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News From the Flock, Vol. 2021 Issue 1

Sperry-Galligar Audubon Society

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NEWS FROM THE FLOCK

Sep 2021/ Issue 1

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Steve Ford
Vice President
Mary Jo Meier
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WELCOME TO A NEW AUDUBON YEAR

YES WE WILL MEET THURSDAY!

S-G Audubon will get back in the saddle after a year and a half hiatus **Thursday, September 30, Yates Hall room 102, 7:00 pm**. Delia Lister will fill us in on exciting new changes in PSU's Nature Reach Program and the Natural History Reserve. That will be followed **Saturday, October 2 with a field trip** to the reserve to see the changes first hand, see the hawks and owls, do a little birding in the woods, and finish up with a chili lunch at the lab (free). Meet at the reserve at 9:00 am or at Meadowbrook Mall, north parking lot at 8:45 to caravan. Bring binoculars.

The decision to meet was considered carefully, and included a discussion with the director of the Crawford County Heath Department. Yates 102 is a big room, so we should be able to space ourselves out. The university has a mask mandate to which we will adhere stringently while in all areas on campus. Sanitizing spray will be available. If we all cooperate, we should all be safe.

It will be wonderful to see everyone and to talk about nature with our Audubon friends! Come help get our chapter off to a great start.

Next Program

Thursday,
September 30

102 Yates Hall,
Pittsburg State
University

7:00 p.m.

Mask required.

"Update on
Nature Reach"
by
Delia Lister



Thick Spike Gay Feather/Kansas Blazing Star

Liatrix *pychnostachya*

Photo by Emmett Sullivan

Thank you to all who provided articles this month. Be sure to check out ALL 6 pages of the newsletter!

Board Minutes

Past Audubon Meeting Program

Treasurer Report

Will report in future newsletter.

Synopses will given monthly in case you could not attend last month's meeting.

What's Been Doing With S-G Audubon During the Covid Break

by Steve Ford

We hope you've found ways to stay connected with nature over the last several months. Cindy and I have no trouble keeping dirt under our fingernails on our farm. Cindy maintains a sizable garden (have you tried "dragon's egg" cucumbers? They're great!). We've been planting and maintaining small trees, mostly loblolly pines and a few larger river birch, mowing and clearing trails, and spraying sericea lespedeza - about which I'll have more to say in future newsletters. We've ordered a few hundred seedling trees from Kansas and Missouri for planting a little later in the fall and in the spring, again loblollies and also various oaks, hickories, plums, and a few bald cypress. Also in later newsletters we'd like to share a bit about some of the nature-oriented books we've had time to read. I hope you'll write about some of your activities. One of the themes that keep recurring in our reading is that periodic emersion in nature is not just "fun" and "nice," it is downright important for mental and physical health.

The chapter has been slowed by the pandemic of course, but it has not been totally idle. Board members have been communicating on line, and the board has met face-to-face twice. The annual planning session was held at our house in August. Mary Jo Meier has organized a strong program of speakers for us - I'm really looking forward to hearing them. Bob has negotiated with Blue Ribbon Farm and Home for another birdseed

"sale" in early December. Tell your friends. Bob continues to post news on the chapter website. Field trips are planned and of course the Christmas Bird Count is on the horizon. We're still discussing building more bluebird boxes, as our supply is low, and it just might be helpful to jumpstart the recovery of the current paucity of bluebirds cut down by the February freeze. What do you think?

The chapter's treasury is in good shape - some \$5,000 in checking and over \$17,000 overall, including CDs. We were wondering if the chapter would receive its annual stipend from National Audubon, about \$400, due to our lack of general meetings, but indeed we did receive it. We voted to donate \$200 to KRPS for "Bird Note" and to ask them to advertise our meetings, as they have in the past. We also voted to donate \$500 to the Milford Naure Center just west of Manhattan to help make repairs and upgrades to their animal care facilities. Delia Lister visited Milford on two occasions to help with her expertise and sweat to that end. Our chapter has been a part of monthly zoom meetings initiated by the new executive director of Audubon of Kansas, Dr. Jackie Augustine, wherein the various chapters throughout Kansas can keep in touch. By the way, Jackie will give the December program for us. The board decided to stick with the current set of officers for the sake of continuity, but we intend to have regular elections in April. Mary Jo Meier has thrown her hat in the ring for president, and Megan Corrigan has graciously consented to serve as secretary this season.



Happenings in Southeast KS

Birding Trip to Wilderness Park

S-G Audubon had its first field trip for well over a year Saturday morning, September 18. PSU ornithology professor, Dr. Andrew George, led the trip at Wilderness Park in Frontenac. Thirteen people of all stripes, newbies and old-timers, walked through the woods on a beautiful, mosquito-free day.



Twenty-four species were counted, a few by song only. One of the more prevalent birds were red-headed woodpeckers whose chattering could be heard along Cow Creek nearly all morning. Carolina wrens and robins were common. Andy heard a red-breasted nuthatch, probably our "best bird."

We also made a quick excursion to the sewage treatment lakes just west of the park and saw seven species including a number of blue winged teal, great egrets, and killdeer. Andy had recently seen several species of shorebirds there, including pectoral and spotted sandpipers, and yellowlegs, but we didn't have any luck that day.

More trips are planned. Please plan to join us. (Photo by Mary Jo Meier)

Great Blue Heron.

by Bob Mangile



Over the summer I stumbled onto an interesting book entitled, "The Great Blue Heron", by Hayward Allen. On page 47, referring to the bird's beak, he states: **"It is a formidable tool and a weapon."** This is a "heads-up" if you every come in close contact with a Heron – of any species!

And the following from a Canadian wildlife biologist of a couple of bird banders in Canada, "A four-foot bird, with a neck of about 18", to which is attached a very strong pointed spear, is not to be treated casually. The result was that the scientists holding the wildly flailing neck and beak did not hold on tight enough and the bird actually pierced his skull resulting in the instantaneous and tragic death of the researcher. James Audubon almost lost his favorite dog because of his ignorance of the potential danger of the great blue heron's great weapon."

This harks back to a piece I wrote in our February 2020 Newsletter about "Pointed Parts of Nature" that can be read at this link http://sperry-galligar.com/SGAS%20Newsletter_2020_02.pdf

Sightings...



Black-bellied whistling ducks seen all over Crawford County



BIRD CONCERNS

Have you seen any bluebirds? They are scarcely seen this year.

Turkeys have declined in population this year.

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

cford@gus.pittstate.edu

CAT vs. VULTURE

by Diane McCallum

We have a neighborhood cat that likes to visit our front yard occasionally. He doesn't really want company—he'll often flee if we go outside—but he seems to like sitting out there and seeing the world from a different perspective (we believe he lives across the street). We don't mind his presence, as long as he stays out of the back yard, where the birdfeeders are.

The cat is a striking figure: mostly white, with a brown tail, and small splotches of orange and black on his head and back. We can hardly miss him when he's out there, if we happen to look out the window at the right time.

This happened the other day when we spotted him on the sidewalk leading from our front porch to the street. He sat at the base of the steps, staring away from our house. At first, I didn't think much of it, but then my husband said, "Come here, come here!" I joined him at the front door window, where he pointed across the street. There, in the neighbor's front yard, was a turkey vulture! No wonder the cat was so mesmerized; he'd probably never seen a bird that big before. We'd certainly never had a vulture in our neighborhood before.

The vulture was feasting on a dead squirrel, and it wasn't long before another joined the party, sailing in on enormous wings. The newcomer stalked around the first vulture, but seemed to realize it couldn't get any closer. It managed to snag a stray scrap, which emboldened it to hang around longer. The cat stared. Not long after that, a third one came in for a landing. The cat stared a little longer and then tried a short stalking move, looking like a miniature tiger on the hunt, before realizing it was outnumbered. The second vulture didn't appreciate the arrival of the third vulture and sort of body-blocked it away from the first, which continued to eat without paying much attention to anything else.

The third vulture seemed to realize it had no chance there, so it took off, flapping its huge wings as it soared across the street and into the sky. Not long after that, the second vulture also left, but the first stayed where it was, still feasting.

The cat was getting restless by this time. He had an annoyed look on his face as he watched the vulture, then looked around, then watched the vulture some more. Finally he came up the steps, loped across our front porch and went into our driveway, where he hid under the SUV to see the vulture a little closer. After he'd done this for a while, he seemed to realize that, however big it was, it was just a bird. Emboldened, he left the cover of the SUV and moved to the end of our driveway. There he crouched low, staring at the vulture, and started to stalk. After a few steps, he straightened up and started to walk slowly toward the bird.

The vulture had finally noticed the cat and had stepped away from the squirrel, keeping an eye on him. It fluffed its wings a few times, but the cat kept walking toward it. The vulture took a few more steps while the cat approached. Then the cat broke into a run and the vulture immediately took flight, laboring to gain altitude with its big wings while the cat gave chase. Both disappeared up the street.

A few minutes later, the cat returned calmly, satisfied that it had defended its territory. It casually sniffed at the remains of the squirrel before going on its way.

Life returned to normal. What a great diversion we had for a while, though!

Notes From the Back Yard

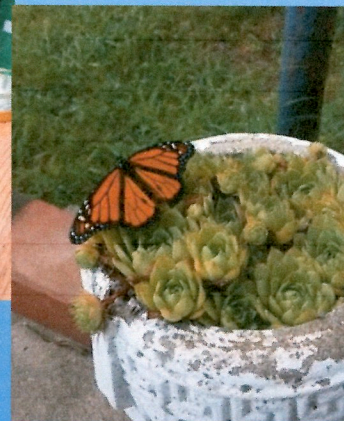
by Megan Corrigan

It's been quite the year for monarchs! I have found more on our milkweed this year than in all the ten years I've lived in Kansas, and so I brought in a few to observe. I was thinking they are better off in my yard than my kitchen, since I read that they eat the milkweed toxins and therefore don't have many predators. But then one day we saw a medium sized monarch caterpillar being sucked dry by a soldier bug with a piercing mouthpart. Sigh. So much for the 'not many natural predators' theory. And this was in my yard, where I have all this milkweed to try and give them a safe haven – how dare that bug hurt my monarchs!

I brought a few inside and fed them milkweed and they dutifully ate and ate, and then hung upside down and metamorphosed into chrysalises and seven or so days later emerged. Well, that was in the best case scenario... Some died after I brought them in before metamorphosis and fly larvae magically appeared in the closed jars. (They were tiny maggots which we left alone out of curiosity, but eventually they pupated and then turned into what looks like common houseflies to me). Some turned into chrysalises that then turned brown and never emerged. So my inside rate was not 100%, but outside I was finding chrysalises to watch on the side of my house and garage and they didn't all make it either, turning brown and not hatching. So, it's not clear if I really "helped" any monarchs, or if they would have been just as well on their own.

What I did help was to satisfy my curiosity. Wayne's sister was a grade school teacher in Joplin and brought monarchs into the classroom every year for her kids to watch emerge and fly all over the classroom. But I grew up in urban Baltimore with no milkweed, so I only ever saw the process on video. Gosh they are not pretty when they first emerge! Huge abdomen, scrawny wings – not a bug that would likely capture the hearts of many humans. But an hour or so later they are slim and svelte and majestic. I guess they are ready to go to Mexico, or at least head that direction. I'm probably never going to make it to Tanzania to watch the wildebeest migration or Canada for the caribou migration, but it's pretty amazing to have a piece of a great migration right here in my backyard!

(Photos by Megan Corrigan)



**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 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.

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.

Bird Seed Sale

Bob Mangile talked with Blue Ribbon about our bird seed sale in their store. We encourage you to purchase your winter supply of bird seed during the sale days-- December 3 & 4.

Kansas Herpetological Meeting in Pittsburg

Mark your calendars for the Kansas Herpetological (KHS) meeting the first week in November. Contact Dr. Andrew George, Dept. of Biology, PSU, for details.



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.)

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.