

September Field Trip:



Sunday - Sept. 14

Meet at the Sedalia
Church parking lot at
5:00 pm

Lee and Lucinda Penner have graciously offered their beautiful acreage for us to visit. A wonderful place for bird watching, the property is located just south of the Sedalia Church off Hwy 24 at **6075 Whites Rd, Manhattan, Kansas 66503**. The church is around 10 miles northwest of Manhattan and about one mile past the Tuttle Creek Shooting Park and Storage Units. The church is immediately south of the highway, requiring a hard left turn off the highway. We will meet at the Church and carpool to the Penner's place.

Bring your binoculars and some snacks. We will be there until dark. There are walks and also a place to sit and watch the birds over the water.

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 53, No. 1, Sept 2025

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Upcoming Events

Sept. - Wednesdays at Alsop - weeding
9 am

Sept. 2 - Board Meeting 5:30
Manhattan Public Library Study room #1

Sept. 13 - Sat. Morning Birding
Meet at Sojourner Truth Park,
departs for birding at 8:00 am

Sept. 14 -Field trip to Lee and Cindy Penner's
See above

Oct. 11 - Sat. Morning Birding
Meet at Sojourner Truth Park,
departs for birding at 8:00 am



Refugia

Dru Clarke

66 million years ago, an asteroid plunged into a portion of Earth's crust we now call Yucatan Peninsula and the northwest edge of the Gulf of Mexico, leaving behind a six-mile-wide crater, nineteen miles deep, and catastrophic devastation reaching around the world. It is estimated that 75% of all Earth's plant and animal species became extinct as a result. All non-avian dinosaurs succumbed. The site of Chicxulub, its given name, was discovered in the late 20th century by finds of shocked quartz, tektites (glassy objects formed by the impact), and a 'gravity anomaly' (caused by variations in subsurface rock density). Satellite imagery helped to determine its extent. Life in its aftermath was vastly different and gave rise to a wholly new biological world.

While Chicxulub's impact was enormous, it is only one of dozens of asteroid hits globally verified.

Each time, extant species have died or been fortunate enough to find refugia that have allowed them to survive. A refugium is a place where conditions are suited to the needs of an isolated or relict population so that it may persist until its greater original habitat recovers. Changes in climate stimulate a need for refugia. Most refugia we are familiar with are post-glacial, pockets of the land spared by the sheets of ice due to irregularities in the topography. Remains of giant sloths – their hairy hides - found in a cave in Chile are a startling example. In the ocean, refugia may be in remote coves or fingers of the abyssal plain where coral larvae may elude the deadly temperature changes of their shallow tropical reef homes where they were spawned.

The recent global rise of wild fires has led to increased research on fire refugia. Certain water features, mountain slopes, canyons, valleys, meadows, and even abandoned mine shafts have proven in some cases to provide refugia for wildlife. Of special value are old growth forests where their evaporative cooling effect through evapotranspiration increases resilience to encroaching flames.

Do we have refugia where we live? Grasslands may be. I suspect that Hackberry Glen is a refugium from the post-glacial years as it hosts species that are not usually encountered in the Flint Hills; walking fern, paw paw trees, ironwood. Cross Timbers in southeastern Kansas may be as well. A stand of old pecan trees at Fort Leavenworth is another. Maybe you are familiar with a hidden one.

Some days we may feel the need for a refugium. A young man who just lost his best friend will spend a week in a remote cabin to mourn and reconcile his loss. Another might sit quietly in a blind to watch birds, or hike along a river trail with his dog. We have a peaceful grove of oaks through which a rubble-bottomed creek flows that offers a calming, soothing place to decompress. All of us may seek a refugium at one time or another. May we find one when the time comes to meet our needs.



Photos by Dru Clarke



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Photos of Penner's place



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Welcome to the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society

This gift is from

GOLDEN ENCOUNTERS - Alpha Bird (Part 4) By Jay Jeffrey

[See Part 1 in Feb newsletter, Part 2 in Mar, Interlude in May, and Part 3 in Jul]

“The whole air is a thoroughfare for the eagle.” – Euripides (*in Days with the Golden Eagle*, Gordon, 1927)

Jon barks out, “Golden!” while pointing straight ahead. And adds, “A big female!” Directly ahead at the river bend, about 100 yards away, past the right riverbank, a large eagle gracefully flaps and glides less than 40 yards above the gently rolling grassland-sagebrush steppe – hunting.

A hot cloudless light-cobalt colored sky, breathless air almost stagnant, filling the river canyon. Smells of parched rock and scrublands, minerally dirt, zero humidity except invisible wafts of river-water barely caressing our kayak decks – simple and complex aroma of high desert canyonlands. An elegant golden eagle gracefully flying ahead of us. The ambiance soul-cleansing, tranquil, remaining serene.

Mesmerized while watching the golden, Jon and I continue paddling downstream, abreast of each other by 20-30 yards. Jon near the thickly-shrubbed right bank, exposed in bright late-afternoon sunlight; me near the left bank, not far from cubbyholes of sun-shelter, amidst shadowy boulder-riddled rimrocked cliffs.

Serenity was soon to be abruptly pulverized; all toggles of our senses would be switched to maximum amplification. From the subtlest synapses between the paddle-water interface and our brains, to explosive firing of the most rooted neurons – achieving topmost alertness; like a hunting lion about to furiously detonate and ambush a wildebeest.

Synapses flash flood our cognitive interpretation centers, crackling like high-voltage powerlines, trying to align truth and reality with onboard diagnostic portals – eyes and ears – by transmitting input at peak power to our cerebral canyons. Lightspeed milliseconds are slowed to slow-motion seconds. The world around us soon to mysteriously change at an exponential pace. Like the throttle of a jet engine gradually opening to reach full power, but occurring more abruptly like a launching NASA rocket – unreal ignition seemingly in slow-motion.

Peregrine falcons are considered the fastest animal on the planet, often descending from at least 1000-feet, in a hunting stoop (dramatic dive), with body intentionally compressed into a sleek shape like a round-tipped boat-tailed bullet, reaching alleged speeds of 240 mph. What’s often not described for ultra-speed stoopers, is that maximum speed often occurs before or after avoidance of a fatal collision with Earth, often not far above ground; instead, G-forcing their trajectory abruptly from vertical to horizontal.

The second fastest animal, is the golden eagle, with records of 150-200 mph stoops. While hunting or displaying either breeding or territorial behavior, goldens also exhibit impressive long-distance declivity, gliding with body in a semi-compact form, descending at speeds up to 120 mph (possibly initiated at 1000s of feet). Goldens may actually glide at higher speeds than peregrines. Some people claim goldens can, theoretically, stoop faster than peregrines. Don’t know, but goldens’ greater weight with increased influence by gravity, and required G-force control for survival success, certainly doesn’t seem conducive for frequent hunting or setting records in hyperdrive.

The dials of our eyes and ears are turned wide open. We’re about as “in-touch” with the natural world as can be, while being “unconnected” from civilization and the tech world – our cherished reason for playing in the wild boonies. But now, our neck hair begins to stand at full attention.

Awe. A feeling of reverential respect mixed with fear or wonder. Awe. Serenity vaporizing, soon we’ll be awed; in a very rare way, an exclusive gift from the natural world – a revealed glimpse of a hidden and acute example of power and grace of this planet’s Alpha Bird. The Golden Eagle.

Time condensed into a movie’s less-than-10-second climax scene. For us, the upcoming scene would become timeless. Yet lightning-quick in my mind’s cinematographic recollection. We paddled a steady cadence, then our sensory toggles switched – we heard a faint whistle. A whistle like that coming from a referee in a distant football field, or maybe a dog whistle. But this whistling didn’t stop, instead it gradually increased in volume; its amplitude would later register as an avian jet engine.

Jon and I turn our heads toward the center of the river while straining to crane our necks looking high overhead, skyward, no longer blissfully smiling but searching for the source of this hair-raising sound getting louder and louder. We see a dark speck quickly becoming a larger black hole in the sky, increasing in size, changing from a black ball, into a rocketing bowling pin, into a spearheaded missile. Plummeting directly at us!

The spearhead changes into a dragon’s head, piercing the air in its meteoric descent. The whistle sounding like a tea kettle blowing steam. We were becoming awed, but make no mistake, we were highly alarmed; all onboard diagnostics between our earlobes were flashing red – DANGER. Sensory portals were signaling a black ballistic thunderbolt was soon to impact directly between Jon and I.

GOLDEN ENCOUNTERS

The screaming kettle-whistle changed pitch as if at peak boil, when two thick arms of long-fingered black wings half-extended on either side of the dragon's head, the following cylindrical body still in sleek aerodynamic missile form. The arms then extended farther, wide trailing secondary feathers catching more air but with wing tips almost touching back over the body; a heart-shape, a black heart, more of a dark delta-stealth-bomber shape. Feather-booted legs with gold feet adorned with grappling hook-like talons, drop like landing gear, wing tips separating, more flight feathers reaching out, the wrist's thumb feathers flared; all sound and visuals progressively changing.

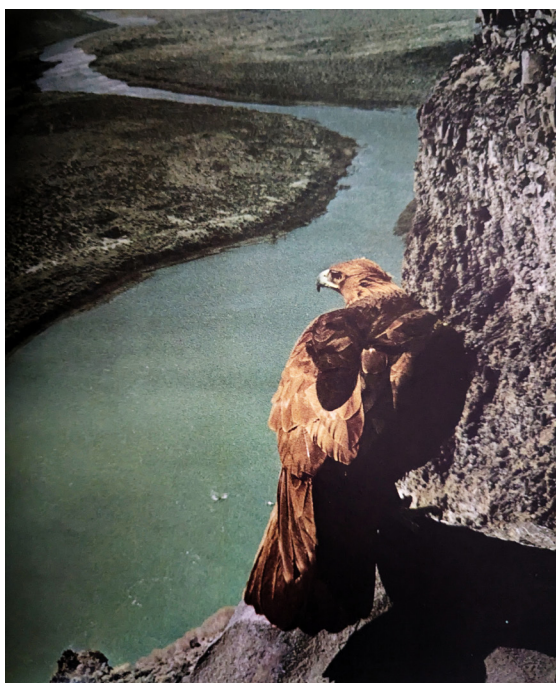
No mistaking it now, we're witnessing an adult male golden; finishing its rocketing stoop toward Earth – now exhibiting what Raptor Biologists call the Delta-Wing-Stoop – throwing out its secondary parachute of feathers, air now blasting through them, like sounds of flags furiously flapping in gale winds, directly between Jon and I, less than 15 yards from either one of us; we can see feathers being assaulted by air, they're shuddering and looking to shred apart at the veins, maybe break shafts, it sounds like cloth beginning to rip, then all flags ripping at once; no slowing in speed, the eagle striking an invisible floor, leveling not more than 8-10 feet above water, exploding like a jet fighter off an aircraft carrier, parallel to water's surface, launching ahead of us at warp speed.

We're frozen, stunned, mouths agape, paddles held motionless. The eagle promptly veers hard right achieving a change in direction of near 90 degrees, just a mere 20-25 yards in front of Jon, blazing directly at the bank of river-right. Clocking a remarkable flight speed. The golden is on a collision-course with a 6-8 foot tall sagebrush (*Artemisa tridentata*) atop the walled riverbank; the oversized old-growth shrub with thick charcoal trunk and sprawling arms covered with miniature smoky ghost-gray green leaves, is pleasantly pungent when crushed or rained upon. The eagle seems to collide with the shrub and we see and hear an explosion of wings, from an erupting hidden covey of chukars, all frenetically abandoning this abrupt horror. Flying chukars escape by bulleting through a wide gap in the surrounding sage shrubbery.

The eagle: instantly turns about-face, takes fast long-legged waddling steps – like one of The Wizard of Oz's flying monkeys – and with speedy momentum, plants both feet and springs forward into flapping flight – now tail chasing chukars! Most of the covey appears to land at the base of another distant sagebrush, with a sprinting eagle in pursuit, and then a loud audible "Thwack!" We see chukar feathers floating in air. The eagle had tail chased as if it had transformed into a starving American Goshawk.

The feathered lion had furiously detonated. Prior to impact, we saw the eagle's full spread of wings and flare of tail feathers: maximum brakes applied while simultaneously using that drastic force to ignite and swing the talon-clad feet outward with added horsepower almost twice the speed of the body prior to braking; talons clasp or driving into prey – The Strike, as it's called. Electrifying, breathtaking. The golden flies back toward us, soon only 15-20 yards overhead, carrying a chukar, again between us, flying back in the direction it stooped from; when directly over us, the golden looked down, as if to say, "Hope you enjoyed the show." Or "Only in your wildest dreams."

Awe. Infusing force and speed with nimble shapeshifting among hunting tactics, coupled with almost-instant problem-solving, make the agile and lithe male golden an extremely elegant and elite killer. The Alpha Bird.



Golden Eagle perched on cliff 1,000 feet above Snake River. Owyhee River is a tributary to the Snake, its confluence not far downstream from here, The Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area. Photo by George Silk, in *The Snake River Country* (1974).



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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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