



# NEWS FROM THE FLOCK...

Newsletter of the Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society

Sperry- Galligar

Audubon Chapter

Officers 2017 - 2019

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## THE MISUNDERSTOOD MARSUPIAL OF NORTH AMERICA

by Delia Lister

Freeman Tilden said, "There is nothing ugly in nature. The seeming exceptions are simply facts of beauty we have not yet grasped." This statement has become more meaningful over the last few weeks after I have taken on "Matilda" the baby Virginia opossum as an animal ambassador for Nature Reach. She came to us at about four months from a rehabilitation center in Lawrence, KS. I have spent more time than I ever expected watching her climb, walk, eat, sleep, and groom. What many people think of as a "big, ugly, rat like creature with beady eyes," I find to be completely wonderful and fascinating.

First, let's talk about the most obvious thing that makes 'possums different from any other North American mammal. They are marsupials which means they are born alive, but highly underdeveloped. Gestation for an opossum is just thirteen days and they can have up to twenty young, although 5-8 is more typical. Once born, only the strongest corn kernel-sized babies will make their way to the mother's pouch in about a minute where they will continuously drink milk and finish maturing for several weeks. Most mothers have thirteen teats available. At three months of age they are weaned and left to fend for themselves. They literally fall off of the mom as she is going about her business--there are no teary goodbyes or best wishes. The survival rate is only about 10-25%, but luckily there are two to three litters per year. Typical lifespan is only about two years in the wild. Some in captivity have lived to be seven, but that is quite rare.

Now, let's compare the Virginia opossum to the more popular and charismatic raccoon. Opossums actually have more teeth than any other furbearer at fifty compared to forty in a raccoon. While both animals have approximately the same size skull, a raccoon's brain is seven times larger than an opossum. But, an opossum has a tremendous capacity to remember where to find food. Both have pretty dexterous hands, but opossums actually have an opposable

A raccoon has a tail, but an opossum's tail is considered pre- it for grasping. By the way, opossums do not sleep while used to help them grasp to material. Just like raccoons, swimmers.

There is quite a bit of fun- For quite a while, many peo- nose, and then actually pouch. One fact that is abso- will grow 28,000 times their



thumb on each of their back feet. By the way, opossums are excellent climbers and

humans only grow twenty times their birth weight. And, the term "playing possum" comes from the fact that when these cat-sized omnivores are threatened they will fall into a comatose state for minutes to even hours. They defecate, they drool, their respiratory rate drops, their tongues hang out, and cannot be roused.

Opossums are also ingrained in our culture far more than we might ever think about. There is not just one, but TWO societies in the U.S. dedicated to the Virginia Opossum. And, there are at least three cities across the U.S. that have or have had "Possum Festivals" complete with 5k races, parades, and pageants (for people, not the opossums). Native American cultures had opossum stories and carved opossum images into their pipes and water carriers. People do eat 'possum, and some say they taste like pork. I'm pretty sure I'll take someone else's word for it. They were trapped for their fur, but it was/is certainly not the most prized fur.

The biggest problems we have when it comes to opossum-human interactions are when we leave food (like pet food and garbage) out for them to find. In looking for a cozy place to sleep they may accidentally wander and get stuck under your house or in your garage. Thankfully they are relatively easy to remove. Opossums don't dig in your garden like your neighbor's dog might, and in fact will help your garden by cleaning up slugs and other unwanted pests. People often think of them as dirty and full of diseases. However, they are more resistant to rabies than any other mammal in North America.

(Continued on Page 3)

**September Meeting**  
**Thursday, 7:00 p.m.**  
**Yates 102**  
**Pittsburg State Univ**  
**\*\*Presentation\*\***

**Oct 26 — "Renewable Energy - A Talk About Solar Power", by Cole Morrison, that will cover overall benefits and possibilities of renewable energy here in Kansas and how homeowners should go about the process if they want to switch over to renewables.**

To receive an e-newsletter: send your e-mail address to Cindy Ford, Editor.

**Board Meeting Highlights**  
**Megan Corrigan, Secretary**

Sperry Galligar Audubon Board Meeting, Heckert Wells, 28 September, 2017, 6:00 pm

**Attending:** Mavis Benner, Wayne Bockelman, Christine Brodsky, Caroline & Charles Chips Megan Corrigan, Cindy & Steve Ford, Delia Lister, Bob & Liz Mangile, Diane McCallum, Emmett & Ruth Sullivan

**Minutes:** Read, one amendment – The \$150 for web hosting is per 2 years. Approved.

**Treasurer's Report (Liz):** Checking account balance-\$7440.90; We received a \$1000 memorial donation in memory of Walt DeGruson. Seeking suggestions for how to best honor his memory.

**Programs:** October 26 – Renewable Energy: a talk on solar power by Cole Morrison;

**Special Program:** Sunday October 1 – Sara Dykman, who is biking the route of the monarch butterfly migration will speak at 2 pm in Yates auditorium. **Motion passed:** To pay for lunch for Sara on Sunday.

**Refreshments:** Liz and Megan. Need to pass around sign-up sheet, clarify if there is a preference for decaf vs. caffeinated coffee.

**Membership:** Dues are due, \$15/household.

**Text Message Reminders:** will be sent to those who sign up.

**Publicity:** Connection with Morning Sun is intact. Suggestion that we hang flyers at the mall, YMCA, Homer Cole Center, and In the Garden. Wayne met with KRPS to talk about sponsoring Bird Note and learned that the cost of sponsorship is \$6-\$8 per mention. Wayne will talk to them about options.

**Newsletter:** Thank you to Cindy, and to Delia for the mystery bird photo, a hoatzin.

**Other Item of Concern:** Carolyn Chips reported that Audubon sponsors 13 sanctuaries in the Houston Galveston area that were severely damaged by hurricane Harvey, and asked if Sperry Galligar would be willing to make a donation to help with the restoration. **Motion passed:** To donate \$200 to the Houston Galveston

Audubon towards recovery.



Diane McCallum photographed this buckeye butterfly in her garden.

*Thanks to Megan Corrigan and Liz Mangile for the refreshments.*

**September Presenter: Mike Davis**



Vultures are not the cutest birds around, but according to Mike Davis, we should love them anyway because they eat dead stuff we wouldn't want to clean up. They have some interesting adaptations that let them eat things we never would.

Unlike many birds, they have a good sense of smell which lets them hone in on carrion beginning to rot. Their beaks are long and sharp so they can tear out tasty morsels of flesh from the innards of carcasses, and they are bald so the flesh doesn't stick too much to their heads. Their stomach juices kill bacteria that would make other animals sick.

Vulture feet are made for walking, not attacking. They don't have sharp talons like hawks because they don't need to kill their prey. They use their feet for another purpose too, called urohidrosis. This means when it's hot they defecate on their own legs to get the benefit of evaporative cooling.

Turkey vultures have a wing span of about 6 feet, but even with those wings, it's not easy for them to take off. If we approach a turkey vulture that has been gorging on a carcass, we'd better watch out. They sometimes eat so much that they can't readily take off. They fill their crop with meat to digest later. If they feel threatened, one of their principle defenses is projectile vomiting. This discourages pretty much anyone from approaching and lightens their load so they can take off. Black vultures (with black heads) are a bit smaller than turkey vultures, but often follow turkey vultures around because black vultures don't have an acute sense of smell. Whenever we see a group of turkey vultures, it's worth looking for black vultures too. When the birds are flying, the black vulture's feet reach almost to the end of its tail, while the turkey vulture's tail extends well beyond its feet. It's almost time for turkey vultures to leave Kansas and head for their southern range, but if we miss them in the winter we only need to travel as far as southern Arkansas to see them year round.

Megan Corrigan

**Financial Statement**  
**Liz Mangile, Treasurer**  
**Oct 2017**

Beginning balance-----	\$7447.55
<b>Credits</b>	
Local dues-----	\$320.00
Total-----	\$ 320.00
<b>Debits</b>	
Newsletter-----	\$ 6.65
Huston Audubon Hurricane relief-----	\$200.00
Total-----	\$ 206.65
Ending balance-----	\$7560.90

## HAPPENINGS IN SOUTHEAST KANSAS

## Critter Connections by Bob Mangile



Male eastern tiger swallowtail

Females come in two color morphs, i.e., yellow and black. The yellow morph differs from males by having a series of blue spots along the hind wing. (See photos.)



Yellow morph female (note blue spots on lower wing)



Various hypotheses



Black morph female visiting my coneflowers (rich black forewings and blue hind wings)

have been put forth to explain the black morph female.

Genetics seems to play a role: a single gene mutation, combination of genes, genes acquired from hybridization, melanism, ambient temperature during the pupal stage and/or combinations of some of the above. The black morph varies from rich black to a light gray-black overcast with the typical tiger pattern visible. Interestingly, the percentages of black morph females increase as you go south.

They fly from early spring to late fall and produce two broods a year in our area. In cold areas they overwinter in the pupa stage. They adapt to various habitats and are considered to be generalists; therefore they are not threatened. Their green eggs are laid on the leaves of many woody plants (trees). Adults prefer nectar from a wide range of plants and will visit hummingbird feeders. The caterpillars appear as bird dropping mimics and like all members of the swallowtail clan they emit an offensive smell to repel predators from a gland called the osmeterium. (All photos by Bob Mangile.) # # #

**(Misunderstood Marsupial ...continued from Page 1)**

They do carry fleas, and can bite if provoked (but so would you). They are actually quite helpful for us. Part of nature's clean-up crew as they will eat everything from roadkill (any kind) to cockroaches to overripe fruits. They are resistant to snake venom, and in some parts of the Southeast, snakes make up a good portion of a 'possum's diet. Best of all, they eat the loathsome tick! Now who can't appreciate that?

Now that you have read all this interesting information about opossums, you may want to go get one as a pet. Please remember they are illegal to keep as pets. If you find an orphaned or injured opossum it is best to call a licensed rehabilitation facility. You can check our website for a listing of rehabilitators in the state <http://www.pittstate.edu/departments/naturereach/index.dot>. I hope next time you see one of these solitary, nocturnal creatures rambling through your yard you have a new appreciation for these misunderstood marsupials!

## Sightings.....



Pic of the Month  
By  
Emmett Sullivan

Leavenworth  
Eryngo

Photographed at  
Crawford State  
Park.

A strange flower  
that is in the  
parsley family.  
It prefers to  
grow in shallow,  
rocky areas.

Send your newsletter  
articles, bird  
sightings, and  
nature notes to  
C. Ford by Nov. 10.

**Application for Membership  
Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society**

**For first-time National Audubon membership**, send \$20.00 and become a member of both organizations, receive 6 copies of Audubon Magazine annually and 8 copies of Sperry-Galligar Newsletter. *Please make your check to: Sperry-Galligar Audubon.*

*YES I wish to become a FIRST-TIME member of National Audubon and Sperry-Galligar Audubon. (\$20.00).*

**For only local or renewal membership**, send \$15.00 for membership of Sperry-Galligar Audubon and receive the 8 newsletters per year informing you of all our local activities. *Please make your check to: Sperry-Galligar Audubon*

*YES I wish to become a RENEWING member of the local chapter (\$15.00).*

**Future National Audubon renewals:** Send Audubon mailer forms directly to National.

Mail to:  
**Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society**  
816 E. Atkinson Ave  
Pittsburg, Kansas 66762

Please Print



Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
e-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

**Events &  
Miscellany**



**Monarch Migration Presentation**



On Sunday, October 1, 2017, we had a special presentation from cyclist Sara Dykman. Since March 2017, she has been following the Monarch migration from Mexico and will return to Mexico in sometime around November. She has traveled over 7800 miles of her 10,000 journey so far, and has spoken to about 4500 kids and adults with more to come. As an outreach educator myself, I was completely impressed by her message and by the amount of work on all levels it took to undergo a journey such as this. I will continue to follow her on whatever her next adventure might be, and if you missed her presentation I highly encourage you to check out her website [www.beyondabook.org](http://www.beyondabook.org). I hope all of us will join her in the movement to preserve, protect, and improve habitat for all pollinators!  
Delia Lister

**Scroll down to Extra BONUS PAGE.**

**Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society  
Newsletter**  
816 Atkinson Ave.  
Pittsburg, KS 66762  
Meetings are held the last Thursday of the month. No meetings in June July, or August. (Nov/Dec meeting date to be announced.)  
7:00 pm to 9 pm, in Room 102, Yates Hall.  
PSU Campus, Pittsburg, KS.  
Refreshments served. Guests welcome.



**Visit our website:**

<http://sperry-galligar.com/>

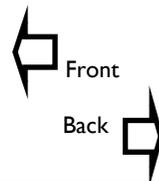
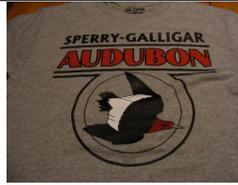


**Attention All  
Members**

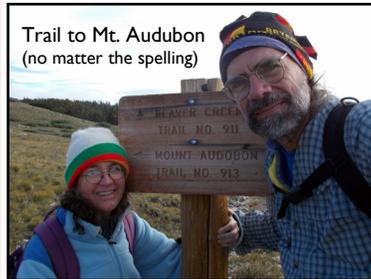
**Pay membership dues in September.** Please consider paying local membership dues. Our chapter receives 100% of the local dues only. **HOWEVER**, you can subscribe to both. Either way you get the newsletter.

## BONUS PAGE

**NEW SPERRY-GALLIGAR T-SHIRTS  
AVAILABLE at \$10**  
Check them out at the October  
Meeting.



### Climbing Mount Audubon



Trail to Mt. Audubon  
(no matter the spelling)

Megan's sister chose a good time and place to get married—Boulder, Colorado, in August when Kansas weather can be stifling. Megan and I used the opportunity to go a few days early, to hike and maybe climb a mountain. We looked at a map, saw the name “Mount

Audubon” and knew that would be our goal.

We set up our tent in the campground at Indian Peaks Wilderness Area. There were more camper trailers and Winnebagoes than tents, but the setting was beautiful.

The plan was to spend the first day taking day hikes in the area and letting our bodies get acclimated to the altitude. But Megan can be very goal oriented. She likes to check things off her list. She didn't want the mountain climb hanging over our head, so to speak. Besides, the weather the next day might be even worse.

So, we headed out early the first morning with our day packs filled with rain gear, warm clothes, food, and water—rain gear on top. Oh, we also had a couple of contractor's heavy-duty, oversized trash bags to crawl into if worse came to worse. Luckily, worse was never beyond bad.

It was the wind that was remarkable. Happily, we were sheltered from it as we hiked through the pine forest on the switchbacks. Switchbacks are nice. Never once did I wish that the trail were steeper so I could climb uphill faster.

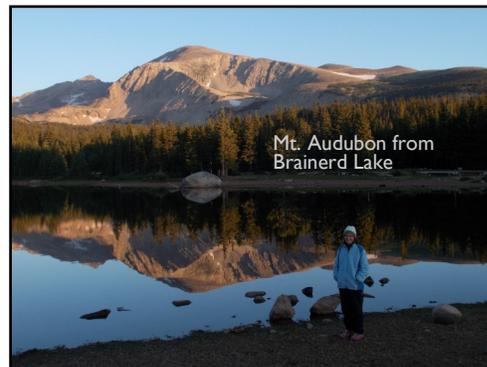
Even out of the trees above the timberline the wind did not confront us full force. We were sheltered by a ridge that was way up there and seemed to go on for a very long distance. This is where we could see the summit of Mount Audubon—occasionally clear, sometimes with dark clouds pouring over it, sometimes lost in the mist not far from us.

It was when we stepped onto the ridge that the wind hit us. We leaned into it as we hiked. Sometimes a step had to be changed mid-footfall as a gust pushed in an unplanned direction.

It is ironic that the closer one gets to a peak, the less likely it is to be seen. Those rocks right up there seem to be the highest ones until one gets to those rocks right up there. The last hour of the climb often involved a hand or two in addition to two feet. At least it often felt good to just lean onto a rock that we were face to face with anyway. The guidebook said that the last thousand feet of the climb was “very strenuous.” Who are we to disagree with the experts.

The summit of Mount Audubon was clear when we got there. We could see across the valley where we had started that morning. Rocks had been piled into a wall to make a windbreak. We sat sheltered, eating and drinking a bit, and pulling on more clothing. We did not stay long enough to cool down, but long enough for clouds to pour over the peak and close off our view.

Happily, the rain that hit us on the way down was not wet but frozen. It mostly bounced off our clothing. I resisted putting on rain-gear that would leave us flapping like a flag in the wind. It wasn't until we got to the forest that the real rain started, but by that time it was falling from top to bottom, not sideways.



Mt. Audubon from  
Brainerd Lake



Megan on windy  
summit

Megan decided it was some sort of grand design flaw that the way back was just as long as the way there. After all, she was a lot more tired on the way back and deserved a

break. I was just glad that the way back was downhill. That's generally the case in the sport of mountain climbing. Caving, now that's a sport with an inherent design flaw.

The wildflowers were beautiful. We first heard, then saw picas. Marmots scolded us, as did Steller's Jays. The following day we saw five moose on a hike. We added the Gray Jay and Lesser Goldfinch to our birding list. We were surprised to see so many White-crowned Sparrows at high altitude. Even on the summit of Audubon there were little brown birds flying quickly up and down, trying to not be carried away by the wind. We did no worse at identifying Colorado little brown birds than we do in Kansas.

In the end we were successful in escaping the stifling heat of August in Kansas, with a vengeance.

**Wayne Bockelman**