



This has been an unusual year, and we want to try out something different:  
A Zoom get together!- To share photos and/or birding experiences.

**On Feb. 21st at 5 pm.**

<https://ksu.zoom.us/j/95352243017?pwd=SmZKN0pQaWMzdk54cFVKdXk0NVFzUT09>

If you have never used Zoom, check out one of these videos on how to join a Zoom meeting.

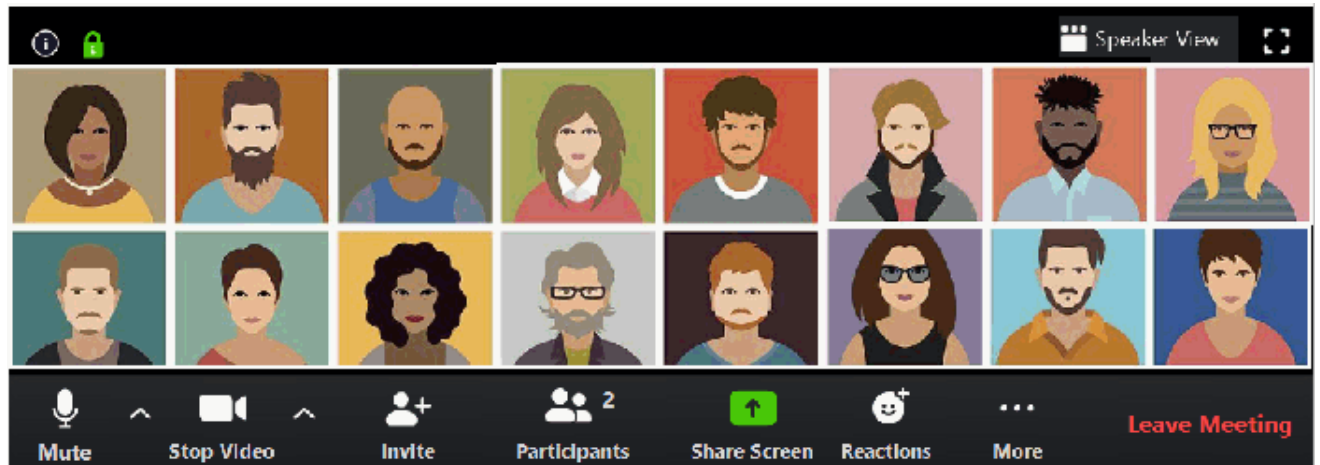
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tr-JHfEas8k>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9isp3qPeQ0E>

Members are welcome to attend a **practice session** using this Zoom link on **Feb. 20th at 2:00 pm**

<https://ksu.zoom.us/j/92216110002?pwd=OTFRQmRSSXE0ZHJ1YUVJTFBuWmV6dz09>

FOR MORE INFORMATION contact Cindy Jeffrey (cinraney@ksu.edu)



Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society,  
P.O. Box 1932, Manhattan, KS 66505-1932



## prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

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### Upcoming Events

Sat. morning Birding- none in winter  
Will begin in the Spring

Feb 2 - TUESDAY Board Meeting- 6:00 pm,  
via Zoom. Contact a board member  
to attend.

Feb. 20- Zoom practice session

Feb. 21- Zoom meeting for all members

March- Bird Flight Patterns and Music!



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Opportunity plus curiosity has led me into and gradually through a book titled *Honeybee Democracy* (Thomas D. Seeley, Princeton Univ. Press, 2010), both

subjects of the title being separately in the news these days as being endangered.

The book focuses on that aspect of this particular species of bee's behavior that occurs when a colony has become so successfully crowded that some have to leave for another home, and specifically on how the incipient swarm decides exactly when and where to relocate. The amount of time, ingenuity, patience, and modern technology that Dr. Seeley and a number of assistants, have utilized in identifying and tracking individual bees amid groups of sometimes over ten thousand look-alikes I find as amazing as the results he describes.

In his view the bees' method can be regarded (as his title indicates) as being democratic, bearing some resemblance to New England town halls and Quaker meetings, and offering a template for decision making that humans might usefully contemplate. So in reading I received not only a fascinating array of information on these bees (immigrants from Eurasia), but also an impulse to contemplate on democracy as practiced in home-grown fashion.

Of course bees have been widely observed with great acuity for centuries. It's been known that colonies send out foragers who report back to their hive the locations of nectar-rich flora and communicate their discoveries by means of waggle dances whose orientations correspond to an angle with the ultra violet rays of the sun. The mystery addressed here is how those reports effect responses. How does a gathering swarm unpredictably decide when to prepare for (it takes preparation), and decide when to make, an initial launch to a specific pausing spot, referred to as a "bivouac". And from there to proceed to new living quarters, and how have those new quarters previously been chosen from a number of alternative possible sites.

As I read Dr. Seeley's account, in the spring or early summer, around 400 older, experienced foragers out of a swarm population averaging 11,000 bees, become real estate scouts, traveling sometimes several miles in search of cavities that would be large enough to contain a winter's food supply of produced honey, as well as being snug enough, with sufficiently small access, to offer protection against the weather and predators. Possibilities are explored and perhaps revisited by individual scouts, with potential sites marked by the release of pheromones. The visitation occasions and the lengths of times spent at each visit by innumerable bees were dutifully recorded by the watching researchers, who most often, for convenience, enticed the searchers to discover variously suitable hives of the researchers own making.

Back at the swarm the scouts engage in a competition of

waggle dances, each apparently advocating for a particular site. This is the democratic decision making of the book's title. Gradually the swarm, the vast majority of which has never seen the sites proposed, begins to resonate to one particular beat aimed at one particular site. It seems that at this time the bees in the middle of the swarm are warmer than those at the edge, and, as I understand it, the scouts begin to emit certain piping sounds. Various 'piping' and 'quacking' sounds are generally produced during a hive's activities, but these seem to signal the outer bees to start individually vibrating to warm their flight muscles to the necessary temperature (about 97° F) for take off. Then there's the "buzz-run" in which the scouts bump through the assembled swarm, breaking it from a uniformly tight cluster into slightly separated clusters, perhaps for better reception of the scouts' signals. Next there's the "streaking" during which the scouts rise above the swarm perhaps to be more visibly outlined against the sky, and where they make short, swift linear dashes directly toward the bivouac or new hive. After each streak each goes back below the swarm to rise and streak again, thus cumulatively guiding the swarm to its new home, which becomes occupied almost immediately upon arrival. And Dr. Seeley notes that almost always the most suitable of the choices offered has been the one chosen.

Questions remain. For one, does every member of the swarm have to join in choosing the one direction chosen, or is a "quorum" of some unknown percentage sufficient to bring about a unanimous take-off? For another, how does the swarm as a whole regulate its flight speed, and know when to slow from an increased velocity to uniformly land gently on a destination a vast majority have not seen?

Furthermore, what is it that influences an individual non-scouting bee to participate with one scout or another? Are there individual biases, or is it merely a question of the vigor of a waggle? And is a less-informed multitude responding to the theatrics of a more-informed few really an apt metaphor for democracy as we know it, or would have it?

While the bees in these parts will be huddling in their chosen shelter, hopefully with a sufficient store of honey, Venus will continue as the brief morning star, while Jupiter, Saturn, and Mercury having moved behind the Sun, will begin reappearing briefly ESE above low horizons in the dawn twilights on the 20th. Mars, a red dot setting soon after midnights, will be just above the Moon the 18th.

The Moon will pass from right to left of Spica, the lone bright star of Virgo in the dawns of the 2nd and 3rd, and above Antares in Scorpius during the first light of the 6th, and will have another dawn rendezvous the 24th, this time glowing to the left of the Gemini Twins. For variety it will get close to Taurus' red eye, Aldebaran in the early evenings of the 19th and 20th, and on 25th and 26th pass from above to below Regulus, the star at the bottom go Leo's rising backward question mark, a forerunner of the coming spring. All the while the panoply of winter constellations will keep their sparkling array passing in review every clear night.

The Moon will be new the 11th at 11p06, full the 27th at 2a17.

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# Night Watch

Dru Clarke



About 8:00 p.m. each night since December 22, I venture out with a warm bottle of milk replacer for the last feeding of a sweet, fuzzy Highland heifer calf whose dam has teats too damaged to allow nursing. Darkness has come down like a drape and I trudge in Wellingtons along the lane, familiar enough to me that I don't really need artificial light to find the way to the barn. At the barn I feel for the light switches that cast enough illumination to go to the loafing shed beyond. Two other cows, one with a new calf and another expecting soon, greet me with low murmurs as I walk through their enclosure to the hungry calf in the far shed. The only other sound is of a soft hooting of a Great Horned owl somewhere in the near woods. On this nightly journey our new dog, Charlie, accompanies me, it seems always beside my side (even during bathroom visits), but I welcome the company each night as we have had silent but slightly ominous visitors in the area.

A neighbor we met recently at a rural estate auction related to us – as he knew we had some cattle – that in early fall he had lost three calves to a cougar. When questioned further and asked how he knew he said he found their mutilated bodies. Without a sighting we were skeptical as the big cats usually bury their prey under leaves and detritus. But we didn't doubt that they were here.

One morning my husband saw one cross the road a few hundred yards south of our house on a well established 'wild-life crossing.' Not too soon after that a linesman setting underground fiber optic cables came to the door, wide-eyed and hesitant, thinking I would consider him a bit deranged, said he saw a big cat with a long tail cross just south of our house. It was where my husband had seen one.

A few years back, our stallions in pens near the barn, began acting crazily, running and snorting, even sweating profusely. Walking in the pasture west of their runs a few weeks later, I discovered a deer skeleton, partly disarticulated, but with the spinal bones relatively intact. I loaded up the skeleton and took it to our vet and discovered that one of the cervical vertebrae was fractured *inside*. What force could have caused such a break? More disconcerting, the bones that were left were licked clean with *no tooth marks*. Both of these pieces of evidence, coupled with the stallions' unusual behavior, led us to believe that a large cat had, at least, passed through the neighborhood.

Another bizarre find was of a big, and robust antlered buck, dead, with its head thrown back, near the corrals. We had not yet moved to the farm, but had our horses there, and they were tended to twice a day. The buck was still intact, untouched and with no wounds, either human-inflicted or animal-gnawed. Its neck was obviously broken.

The recent photo posted by media and landowner Greg Gilman of a cougar near his deer feeder gives further credence to stories of folks in the area who have seen the big cat. Another posted was photographed near Seneca.

My brother, a biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, left my mother's place near the Delaware River (Milford, New Jersey) early one morning and near Bernardsville (in the

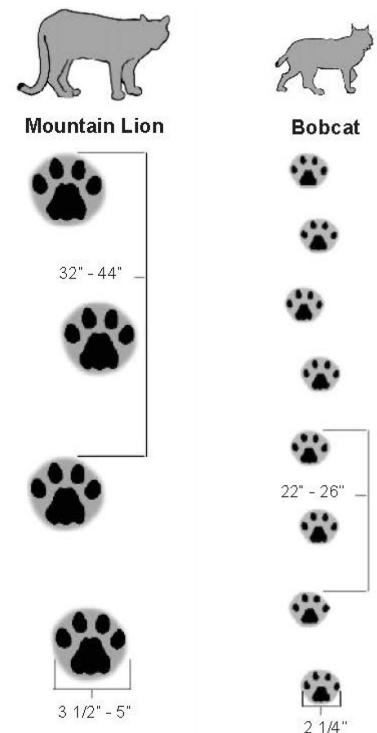
highlands) watched a cougar run across the road in front of his vehicle. This was in the 1970's! Even then, and probably before then, the big cat's range was being reoccupied.

Recent videos of hikers and joggers being stalked (or warned) by cougars during daylight hours might give us pause, but not a reason to panic or begin a vendetta against them. Normally predators of deer, they will naturally be where the deer flourish and that might be in remote wilderness or suburban sprawl where their normal habitat might have been and still exists in pockets where prey might be.

When I was in high school one day my boyfriend's dad took me up in his Piper Cub for a bird's eye view of the landscape. As we flew over the land where our summer place was – acres of woods edged by meadows being invaded by flowering dogwood and sheer cliffs above the river valley – we passed over a herd of between fifty and eighty deer. Where there are deer, their predators will follow.

I have not seen one, but I've felt sometimes that something is watching, watching, and waiting. These sightings remind me of an odd and disconcerting event from many years ago: When my son was a little boy, he and a friend were playing in the woods – building lean tos with fallen branches as I used to when I was their age – near our summer place in the highlands of New Jersey where years before I had seen the great herd of deer. The boys, then yelling, came running back into the yard, breathless and obviously scared, and I asked them what was wrong. They said they heard 'a woman screaming'. Dan is 56 years old now, so this was in the late '60s, early '70's, about when my brother saw the cat that one morning. Was it the vivid imagination of young, active minds, or have these stealthy creatures been living next to us for longer than we will admit?

I reach down and scratch the dog's ears and feel his flank against my leg as we make our way back to the house, the porch light a welcome beacon. The dark drape of sky is pinned there by scattered stars, one constellation, Orion's Belt, standing out among many whose names escape me. I'm sure one of them is, or should be, a big cat.



© JAN. 2021 Dru Clarke



# Crossword Puzzle #6

Patricia Yeager

## DOWN

1. That from which a chick hatches
5. Longest feathers of a bird's wing
11. Seen mostly in flight over warm water. This tern is named for its color.
13. Indiana
14. American Avocet (code)
15. Northern Harrier (code)
16. Indian flat bread
18. Wyoming
19. Wyoming (postal)
20. Montana
22. Rule from authority
24. Brother or sister
28. Upper and lower mandible
29. Favorite flowers of Easter
30. Bachelor of Arts
31. Person in charge
33. Found along the edge of the cattails if your looking carefully enough
34. Small in stature
35. Ruby or Golden they are both crowned
38. December treats bring January \_\_\_\_.
39. Technetium
40. One of two eagles found in the U.S.
43. What the bell did
44. The Ram
45. Small Owl
47. One of two eagles found in the U.S.
49. A long bird walk will make your heart soar even if your feet \_\_\_\_.
51. Scissor-tailed flycatcher (code)
53. Ruby-throated humming bird (code)
54. Finish the goatsuckers' name that starts chuck
55. Remarkably, these serpent-like fish lay eggs in deep Atlantic water SE of Bermuda and return to their respective continents as adults
61. Holds the reins of eight tiny reindeer
62. Larger stripe beneath the mustache stripe useful to ID sparrows

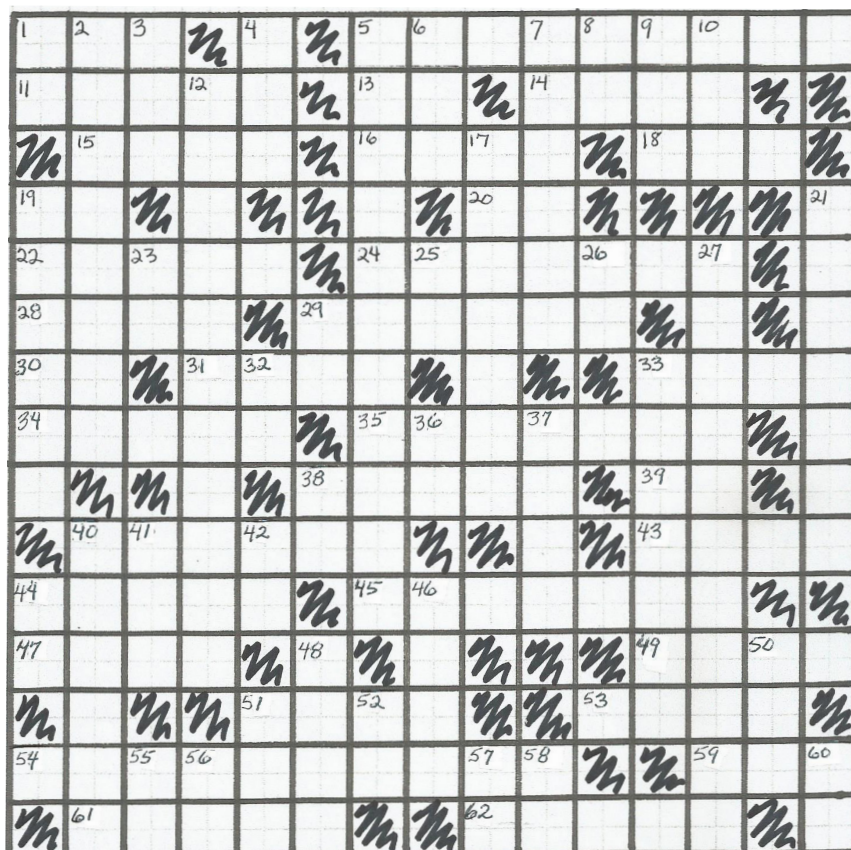
## DOWN

1. Einsteinium
2. The angle on a gull's lower bill where there is often a dot of color
3. Sticky stuff
4. Coin of Myanmar (formerly Burma)
5. Similar in size, these winter birds are at the feeders with gold finches
6. DNA's messenger
7. Back section of feathers below the nape
8. Morning
9. Unrefined
10. Some are poison and some are not

12. An edict has been pasted down that renames McCown's Longspur to

\_\_\_\_\_ Longspur.

21. A young goose
23. Iowa
25. Illinois
26. It is what it \_\_\_\_.
27. Finish this bird's name. Blue-gray \_\_\_\_\_.
29. Left side
32. Opposite of off
33. Back off
36. That is
37. White Snow Goose (code)
38. Delaware
40. Without charge
41. Fossil fuel
42. Doctor of Science
44. First two letters of the alphabet
46. \_\_\_\_ Lang Syne
48. Yellow throated warbler (code)
50. Color description
51. Super Sonic Transport
52. Second sound from the beanstalk's giant
55. California's largest city
56. Lane
57. Sacred mantra of Hinduism
58. Washington
59. Emergency Room
60. Long Island





Photos by Dave Rintoul

“There is not an individual in the Union who does not know the little Snow-bird,” declared John James Audubon, writing about the Dark-eyed Junco almost 200 years ago. Many people in the United States today still think of this familiar songbird as the “snow-bird,” since it seems to show up in backyards and other suburban habitats just as winter settles in.

**HABITAT:** Breeds in high-elevation conifer and mixed woods. Winters in fields, parks, and yards

All Dark-eyed Juncos have some features in common: white outer tail feathers that are especially conspicuous when the bird takes flight; darker upperparts contrasting a lighter belly; and a pale bill. But this bird can vary drastically in appearance depending on where one sees it. Some juncos have more reddish-brown on the back and sides, some sport a contrasting dark hood over the head and neck, and others show a gray-tinged belly or white bars on the wings.

The Dark-eyed Junco was classified as five separate species until the 1970s, when the American Ornithologists’ Union (AOU) combined them, based on the most current scientific data. The AOU then subdivided the newly created species into separate groups, each with its previous common and scientific names: Slate-colored Junco (*hyemalis*); White-winged Junco (*aikenii*); Oregon Junco (*oreganus*); Gray-headed Junco (*caniceps*); and Guadalupe Junco (*insularis*).

#### Splits and Lumps

Although initially lumped with the rest of the Dark-eyed group, the endemic Guadalupe Junco was again split into a distinct species in 2016. Another closely related species, the Yellow-eyed Junco, is resident in pine-oak highlands from southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico south through Mexican highlands to Guatemala.

Scientists recognize approximately 16 subspecies within the Dark-eyed Junco groups; to complicate matters even further, there is much overlap between the groups and different subspecies. Some scientists do not recognize the AOU’s reclassification of the Dark-eyed Junco and still consider some or all of these groups as separate species. The debate goes on even today.

#### Crossword Puzzle #5 Answers

1	M	2	O	3	D	4	O	5	H	6	A	7	V	8	E	9	R	10	S	11	A	12	C	K	
13	P	14	H	15	A	16	L	17	A	18	R	19	O	20	P	21	E	22	A	23	R	24	C	H	E
25	R	26	S	27	R	28	E	29	N	30	O	31	V	32	A	33	T	34	E	35	S	36			
37	F	38	K	39	P	40	I	41	N	42	I	43	E	44	C	45	T	46		47		48			
49	R	50	O	51	E	52	B	53	L	54	E	55	S	56	S	57	I	58	N	59	G	60	K	R	
61	O	62	Y	63	A	64	S	65	D	66	O	67	O	68	O	69	O	70	E	71	E	72			
73	F	74	E	75	R	76	R	77	U	78	G	79	I	80	N	81	O	82	U	83	S	84	R	L	
85	E	86	I	87	D	88	E	89	R	90	R	91	S	92	O	93	S	94	F	95	E	96			
97	U	98	N	99	F	100	E	101	V	102	E	103	R	104	L	105	A	106	L	107	D	108	E		
109	S	110	C	111	D	112	B	113	F	114	O	115	W	116	L	117		118		119		120			
121	T	122	H	123	A	124	T	125	P	126	E	127	R	128	E	129	G	130	R	131	I	132	N	E	
133	E	134	G	135	R	136	E	137	T	138	E	139	Y	140	E	141	V	142	I	143	E	144	W		
145	S	146	E	147	X	148	O	149	D	150	U	151	S	152	N	153	E	154	T	155	I	156			
157	T	158	A	159	I	160		161		162		163	I	164		165		166		167		168	T		
169	R	170	E	171	D	172	T	173	A	174	I	175	L	176	E	177	D	178	H	179	A	180	W	K	





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The purpose of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society is to teach people to enjoy and respect birds and their habitats. NFHAS advocates preservation of prairie ecosystems and urban green spaces thus saving the lives of birds and enriching the lives of people.

Also available online at [nfhas.org](http://nfhas.org)

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**Membership Information:** Introductory memberships - \$20/yr. then basic renewal membership is \$35/yr. When you join the National Audubon Society, you automatically become a member of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society. You will receive the bimonthly Audubon magazine in addition to the Prairie Falcon newsletter. New membership applications should be sent to National Audubon Society, PO Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250. Make checks payable to the National Audubon Society and include the code C4ZJ040Z. Questions about membership Call 1-800-274-4201 or email the National Audubon Society [join@audubon.org](mailto:join@audubon.org). Website is [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org).

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**RARE BIRD HOTLINE:** For information on Kansas Birds, subscribe to the Kansas Bird Listserve. Send this message <subscribe KSBIRD-L> to <[list\\_serve@ksu.edu](mailto:list_serve@ksu.edu)> and join in the

**WE NEED YOU!** PLEASE consider joining our NFHAS Board.

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