



NEWS FROM THE FLOCK

Jan 2023/ Issue 1

OFFICERS

President

Mary Jo Meier

Vice President

Andrew George

Secretary

Megan Corrigan

Treasurer

Liz Mangile

Board Support

Newsletter Editor

Cindy Ford

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

pittstate.edu

Web Master

Bob Mangile

[sperry-](http://sperry-galligar.com)

[galligar.com](http://sperry-galligar.com)

Membership

Diane McCallum

Next Program

Thursday, 7:00

January 26

Yates 102

PSU Campus

"Thirty Years of Digging Mussels in Southeast Kansas" by Ed Miller, Retired Biologist, KS Dept. Wildlife & Parks

The Search for the Spotted Skunk in Kansas

Christine Brodsky

While not universally loved, skunks play an important ecological role throughout North America, feeding on various insects, mammal pests, and spreading seeds through their scat. One skunk, historically found throughout Kansas, is now up for a potential listing on the Endangered Species List – the spotted skunk. This species was once known as the eastern spotted skunk (*Spilogale putorius*). However, recent genetic evidence suggests that the species of skunk found throughout the Central Plains is a unique species, the plains spotted skunk (*Spilogale interrupta*), while the eastern spotted skunk is now regulated to states east of the Mississippi River.

Spotted skunks get their name from their black and white spotted pelage. These species are small, only about the size of

a tree squirrel. Its urban cousin, the striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*), is the skunk that we see much more frequently in southeast Kansas. Striped skunks tend to be larger than the spotted skunk (often getting quite portly while taking advantage of the abundant food sources found in more urban habitats) and have a characteristic white stripe running along its black backside.



Daniel Benson

Striped skunks are also more omnivorous, more active during the day, and are flexible with where they live, from forests, grassy plains, to suburban

neighborhoods. The spotted skunks are much pickier – they are more nocturnal, carnivorous, and tend to be a bit more secretive. Spotted skunks also have the unique ability to perform a unique set of behaviors when encountering a potential predator. This little gymnast stomps its feet on the ground and then performs a handstand, eventually spraying the intruder if it does not get the acrobatic hint.

(Cont. on Page 2)

Board Minutes...Megan Corrigan

Sperry Galligar Audubon Minutes -December 1, 2022, Pittsburg State, Yates Hall 102

Attended: Mavis Benner, Andrew George, Steve Ford, Cindy Ford, Diane McCallum, Bob Mangile, Liz Mangile, Wayne Bockelman, Megan Corrigan

Minutes from the October meeting were read and approved.

Treasurer's Report – We have \$4540.65 in checking.

Upcoming Events –Dec. 2-3 – Birdseed Sale at Blue Ribbon; Dec. 3 – Bird Walk at Wilderness Park; Christmas Bird Counts – December 17 at Prairie State Park, Dec 21 in Parsons, January 1 at Mined Lands Wildlife Area; January program – Ed Miller. February program – from Prairie State Park. Jenn Rader is rescheduled for March.

Thank you note to Dane and Linda Shultz – Mary Jo will send a thank you note for hosting the fundraiser.

Picnic Date – Bob booked the Homer Cole center for May 25, 2023, for the picnic

Lead Legislation – Mary Jo responded to the email we received, agreeing that our group would sign on to a letter to support the LEAD act.

Attendance at December Meeting – 37 at December bird walk – 7

Spotted Skunk (cont. from Page 1)

In Kansas, the spotted skunk was once a common furbearer species. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the annual number of spotted skunk pelts sold ranged from 93,216 to 117,309 in Kansas alone. Pelt sales had fallen to less than 1,000 by 1950, and the season was permanently closed by the KDWP in 1977. The last confirmed observation of the plains spotted skunk in Kansas occurred in

Treasurer Report...Liz Mangile

January 2023

Beginning Balance \$ 5226.21

Credits

Membership \$ 100.00

Birdseed Sale 420.00

Nat. Membership 20.00

Total \$ 540.00

Debits

Newsletter \$ 5.56

PSU Foundation 200.00

Sally Imhoff 500.00

Homer Cole 2023 Picnic 80.00

Stamps 48.00

Total \$ 833.56

Ending Balance \$ 4932.65

Gray County in 2020, with the last confirmed observation in southeast Kansas occurring back in 2004. Multiple hypotheses exist as to why this species is in decline, from habitat loss and fragmentation, increased agricultural intensity, pesticide use, and disease.

Due to its statewide conservation concern, Christine Brodsky's graduate students and she have been conducting a statewide survey to find the spotted skunk since early 2022. This research is funded by the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP), and will continue into the Spring of 2024. Our goal is to deploy 600 motion-activated game cameras across 18 counties, baited with a can of sardines to lure in any spotted skunks located nearby. As of writing this article (December 2022), we have not yet detected a single spotted skunk after deploying approximately 30% of our cameras. However, we have found other Kansas Species of Greatest Conservation Need, such as the gray fox, southern flying squirrel, and even one bird species – the lesser prairie chicken!

December Program Synopsis by Megan Corrigan



The State of Birds 2022

A high-profile article in Science Magazine in 2019 reported that there are 2.9 billion fewer birds now than there were 50 years ago, a loss of 29%. The first question this raises is, why? An obvious cause is habitat destruction. We know grasslands are disappearing to development and agriculture, so it's not surprising the article noted a 53% decline in grassland birds. Cats, vehicle collisions, and window strikes also contribute. But a second question of interest, beyond why this is happening is, how do they know?

This is where we come in. They know because of us and because of people like us. They used data from two citizen science projects: the North American Breeding Bird Survey and the Christmas Bird Count. These surveys have been conducted each year by volunteers who count birds during specific time and date windows, in specific locations. These same routes/locations are used year after year, so there is long term data about trends in relative abundance of bird populations.

While dedicated volunteers continue these surveys to provide new data each year, there are also now websites with accompanying free cell phone apps that can turn any one of us into a citizen scientist and make our data available to researchers.

The first is eBird, which was started in 2003 by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Users can post lists of what birds they have seen, where and when, and eBird makes that information publicly available to everyone. It has over 600,000 users worldwide, it is free, and it can be accessed on a desktop computer or through an app. It's an easy place for birders to keep track of their life lists, or to explore what birds were recently seen any place you might travel. Users can also sign up to receive email alerts when any rare species is reported in their county.

Another app, this one sponsored by the California Academy of Sciences and National Geographic is called iNaturalist. This site is about more than just birds and could be fun for kids. You can post photos or videos (they call these 'observations') of any living thing. If you are not sure of the identification, iNaturalist will make a suggestion. All users can see everyone's observations, and if something is mis-identified, other users may offer corrections. As in eBird, you can search by location to see what has been observed recently. Once an observation has been confirmed by two people, it is considered 'research grade.'

The 123rd Christmas Bird Count was a success! In contrast to the previous two years, the weather cooperated, and the count commenced on January 1st. Despite some fog in the morning, temperatures reached a balmy 68°F with low winds, which made for a pleasant day of birding with friends. Cindy Ford remarked that this was among the warmest CBCs in the last 35 years. Eleven people participated in the count, including at least four who were joining for the first time.

We managed to find 70 species, which is well above the historical average for the count. However, numbers were low for several species that are normally abundant in the count circle, including most sparrows and blackbirds. Low numbers may reflect the severe drought of 2022, or the arctic weather in the weeks preceding the count.



Happenings in Southeast KS

Striped Skunks

Bob Mangile

When we moved to our current location over 40 years ago there were patchers of prairie around our place. Our back area was a grazed-bare horse pasture. Bobwhite quail were regulars through our yard. Killdeer nested at the south end of our drive and striped skunks sprayed regularly through the night and dug up the yard searching for grubs. I started live trapping them and hauling them away which was a tricky operation! Consider a live skunk in a live trap and the task of removing it. First was a homemade rabbit trap with covered sides--which is good. Then I bought a wire trap but had to cover it so not to be seen by the skunk and become a threat. That worked. Then slowly hauling, low to the ground not to expose my moving feet, to my pickup truck to be hauled away and released. But that is another tricky operation. Opening the door might trigger a skunk spray. And when open the skunk refused to exit the trap and you might get sprayed when it exited the trap. I learned that a plastic pop bottle full of water with a small hole in the lid is a nice way to get them to move by spraying them with water. Not a good idea to punch them with a stick! I became an expert on the operation. One year I trapped over a dozen skunks and never got sprayed.

Striped skunks come in various patterns of black and white. Some are very black and some almost all white. Years ago I hauled home a nearly all black skunk with a small white spot on its head,--sometimes called a star skunk--that I found along the road on West 4th St. It barely smelled like a skunk so I decided to carefully skin it and sell the fur. When I entered the house my wife had an unpleasant reaction. I had to put my clothes outside and hit the shower or sleep on the porch.

During the trapping time I caught one nearly all white skunk and had my wife photograph it when it was released (see photo). Getting her to do that took some clever dialogue, for sure!

My property has changed over the past years and so has the surroundings. No more bobwhite quail, no more killdeer out back and the skunks are seldom smelled at night.

Sightings...



SKUNKS



Skunk in Bob Mangile's yard.



Skunk Patterns

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

cford@pittstate.edu

FOX PHOTOS FROM TERRAPIN RIDGE

Kathy Fox



Golden-crowned kinglet



American robin

EMMETT'S PICS



Trumpeter swans



Hairy gayfeather

David Mangile



"White" striped skunk



Barred owl

Application for Membership Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society

For first-time National Audubon membership: send \$20.00 and become a member of both organizations, receive 4 copies of Audubon Magazine annually and 8 copies of Sperry-Galligar Newsletter. Please make your check to: National Audubon Society.

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

For only local renewal membership, send \$15.00 for membership in 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 Audubon Society.

Please print and mail to:

Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society
816 E. Atkinson Ave.
Pittsburg, KS 66762

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip Code _____

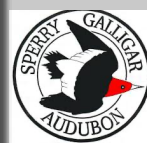
Phone _____

e-mail _____

Events & Etc.

Dr. Christine Brodsky, PSU Biology Dept., is wanting to locate spotted skunks--a secretive gymnast--over the next year. If you are interested in having a camera placed on your property to help with her detection efforts, please contact her at

ksspottedskunk@gmail.com



Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society

Meetings are held the last Thursday of the month...7:00 p.m. to 9 p.m., Room 102, Yates Hall, PSU Campus, Pittsburg, KS.

No meetings in June, July, or August. (November/December meeting date to be announced.)

Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society
816 E. Atkinson Ave.
Pittsburg, KS 66762

ATTENTION ALL MEMBERS. Pay membership dues in September. Please consider paying local membership dues. Our chapter receives 100% of the local dues only. You can subscribe to both local and national. Either way you get the newsletter.

Southeast Kansas Mined Land Christmas Bird Count — January 1, 2023

Snow goose	1	Horned lark	231
Cackling goose	16	Carolina chickadee	61
Canada goose	514	Chickadee sp.	23
Trumpeter swan	1	Tufted titmouse	25
Mallard	101	White-breasted nuthatch	13
Green-winged teal	2	Carolina wren	13
Duck sp.	6	Golden-crowned kinglet	10
Northern bobwhite	16	Ruby-crowned kinglet	2
Wild turkey	28	Eastern bluebird	23
Great blue heron	4	Hermit thrush	2
Black vulture	1	American robin	43
Northern harrier	18	Northern mockingbird	6
Sharp-shinned hawk	1	European starling	226
Bald eagle	12	Cedar waxwing	28
Red-shouldered hawk	9	Lapland longspur	100
Red-tailed hawk	41	Common yellowthroat	2
Red-tailed hawk (Harlan's)	1	Yellow-rumped warbler	2
Rough-legged hawk	1	Yellow-rumped warbler (myrtle)	5
Killdeer	1	American tree sparrow	24
Ring-billed gull	3	Field sparrow	5
Rock pigeon	5	Fox sparrow	4
Eurasian collared dove	12	Dark-eye junco	231
Mourning dove	95	Dark-eye junco (slate-colored)	16
Short-eared owl	1	White-crowned sparrow	51
Great horned owl	2	Harris' sparrow	112
Barred owl	2	White-throated sparrow	69
Belted kingfisher	2	Savannah sparrow	7
Red-headed woodpecker	4	Song sparrow	28
Red-bellied woodpecker	47	Swamp sparrow	7
Yellow-bellied sapsucker	1	Northern cardinal	154
Downy woodpecker	25	Red-winged blackbird	861
Hairy woodpecker	6	Western meadowlark	17
Northern flicker	34	Eastern meadowlark	122
Northern flicker (yellow-shafted)	1	Meadowlark sp.	105
Pileated woodpecker	2	Common grackle	29
American kestrel	20	Blackbird sp.	500
Loggerhead shrike	3	House finch	8
Blue jay	123	American goldfinch	98
American crow	216	House sparrow	56
Total Species.....			70

Participants: Cindy Ford, Steve Ford, Chad Gardner, Andrew George, Stephen Hight, Ryan McGinty, Taylor Michael, Amanda Trout, Leann Trout, Donald Weidemann

Record high numbers for individual species (with total # counted) included Cackling Goose (16), Red-shouldered-Hawk (9), Hermit Thrush (2), and Western Meadowlark (17).