OUT and THANK YOU to the Members and Friends of the Mu Eta Omega and Kappa Pi Chapters of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. who partnered with us in the spring clean-up of the Butterfly Garden at Sojourner Truth Park.



Alsop Bird Sanctuary Update



Sean Mitchell, Dawson Borcharding, Andrew Eigsti (pink shirt in the background), and Demetri Praderio.

Workers from the student chapter of the **Construction Science Management club** (recruited by Jim Koelliker- Thank you Jim!) are finishing up the walkway and signage at the Alsop Bird Sanctuary this week.

We will be planting a lot and weeding a lot after they finish. Most any weekend morning and sometimes Thursday morning you can find someone there doing these tasks and you are encouraged to join in. It's for the birds and pollinators.




Andrew Eigsti, Demetri Praderio, and Sean Mitchell (kneeling on the ground).

Spring Migratory Bird Watch

Check out this site for occurrence maps of migration

<http://ebird.org/content/ebird/occurrence/>



The animation shows when and where a species migrates:

We make

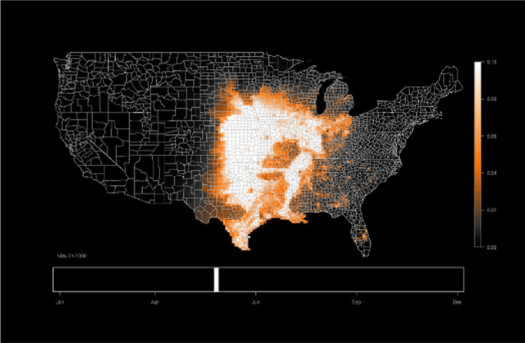
Home About Submit Observations Explore Data My eBird Help

Lang

Occurrence Maps

Dickcissel

29 May 2013



[Click to view larger size](#)

Dickcissel breeds in the central United States and winters in Central and South America. It is highly migratory, and funnels through Texas by the thousands as it returns to its breeding grounds in April and May. It is somewhat nomadic in June, and then passes back southward in August, September, and October.

Dickcissel breeds in tall grass prairies on the Great Plains and Upper Midwest, and like



Report Sightings All Sightings Past Seasons My Sightings Journey North

Winter & Spring 2017

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 <p>Daylength map look-up reports home Mystery Class Map</p>	 <p>Robins map list home</p>	 <p>Earthworms map list home</p>	 <p>Climate Test maps list f</p>
 <p>Whooping Crane Migration map list home</p>	 <p>Spring 2017 map list home</p>	 <p>Spring 2017 map list home</p>	 <p>Spring 2017 map list home</p>

<https://www.learner.org/jnorth/maps/>

Other websites about Spring Migrations:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/729864747196242>

<http://www.migratorybirdday.org/>

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/the-basics-how-why-and-where-of-bird-migration/>



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Manhattan, KS
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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.
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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, 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 <listserve@ksu.edu> and join in the discussions.

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