



NEWS FROM THE FLOCK

Jan 2024 / Issue 4

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Diane McCallum

Next Program

Thursday, 7:00
January 25
Yates Hall 102
PSU Campus

“Supporting Aquatic Ecosystems” by Kyle Steinert, Farlington Fish Hatchery & KS Aquatic Biodiversity Center will outline how the hatchery is contributing to conservation efforts by raising and replacing freshwater mussels and plains minnows to regional streams.

What Was That?

Diane McCallum

We’ve had such mild weather this fall that I’ve taken advantage of several of the Mined Land Wildlife Areas around Pittsburg. Since they’re closed to vehicles from October to March, they can provide a quiet place to walk and watch for wildlife.

On a recent walk through #1 (just north of Frontenac), I took a side path and found myself standing by a medium-sized pond. The water was still and it was very peaceful. As I scanned the far shore, I saw movement and cursed myself for not bringing binoculars. (I know! I’m a failure as a birder.) Something was moving along the edge of the water; at first I thought it was an opossum, but then I realized it was a raccoon. He would wander along the shore and then stop to feel around in the water for a snack. I’d never seen one do this in the wild before, so I stood there watching. As he worked his way along, I began to wonder if he might come close to me. I did have a camera, so I got it ready and waited. The raccoon disappeared into a stand of trees on my right and I stood still, listening for raccoon sounds (footfalls in the dry leaves or splashes of water).

Then, without warning, I heard the most raucous, frightening sound! It came from a few yards to my right, beyond a bend in the path, so I couldn’t see anything. I’d never heard anything like it, so I froze. It sounded like a bullfrog shrieking and croaking at the same time. I didn’t know if I should run away, stay still or scream back, especially when the sound was repeated a few times. As I considered my options, though, my terrified brain finally calmed down enough to really think about what I might have heard ... and a suspicion formed in my mind. (Some of you have probably already guessed what it was.)

I lowered the camera and took several steps to my right. The fallen leaves made it impossible to be silent, but I was as quiet as I could be. I rounded the corner and saw a larger pond, with a great blue heron in flight away from me. I have to admit, I breathed a sigh of relief. It wasn’t a bobcat or a rabid raccoon. It was the heron! (I later verified this with several YouTube videos. Check it out if you’ve never heard a great blue heron’s warning cry!)

Forgive the pun, but I thought I was heron things ...

I never did see the raccoon again. I don’t know if the heron was yelling at me or at him, but I think it was probably me. The raccoon most likely didn’t stick around to find out either way.

I didn’t get my photo, but I did get a new experience!

Board Minutes...Mary Jo Meier

No board minutes.

Sperry-Galligar Audubon January Bird Walk

Kathy Fox

We had a group of six adults meet at Wilderness Park and walked 1.8 miles in 1:25.

A group of five then met just down the road to the West at the Frontenac WTP for 22 min.

Wilderness Park, Frontenac 1/6/2024 16 Species observed, 58 individuals

- 5 Canada Goose
- 7 Red-bellied Woodpecker
- 6 Downy Woodpecker
- 1 Pileated Woodpecker
- 3 Northern Flicker
- 1 American Crow
- 8 Carolina Chickadee
- 5 Tufted Titmouse
- 2 Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- 1 Golden-crowned Kinglet
- 1 White-breasted Nuthatch
- 1 Brown Creeper
- 5 Carolina Wren
- 2 American Robin
- 4 American Goldfinch
- 6 Northern Cardinal

Frontenac WTP 1/6/2024 7 Species observed, 473 individuals

- 350 Greater White-fronted Goose
- 30 Northern Shoveler
- 6 Green-winged Teal
- 60 Ring-necked Duck
- 2 Bufflehead
- 18 Common Goldeneye
- 7 Killdeer

Treasurer Report...Liz Mangile

Report for Nov/Dec 2023

Beginning Balance \$ 4978.64

Debit

9/22/23 Newsletter Printing . \$ 7.58
10/22/23 Newsletter Printing . 7.14
22/26/23 Newsletter Printing . 5.92
Total \$20.64

Credit

11/02/23 Ach Deposit \$ 40.00
11/26/23 Membership 45.00
12/14/23 Birdseed Sale 400.00
12/14/23 Membership 15.00
Total \$500.00

Ending Balance \$ 5458.00

Photos by Kathy Fox



White-fronted Geese



Northern Shoveler

December PROGRAM RECAP by Cindy Ford



Meagan Duffee-Yates explained that there is a difference between prescribed burns and wildfires. Wildfires can contain large, high flames, race across an area (including up mountains), could kill acres of vegetation, and threaten structures and lives. Most wildfires are caused by lightning strikes and human causes.

Most notable, particularly the last few years of climate change, are the western evergreen forest fires. In addition to the most common causes of these fires listed above is the longterm management of those forests. Smokey Bear admonitions against starting fires seemed like a good slogan years ago.

There is still merit to the philosophy, but what has happened is suppression of fire in many of the large mountainous forests. There is too much dead tree debris on the forest floors that contribute to huge amounts of fuel, resulting in the extensive and dangerous fires. Other management factors are also in play: refusing to thin timber and massive outbreaks of pine bark beetles that kill thousands of trees. Managed fires throughout the West are good management and indeed important to many species of trees. Meagan pointed out that sugar pines, for example, must have fire to open their cones so that the seeds are dispersed.

Meagan volunteered a couple of years ago to join fire fighting crews to fight some fires in Montana and Oregon. She was the only woman in a 20-person crew, consisting of a crew boss, two sawyers, and 17 linemen. They go out for 21 days for 16-18 hours each day carrying over 50 pounds of safety and survival equipment—hiking miles up and down mountains. She was part of the linemen who dig trenches with pulaskis (a specialized hand tool that is an axe on one side and a hoe on the other). She displayed the safety clothing they wear and indicated that she had to get used to not having a shower for 21 days.

Safety is the most important aspect of fire fighting. Bare dirt lines are established so that the fires will not jump to new areas. This is what linemen are doing along with bulldozers creating large lanes of bare dirt. Consciously watching the fire behavior is extremely important. A person does not want to be in front of a fire going uphill where the fire moves quicker—updrafting and hotter than going downhill. The crew also has to watch for falling trees (cut or burned) and loads of water dropped by helicopters. Meagan said that she is not helping as much with the western fires due to health problems when getting home. Smoke and toxins in the air can be detrimental to respiratory health, making her ill for a couple weeks.

The general philosophy for fighting the western fires is currently to let the fire burn until it reaches structures or is life threatening. Agencies now are using prescribed burns to lessen the impacts of out of control fires.

Prescribed burns are fires set purposely. To be safe, conditions must be good, such as humidity, wind speed and direction, knowing how the vegetation will react to fire, preparing edges to the fire, and getting enough people to monitor the fire. Meagan makes burn plans for land owners in Missouri and assists with the burns as crew boss. Most of the prescribed burns are on prairies where the health of the native prairie is greatly improved through fire. She emphasized that fire leads to rejuvenation—vegetation and wildlife. Through various studies, it has been documented that American kestrels as well as prairie chickens are linked to prairies that are burned. Bobwhites cannot thrive in grasslands that are too choked with ground duff.

Meagan showed impressively that fire can be one of the most valuable tools to improve habitat.

Southeast Kansas Mined Land Christmas Bird Count — 2024

Andy George

This winter marks the 124th year of the Christmas Bird Count, one of the largest and longest running international citizen science projects. Each year, thousands of volunteers from more than 20 countries join local counts help identify and count birds on a previously designated date and location. Per tradition, the Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society hosted the Southeast Kansas Minedlands count on New Year's Day.

This year, 11 participants met before sunrise on the count day, where they received maps and instructions before embarking in 5 teams to cover a portion of the 15-mile count circle in Cherokee County. We counted 4737 individual birds of 76 species, which is tied with 2002 for second highest number of species for the count.

A Northern Shrike was reported for the first time on this count, which is a rarity for southeast Kansas. Other notable records included record numbers of Wood Duck (7), Red-shouldered-Hawk (18), Fox Sparrow (17), Spotted Towhee (3), and Rusty Blackbird (300). Other notable species included Short-eared Owl, Smith's Longspur, Prairie Falcon, Merlin, and Red-breasted Nuthatch.

Like the Northern Shrike, bird species such as Rusty Blackbird, Smith's Longspur, and several of our common winter sparrows, spend the breeding season in the Boreal Forest and Tundra of northern Canada – regions that are difficult for biologists to access. Long-term monitoring programs such as the Christmas Bird Count are especially important studying the population trends of these species.

Thank you to the dedicated volunteers whose efforts continue to contribute valuable insights into our local bird populations during the Christmas Bird Count. Participants: Jackie Augustine, Wayne Bockelman, Bob Estes, Steve Ford, Cindy Ford, Andrew George, Chad Gardner, Delia Lister, Donald Weidemann, Marion Weidemann, Maddie Rodriguez

Greater white-fronted goose 23
Snow goose. 12
Canada goose. 357
Wood duck. 7
Mallard. 19
Pied-billed grebe 6
Great blue heron 4
Northern harrier 15
Sharp-shinned hawk 1
Cooper's hawk. 1
Bald eagle 1
Red-shouldered hawk 18
Red-tailed hawk 61
Harlan's hawk 1
Rough-legged hawk. 1
Buteo sp. 1
Eurasian collared dove 14
Mourning dove. 118
Short-eared owl. 1
Great horned owl. 1
Barred owl. 1
Belted kingfisher. 4
Red-headed woodpecker. 27
Red-bellied woodpecker 57
Yellow-bellied sapsucker. 5
Downy woodpecker. 35
Hairy woodpecker. 6
Northern flicker. 29

Yellow-shafted flicker. 3
Pileated woodpecker. 7
American kestrel. 34
Merlin. 1
Prairie falcon. 1
Loggerhead shrike. 7
Northern shrike. 1
Blue jay. 164
American crow. 153
Horned lark. 27
Carolina chickadee. 72
Tufted titmouse. 33
Red-breasted nuthatch. 1
White-breasted nuthatch. 7
Brown creeper. 4
Carolina wren. 19
Golden-crowned kinglet. 4
Ruby-crowned kinglet. 4
Eastern bluebird. 54
Hermit thrush. 2
American robin. 182
Northern mockingbird. 20
European starling. 229
Cedar waxwing. 50
Lapland longspur. 238
Smith's longspur. 5
Yellow-rumped warbler. 36
Myrtle warbler. 2

American tree sparrow. 1
Field sparrow. 3
Dark-eyed junco. 238
Slate-colored junco. 87
White-crowned sparrow. 258
Harris's sparrow. 182
White-throated sparrow. 102
Savannah sparrow. 52
Song sparrow. 77
Lincoln's sparrow. 2
Swamp sparrow. 31
Spotted towhee. 3
Sparrow sp. 36
Northern cardinal. 116
Red-winged blackbird. 549
Western meadowlark. 6
Eastern meadowlark. 195
Western/Eastern meadowlark. 63
Rusty blackbird. 37
Common grackle. 30
Brown-headed cowbird. 22
Blackbird sp. 30
House finch. 3
Purple finch. 4
American goldfinch. 63
House sparrow. 34

Total Species. 76

AUDUBON ARTISTIC NOTEBOOK

Kathy Fox sent photos taken at her country home near Pittsburg.



Cedar Waxwing
12/23/23



Harris's Sparrow
1/9/24



Happenings in Southeast KS

CREEKSIDE WHITE-TAILS

Cindy and I purchased our property west of Cherokee over thirty years ago. The most scenic part of the place is a steep hill, "the bluff," south of Limestone Creek. Its mature oak-hickory woods is quite Ozarkian. Nonetheless we rarely visit it. It's simply hard to access because one has to battle through a dense, even claustrophobic, young woods to do it.

I was trying to rectify that recently by cutting a trail through that lowland woods. I curved it near the bank of the creek because, well, creeks are pretty and they attract interesting things. Before long I happened on such a thing - albeit not so pretty - on the opposite bank, a dead eight-point buck lying halfway in the water.

I was sorry it was dead, and I was irritated because my first thought was that one of my neighbors had wounded it, but failed to hunt it down - "wanton waste," as they call it, which is both unethical and illegal. It has happened before. That said, I have always found skulls, antlers, and other artifacts of the woods to be particularly interesting and often beautiful. I would find it difficult to be a trophy hunter, but am glad to retrieve and prepare the skull of a buck with a handsome rack.

I had a couple more days of work to do, but marked the location. Rain interceded. The creek rose a little and covered much of the deer, but when I was able to return for it, it was still there, covered in a thin layer of mud, into which a raccoon had left its tracks. "Deft" would describe neither my clammering down the vertical, muddy, root-filled embankment, nor my handling of a limb saw to behead the animal. I finally managed to scale back up the bank, sweating, my old chest heaving, my pants wet with creek water and mud, but brandishing my smelly prize.

I could not find a wound (admittedly, I was spent and did not try to turn over the water-logged deer to check its other side). The neighbors I tactfully questioned didn't know anything, but one had some interesting observations. Could the death be due to the disease sweeping the central U.S. called chronic wasting disease, CWD? Possibly, but probably not. CWD is more common in western Kansas, although it is working its way east, and in fact surrounds Crawford County. The state deer biologist thinks it will occur everywhere in Kansas in just a few years. The culprit here was more likely a viral disease of the lungs and heart called epizootic hemorrhagic disease, EHD*, common in certain circumstances in deer, and similar to a disease of sheep and cattle called "blue tongue."

The circumstances in deer are ecological. EHD results when deer are bitten by tiny flies called midges, which concentrate in pools when creeks dry up in summer. Our region has suffered two years of drought - two years of pools in Limestone Creek. Midges are killed by subfreezing winter weather, but the mild winter we'd enjoyed up to the time I spotted the deer has fostered EHD. My friend spends a lot of time along the creeks of southeast Kansas, and says he's seen dozens of dead bucks (but no does for some reason). I did search the creek more, but didn't find any additional dead animals. I'm glad I didn't, but he suspects there are more to be found.

At least my deer didn't die totally unappreciated. Hopefully the recent rain, flowing creek, and frigid temperatures will help stifle the EHD. I prefer finding my antlers high atop prancing bucks.

Steve Ford

**EHD is not known to be transmitted from deer to humans or to other animals.*

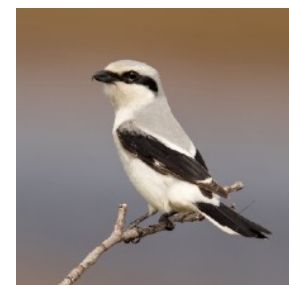
Sightings...



Close "Cousins"

Both of these shrikes were seen on the Christmas Bird Count.

Note the similarities in field marks. The Loggerhead shrike (more common here) is pictured on top; the Northern shrike is below.



**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**

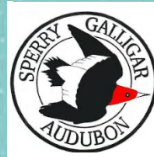
Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip Code _____

Phone _____

e-mail _____



**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

EVENTS & ETC.

A BIG THANKS
to
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& Home Store
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Sperry-Galligar
Audubon for the
Annual Birdseed
Sale. **Blue Ribbon**
hosts and donates
a percentage of
seed sales.
We greatly
appreciate
the
generosity!

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.