

# NATURAL INQUIRER

FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Department of Biological Sciences

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## FACULTY HAPPENINGS

**Dr. Eric Gillock** attended the Joint Meeting of the Missouri and Missouri Valley Branches of the American Society for Microbiology on April 5 and 6 in Kansas City, Missouri. These are two regional branches of the ASM that represent Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Missouri.

On Friday, the faculty speakers presented talks on the microbiology of Antarctica, the bioremediation of toxic organic materials from the environment, and the pathogenesis of prion diseases. On Saturday, the faculty talks were on alternative methods for teaching undergraduate science courses, as well as the microbiology of a potential bioterrorism attack. After each morning presentation session by faculty members, there were many excellent afternoon presentations given by undergraduate and graduate students. In fact, an undergraduate student gave one of the very best presentations of the entire meeting.

Also in attendance at the meeting were **Hilary Gillock** and two current FHSU undergraduate students, **Aileen Johnson** and **Lance Thurlow**. Both Aileen and Lance are looking with interest at graduate studies in microbiology at FHSU.

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As part of the Ornithology course, **Dr. Greg Farley** lead a weekend field trip to the Rainwater Basin and Platte River areas of Nebraska to view the spring migration of sandhill cranes. Eighteen students, including three graduate students, and **Dr. Mary Morgan**, witnessed the most impressive level of activity over the last seven years of this annual trip. An estimated 3 - 4 million individual birds were observed, consisting primarily of Greater White-fronted Goose, Blue Goose (both white and blue morphs), Sandhill Crane, and eight species of waterfowl. Other highlights included Ross' Goose and 12 Bald Eagles feeding on goose carcasses at Funk Lagoon. In addition to providing opportunities to practice identification skills in the field, the trip provides a unique opportunity for students to directly experience important biological phenomena in ornithology, such as migration, navigation, timing of molt and breeding in the annual cycle, etc. Many graduates point out that they

remember both specific and general knowledge from these field trips long after they graduate (and often long after they forget material from lectures)! Ornithology will have one more weekend field trip near the end of semester to Quivera N.W.R., and will be joined this year by students and faculty from Ecology (**Dr. Karen Hickman**), Herpetology (**Dr. Bill Stark**) and Wildlife Management (**Dr. Elmer Finck**).



The view at sunset

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On March 13-15, **Dr. Rob Channell** (BS 1990, MS 1992) attended a conservation planning workshop in Loveland, CO sponsored by The Nature Conservancy. The goal of the workshop was to establish conservation targets for the central short-grass ecoregion. Future workshops will focus on the identification of threats and development of conservation strategies. For his contributions to this series of workshops, Dr. Channell has been honored with The Nature Conservancy's Efromyson fellowship.

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**Dr. Elmer Finck**, chair of the Department of Biological Sciences at FHSU, recently was appointed as an adjunct curator of birds and mammals at the Sternberg Museum of Natural History.

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Congratulations to **Dr. Karen Hickman** and **Dr. Elmer Finck** who recently received tenure. Dr. Hickman also received promotion from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor.

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## GRADUATE STUDENTS

**Jon Storm**, studying under the mentorship of **Dr. Jerry R. Choate**, will complete the requirements for the M.S. (Biology) degree this spring. Storm has accepted an offer of a graduate assistantship to pursue Ph.D. studies at Indiana State University beginning in the fall semester of 2002.

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On April 6-8, **Jan Steier**, **Cheryl Schmidt**, and **Margaret Kritsch** attended the 15<sup>th</sup> Biennial High Altitude Revegetation Workshop in Fort Collins, Colorado sponsored by the Colorado State University Soil and Crop Sciences Department. Students and professionals from the western half of the United States attended the workshop. Some of the attendees included Randy Westbrook, the Invasive Plant Coordinator of the USGS, various NRCS, US Forest Service, and National Park Service employees as well as production managers of native seed suppliers. The presentations covered a range of topics from wetlands and wildfire restoration, to native seeding techniques and resources, to invasive species management. It was an extremely informative meeting, whose importance will definitely increase in the coming years.

## PUBLICATIONS

The following is a recent publication by **Rob DeBaca** (MS 1998) and **Dr. Jerry Choate** based on research DeBaca did for his MS theses:

DeBaca, R. S., and J. R. Choate. 2002.  
Biogeography of heteromyid rodents on the  
Central Great Plains. Occasional Papers,  
Museum of Texas Tech University, 212:1-22.

DeBaca is currently working on his Ph.D. dissertation at Texas Tech University.

## BIOLOGY CLUB BITS

Tuesday, April 9, saw Biology Club's 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Big Creek clean up. Many bags were filled with everyone putting in a good effort. Biology Club would like to thank all the participants - **Eric Starkey**, **Josh Melby**, **Valena Hickert**, **Dr. Finck**, **Dr. Farley**, **Jim Schmidt**, **Sara Kay Carrell**, **Jason Luginbill**, **Jeff Conley** and also the Grounds Department for providing the materials.

## ODDS AND ENDS

On March 22, **Dr. Howard Reynolds**, curator emeritus of botany for Fort Hays State University's Sternberg Museum of Natural History, presented a special lecture on "Patagonia: Land of Giganoto-saurus." The lecture was in conjunction with the current traveling exhibit at

the Sternberg, "Jurassic Park: The Life and Death of Dinosaurs."