

Sunday, Jan. 22 -2:30 pm, Groesbeck Rm. Manhattan Public Library



Chuck Otte

“Now that we did it, what happens to it?”

Chuck will focus on some of the history of CBCs and especially Kansas CBCs. He will help us understand what happens to the data after it is collected and turned in and how it is used, for example, what did the West Nile Virus do to Chickadee populations?

He has long been interested in bird records and has served as the secretary for the Kansas Bird Records Committee from 2015 to the present and from 2003 to 2009 prior to that. He also served in multiple offices for the Kansas Ornithological Society and co-authored *Birds of Kansas*.

Chuck grew up on a farm on the edge of the Rainwater Basin region of Nebraska. He has been a birder since he was 4 (thanks to his Mom!). He has two degrees in Agronomy from the University of Nebraska and was the Ag and Natural Resources County Extension Agent for Geary County for 40 years (retiring in the fall of 2022).

Now Chuck is working on a 100+ year old farmhouse, loves gardening, growing his interest in amateur radio, and of course, always birding and keeping bird records.

Join us for lunch with Chuck and Jaye before the program, at 12:30 pm at Nico's Little Italy in Aggiveville (1101 Moro St Suite 111)

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

- Jan. 3 - Board meeting - 5:30 Public Library
- Jan. 14 - Sat. morning birding  
8:00 am Depart from Sojourner Truth Park
- Jan. 22 - 12:30 Dinner with Chuck Otte**  
**2:30 Program Groesbeck Rm -Manhattan Public Library (see above)**
- Feb. 6 - Board meeting - 5:30 Public Library
- Feb. 11 - Sat. morning birding  
8:00 am Depart from Sojourner Truth Park
- Feb. 18 - 10:00 am - KSU Insect Collection and Insect Zoo**  
**With Dr. Greg Zolnerowich, Dept. of Entomology**



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

In the last issue, as in March, I wrote about the broad interest that is being expressed in providing legal rights to the “persona” of non-human entities, from individual animals to whole ecosystems. Doing so I kept being reminded that I had a tale to tell. I’ve told it orally to a sparse number of individuals over the past 50 years, all the while looking for an appropriate venue to set it in print. Now seems a time.

And while I think it’s not uncommon to see individuals of other species behave in ways that seem analogous to how humans do, I also have come to believe that some occasions are more so than others.

Back around 1970, Sue, our two young boys and I were car camping toward noontime in an isolated, very timbered part of the Black Hills on a rather warm pine-scented day. The narrow dirt road led us suddenly along the edge of a sunlit grassy clearing, maybe the size of a football field. Over at the far side a group of red-and-white Herefords were grazing, contrasting amid the green. Close at hand, just ahead and rooted right beside the road, stood a wonderfully shading, perfectly placed, lone leafed tree.

There seemed enough room for sharing. We pulled off and spread our picnic blanket in the shade. It was idyllic—except for a calf that began bawling beside the herd. And bawl it could, so factory loud and on and on that we actually began talking about moving on. It was then that I happened to notice a stocky bull with wide ivory-colored horns stepping directly toward us, large head swinging side-to-side, foam flying from his mouth. The four of us dropped whatever, and got back in the car. I started the motor, put the gears in reverse with the clutch down, ready to back off in case the bull decided to come at the vehicle.

But no, he veered slightly to his left and I made eye contact with his big right eye as he strode steadily by. He kept on across the road and disappeared among some road-edge brush that shook above him as he passed through. The brush stopped shaking and we sat wondering what to do, how long to wait, before getting back out. The calf’s bellowing filling the air all the while. Then

the brush tops began shaking again, in reverse order. Then out onto the road came a cow, and right behind her, head against her rump, horns surrounding her hips, was the bull, who continued to push her in a bee-line to that calf. The calf immediately began pulling at her udder, the bull went back to grazing. In blissful quiet we went back our lunch.

Robots were uncommon in those days. I’m sure it was a very personable real live bull. We thought seriously about trying to contact the rancher and give that bull a merit badge, but neither steering the car across the uncertain ground of that meadow, nor going afoot, to get close enough to those various individuals to notice the bull’s brand, became an idea we thought it wise to test.

In the night skies ahead Mars will welcome January by adding another reddish shining with the star, Aldebaran, in Taurus, and be up most of the night to start, but gradually setting ever earlier in the wee hours. At the same time Venus will show up only dimly and briefly as the Evening Star to begin, though will gradually gain some altitude and brightness and linger gradually longer. Saturn will be a noticeable “star” in Aquarius high above Venus to start then gradually they’ll grow closer to meet on the 22nd. Jupiter will take its special brightness down in the west increasingly earlier well before midnight.

While setting, Jupiter will be part of an array of bright stars that will again give January the most sparkling nights of the year. At mid-evening Canis Major (the Big Dog) will have cleared the SE horizon with its gleaming eye, Sirius, the brightest star of all. Northeastward the famous lights of Orion will be showing between the Big Dog and Aldebaran in Taurus. Northwestward from Aldebaran, just across the Milky Way, will be Capella in Auriga, then a convex arc back southward will pass through Pollux, the strongest of the Gemini Twins, and then Procyon in Canis Minor, the Little Dog. Farther westward, following Jupiter, will be Hamal in the brief constellation of Aries, and a bit NW, amid the Milky Way, will be two or three bright stars in Perseus, depending on what phase Algol is in when sought.

The light of a gibbous Moon will likely overcome any streaks from the Quadrantic meteor shower the first few days of the month. The Moon will reach fullness at 5a08 the 6th, and be new at 2p53 the 21st.

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## Invasions of a Sort

Dru Clarke



The country soundscape had been invaded. The plaintive song of the coyote at dusk and often in the night was expected. The whirring of a quail covey's wings was a startling delight. A woodpecker's knocking told us of their sensing life we can't detect. The occasional whinny of a horse or the lowing of a cow seeking its calf reminded us of their presence on the land. But this was new and decidedly unwelcome: an old neighbor had died and the new owners who moved in brought with them their three dogs. The outside one, a cattle dog breed, was relatively quiet. But one, evidently a smaller house dog, was not. When put out to relieve itself (and probably the folks inside) it protested with a piercing, mournful and neurotic voice. The high-pitched yipping was relentless, and each day it became more and more grating. It stopped only when the owner arrived home from work or whoever was at home finally allowed it back inside. One day a gunshot rang out and the dog was silent. We wondered if someone else had had enough. But, twenty minutes later, it took up its yelping. We were grateful for the short respite. Very short.

I finally contacted the owners and couched our complaint gently and asked if they could address this. At first, there was denial ("there are many dogs in the area," "we have two inside dogs"). But after it happened again and I drove the ATV (which backfired on cue) to the edge of our property at dusk, training the headlight over the landscape from which the yelps emanated, the intrusive sound abruptly stopped. Today, we have only the expected rural sounds, with a rare and, thankfully, brief interval of yipping.

Over the hills and beyond a woodland, lights from a modern, newly built school brighten the sky at night. We see the glow from our east windows, and while no direct beam shines in, the historic dark night sky has mostly been erased. The lights have more than likely been installed as security (a few years ago, graduating seniors placed round bales of hay by the front doors, successfully preventing entry, as a parting gesture!). But it seems like overkill to illuminate not only the school grounds but the surrounding countryside and arcing sky above. Driving home from a meeting late one night I thought a catastrophe had occurred as for miles to the east of the school the fields appeared to be hosting a firefight.

Fortunately, one night recently I chanced to walk out on our east deck and look skyward. It was a cloudless night and distant stars pricked the blackness. One in particular glowed as if in an orange-gold net: I thought it must be a plane but while I stood there it did not move. It glowed like the scattered embers of a dying fire, pulsing as it consumed the fuel that fed it. I learned that it was Capella, a less than complimentary name meaning "goat." (Its history I'll leave to Pete to tell you about. (see page 4))

One summer I worked for a Rutgers plant pathologist whose last name, Capellini, he said meant "little bells." Perhaps, or maybe he was embarrassed to let on that it meant "little goats." (Or maybe it means both. Someone who speaks Italian or Latin could help here.) Why I had never noticed this glorious star before eludes me, but how wonderful to discover something that's been there all along. The bright security lights could not dim its shimmering presence.

Living in the country has its drawbacks. It is a long drive to town so careful planning beforehand for shopping for necessities is a given. When electricity goes out, we are usually the last to be serviced (eleven days without during an ice storm had me baking cookies for the utility guys who finally hooked us up). Weird, or maybe just lonely, folks looking for solitude, escape, or a place to shoot up (or at something) sometimes find our remoteness. But we remain, for our livestock (some say our yard art), our proximity to wider expanses of wildness, the sound of silence, the parcel of night sky just beyond the jolt of lights deigned to provide security. Here, we mean to leave room for the dark. And, the silence.

© Dec. 2022 Dru Clarke

# SAVE the DATES

Mark your Calendar:

**Feb. 18 - Saturday - 10-12n - Field trip KSU insect collection and the Insect Zoo**

Meet at KSU Gardens, carpool to Waters dept. of entomology with Dr. Greg Zolnerowich, then carpool back to Insect Zoo for tour. (\$4/person)  
For those interested we will go to lunch after the tour.

**March 19 Sunday, 2:30 pm - Gregg Eyestone, Extension Agent at Kansas State**

University. How to attract polinators and birds.

Special: Two books will be given away:

SLOW BIRDING: THE ART AND SCIENCE OF ENJOYING THE BIRDS IN  
YOUR OWN BACKYARD, by Joan E. Strassman (October 2022)

MIDWESTERN BIRDS: BACKYARD GUIDE — Watching, Feeding, Landscaping,  
Nurturing, by Bill Thompson (2013).

March - Time for clean up at our sanctuaries. TBD

May - Migratory Bird Day

We work hard to bring you interesting and informative programs and field trips.  
But it is very disappointing to have only five or six people show up.  
Would you rather we not have programs, field trips or Sat. morning birding?  
PLEASE let us know how we can improve and increase involvement.

Capella's story is a bit complex. Capella is the bright star in the constellation Auriga the Charioteer. The constellation looks like a baseball homeplate to us, four easily visible stars making a sort of square with a fifth indicating a pointed end that points NW to NE as it travels across the northern sky, but in pre-baseball times it was somehow imagined as a chariot. Capella, much brighter than the rest--it can shine through clouds-- marks the right shoulder of the square, considering the fifth star as the head.

Capella indeed refers to a goat, and the star is said to represent a goat herder, and three faint stars depending in a spray about two finger widths to the right of the square are regarded as representing goat kids.

Pete Cohen



# Dark-eyed Junco

Harbinger of wintry weather

## Snowbirds

### *Junco hyemalis*

The genus name Junco is the Spanish word for rush, from the Latin word juncus. Its modern scientific name means “winter junco”, from the Latin word hyemalis “of the winter”.

It is one of the most variable, with 15 subspecies in five distinguishable groups that differ from one another sufficiently in size, proportions, plumage, vocalizations, migration patterns, and ecology that they once were considered distinct species (Slate-colored, Oregon, Gray-headed, White-winged, and Guadalupe Juncos). This lively territorial bird is a ground dweller and feeds on seeds and small fruits in the open. It also moves through the lower branches of trees and seeks shelter in the tangle of shrubs. It is abundant in the boreal forest during the breeding season.

Banding records show that a dark eyed junco bird can live to be 11 years old.

The coat of feathers on a junco bird is 30% heavier in winter than in summer.



Photos by Dave Rintoul





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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.

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Make checks payable to the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, and mail to: **Treasurer, NFHAS, P.O Box 1932, Manhattan, KS, 66505-1932**

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

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