

# NEWS FROM THE FLOCK...

Newsletter of the Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society

Sperry– Galligar

Audubon Chapter

Officers 2019 - 2021

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Steve Ford

**Vice President:**

Mary Jo Meier

**Secretary**

Christine Brodsky

**Treasurer**

Liz Mangile

**Newsletter Editor**

Cindy Ford

[cford@gus.pittstate.edu](mailto:cford@gus.pittstate.edu)

**March Meeting**  
**Thursday, 7:00 p.m.**  
**Yates 102, PSU**  
**Pittsburg, KS**  
**\*\*Presentation\*\***

**March meeting**  
**CANCELLED**

**The April meeting is still**  
**scheduled for now.**

**Watch for announce-**  
**ments about the April**  
**meeting.**

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

**March 2020**

**VOLUME 2020 ISSUE 3**

## Land O' Lakes: Ralph Wells' 1953 Review by Steve Ford

I won't say I was a nerd as a kid in Indiana, but I will admit to nerdish tendencies, one of which was getting my mother to drive me a few miles outside of Terre Haute, to drop me off, canteen in hand, in the strip mined areas. In my other hand was a rock hammer. I would climb the bare dumps in search of egg-like nodules of shale, which I would tap with my hammer. About one in five nodules would crack open in two halves, each showing a beautiful fossil fern leaf. The dumps and strip

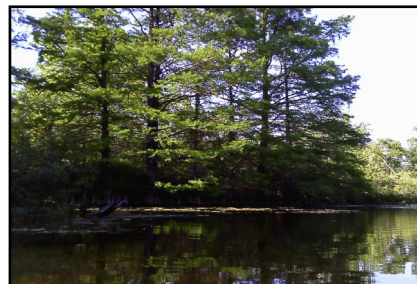
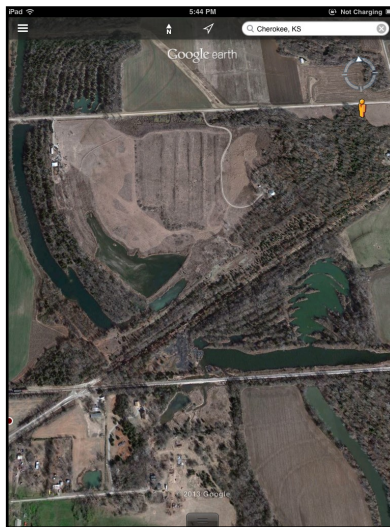
pit lakes were my playground. I would fish in them with my grandfather, swim, later scuba dive (I once recovered a stolen tape recorder for my detective father.), target shoot (never animals unless I was actually hunting), and as an undergrad at Indiana State do ecological projects.

Jump ahead to 1985 when I first came to southeast Kansas. I was very pleased to find that not all the countryside was pasture, corn, and soybeans, but consisted of a good bit of un-reclaimed mined land, exactly the same kind of coal beds I grew up on in Indiana. Sort of reminiscent of my mother, I got Victor Sullivan to fly me around over the area, and was amazed as to how extensive the old coal fields were. I was soon to live in a mobile home next to a pit lake as caretaker at PSU'S Monahan site, near

Cherokee, and later built a house near another such lake. The sulfur-smelling mud of the Pennsylvania Age is in my veins forever.

Skip another thirty years. Last week I came across an old reprint of the *Presidential Address, Kansas Academy of Science (KAS), 1953*. The President happened to be J. Ralph Wells, of Heckert-Wells Hall fame. One of Wells' interests, and the focus of his talk to KAS, was describing uses for the old coal fields in Crawford and Cherokee Counties. He noted that over 3 per

cent of the area of these counties was mined land—over 30,000 acres— about half of which was water (at that time the 15,000 acres of the Mined Land Wildlife Area had not been established). The land was still owned mostly by the coal companies and by other private land owners. It was pretty much unproductive “wasteland,” and Wells noted that lots of people were not happy with the initially barren landscape. What to do with it?



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## 6:00 Board Meeting Highlights Christine Brodsky, Secretary

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

**January minutes:** Correction to Christmas Bird Count data; we observed 58 species, not 38. Read and approved after this correction.

**Treasurer's Report:** \$4,717.03 balance.

**Tonight's Speaker:** "The State of Birds in 2020: How Citizen Science Informs Conservation", by Dr. Andrew George, Assistant Professor of Biology at Pittsburg State University. March's speaker is Bob Gress presenting "Kansas Birds in Photos." Rachel Ross can no longer present in April; need to find another speaker. Start thinking about speakers for next year.

**Field Trip:** Saturday March 14 to Lester Davis Forest, near Mindemines and Prairie State Park, MO. Meet at Home Depot parking lot at 8:00AM and will return around noon. Steve suggested a birding trip to Lake Parsons on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. Mavis suggested a summer field trip to the Lavender Festival in Fort Scott on June 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Wildlife & Parks (Walt DeGrusen) Landscape Project:** Ordered another batch of seed; mixed and scattered. Will require some weeding soon – who wants to help?

**Earth Day:** We will have a table at the Pritchett Pavilion in Pittsburg on Saturday, April 18<sup>th</sup>. We will bring the trifold material, brochures, and milkweed seed to give away. Steve found a good deal on milkweed seed (\$50 for a half pound). Mavis moved to spend \$50 on milkweed seed and Diane seconded; the motion passed. Christine will print more brochures. We may bring a few bird boxes to sell. Mary Kiltchner may bring potted pine trees to hand out.

**Australia Wildlife Recovery Donation:** Delia's cousin lives in Australia and told her about an organization called Two Thumbs that rescues koalas. One of the recent wildfires burned through the sanctuary and burned down the building housing the koalas. The Two Thumbs' GoFundMe page is trying to fundraise \$200,000 to rebuild and care for the injured koalas (currently at \$123,000). Wayne motioned to donate \$100 to the Two Thumbs fundraiser and Cindy seconded. Discussion followed about increasing the donation amount and encouraging other local Audubon chapters to donate. Motion passed for \$100.

**Next Meeting:** March 26, 2020



**Help koalas recover by sending support for re-establishing habitat for them following devastating fires in Australia.**

## Febr. Presenter: Dr. Andrew George



**Title:** "The State of Birds in 2020: How Citizen Science Informs Conservation"

Dr. Andrew George, Assistant Professor of Biology from Pittsburg State University, highlighted an important news story for his February Meeting presentation. Published in the October edition of the journal *Science*, a group of esteemed ornithologists made a shocking claim that approximately 2.9 billion birds have been lost since 1970 in the USA and

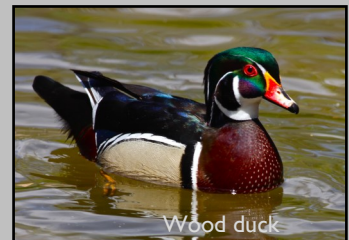
Canada. Dr. George broke down the news article by presenting the data about the state of the birds and discussed how the researchers estimated the declining bird population trends.

The data was disheartening and alarming. The authors of the article estimated that of the 2.9 billion birds lost in this time period, 2.5 billion were migratory birds, 500 million were boreal forest species, and 720 million were grassland species (53% loss!). The species declining the fastest included the house sparrow (356% decline), blackpoll warbler, horned lark, dark-eyed junco, and savannah sparrow. Dr. George shared that the major causes of bird mortality include cat predation, window collisions, and vehicles.

Even so, not all of the data were bad – there were a few groups of birds that have done well since the 1970s. The success stories included woodpeckers (increased by 14 million), raptors (increased by 15 million), and waterfowl (increased by 35 million), all mainly due to habitat conservation, management, and the banning of DDT. These trends were estimated by using the Breeding Bird Survey data and extrapolating data from Partners in Flight.



Red-bellied woodpecker



Wood duck

Dr. George concluded his presentation on a positive note, highlighting a few important ways that any of us can contribute to the data on bird

populations in the United States, and abroad. He emphasized how data collected from citizens inform these types of research studies. He recommended participating in the Christmas Bird Count and e-Bird, an online database to put in all of your bird observations. Many thanks to Dr. George for his informative presentation!

**Christine Brodsky**



## HAPPENINGS IN SOUTHEAST KANSAS

(Cont. from Page 1)



Forest products was one idea. Consequently thousands of trees of many species were planted. Walnuts in particular seemed promising, but ultimately

failed. Several pine varieties were tried, of which loblollies did the best. The others died out over time. At PSU's Natural History Reserve, the old "college farm," there are many mature bald cypress. None of these plantings proved to be economically viable. Cover plants such as - I cringe to say - sericea lespedeza, Japanese honeysuckle, shrub honeysuckle, crown vetch, multiflora rose, and even kudzu were planted, many of which turned out to be big mistakes due to their aggressive spreading. Sericea is now listed as a noxious weed in Crawford County - the land owner is obliged to control it or be penalized. It is indeed a problem on our farm.

Varieties of legumes and grasses for cattle grazing were seeded, some by helicopter. While grazing seemed the answer for a while, it mostly fizzled.

In the early days orchards and vineyards were key. Many acres were planted with many varieties, and though productivity and quality were good, the cost of labor and maintenance in the hilly geography was just too high for commercial success. Marketing sputtered. Weather was frustrating. Sparse remnants of such plantings can still be found on PSU's Reserve.

Wells predicted that fishing, hunting, and other recreation might prove to be important. (Recall that deer were scarce in the '30s and '40s, and turkeys were nonexistent until the late '70s.) At the time of Wells' address to KAS, the old quail farm

(headquarters of KDWP) was still raising about 15,000 bobwhites annually to release in the area. Like most state fish and game agencies throughout the country, Kansas stubbornly refused to give up on upland game farming, even though it was never successful in the long term. (I must mention that captive Canada goose programs however, such as the one on mined land south of Cherokee up until the mid 80s, were successful, and helped pull that handsome species from the brink of extinction and make it a popular game bird).

As it turned out, with vegetation softening the rough landscape over time, deer, turkeys, and wood ducks did find the mined lands hospitable. Songbirds, red-shouldered hawks, barred owls, and even an occasional eagle like the edges, as do squirrels and endangered gray bats. Beavers, for better or worse, are plentiful, and river otters have made a comeback. My grandfather would have loved the fishing and especially the ready access to it thanks to all the boat ramps in the Mined Land Wildlife Area. People build houses and cabins on the lakes. What was once cheap waste land (as it was when we purchased a couple of hundred acres in 1988) is now called "recreational land," and is valued as highly as agricultural land.

The wake of fifty years of strip mining left an initial ecological disaster, and few subsequent commercial endeavors were successful. Yet Dr. Wells' predictions as to the eventual utility of the mined lands for recreational use proved correct, perhaps to a greater degree than he foresaw. I think time will continue to be a friend to the mined lands, and in our growing technological and artificial environments the mined lands will grow in importance as an access to the balm of nature. This disaster ironically has become a special part of our local landscape. Now where's my rock hammer?!

### FINANCIAL STATEMENT March 2020 Liz Mangile, Treasurer

Beginning balance-----\$4777.28

#### Credits

Membership dues-----\$15.00

Total-----\$ 15.00

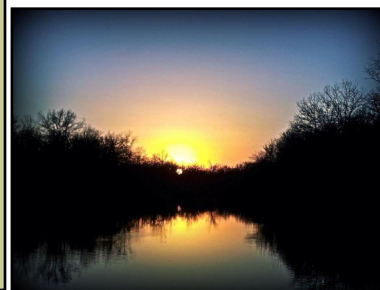
#### Debits

Newsletter-----\$ 4.26

Donation to Australia Audubon for wildlife-----\$100.00

Total-----\$ 104.26

Ending balance-----\$4688.02



## Sightings.....



### Emmett's Pics



### Spring Beauty

Spring Beauty, (*Claytonia Virginica*), Purslane family. They can be found in moist soil and in some yards. This one was found at Southeast Kansas Nature Center, Galena, Ks. Mar. 3-2020. Uses: The bulbs were used as a food source by Native Americans.

Send your newsletter articles, bird sightings, and nature notes to C. Ford by Apr. 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 \_\_\_\_\_

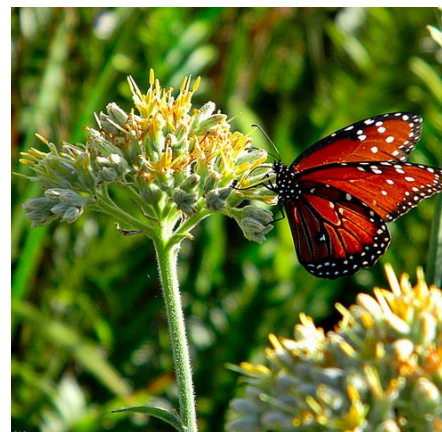
**Events &  
Miscellany**



## Earth Day Celebration

**The city of Pittsburg will celebrate  
the 50-year birthday of Earth Day  
with booths and music,  
Saturday, April 18  
Pritchett Pavilion**

Sperry-Galligar Audubon will have a booth set up to highlight our mission of conservation and birds. Please join us or stop by where we will have information on how to enhance your backyard for pollinators and birds.

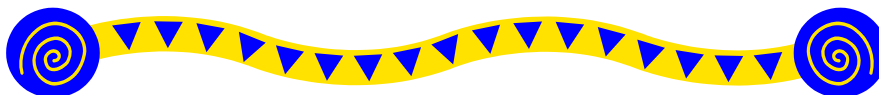


**Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society  
Newsletter  
816 Atkinson Ave.  
Pittsburg, KS 66762  
Meetings are held the last Thursday of the month. No meetings in June July, or August. (Nov/Dec meeting date to be announced.)  
7:00 pm to 9 pm, in Room 102, Yates Hall.  
PSU Campus, Pittsburg, KS.  
Refreshments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

