

For the past 18 months or so, several KOS members have been working with Mike Rader and KS Department of Wildlife and Parks to establish the Kansas Birding Trail. It is now live and can be found at:

<https://www.ksbirdingtrail.com/>

This is not one long trail but rather regionally based trails that lead you to public land areas that support good birding. It doesn't include every single hotspot on eBird but is designed to give birders an awareness of where to go birding in a part of the state that they may not be familiar with. It is intended to be dynamic with the hope of adding locations or even new trails as time allows. Like with anything there may still be a few bugs in the system so if you run across a misdirecting link or something, please let Mike know so that it can be worked on. (mike.rader@ks.gov)

While many contributed to this, a special thanks to Ted Cable who did most of the writing.

You may also want to take a look at a promotional video that was put together for this. It can be found on KDWP's YouTube channel and you can go there directly from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J20YilPen7g>

Spring migration is on it's way so take a look at the Birding Trail website and find some new locations in the state to bird!!!
Chuck Otte, Kansas Birding

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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 50, No. 8, April 2022

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Upcoming Events

April 5 - Board Meeting, 5:30 pm, Manhattan Public Library

April 12 - Saturday morning birding 8am
Meet at Sojourner Truth Park

April 23-24 - Annual BIRDATHON
See pages 6-7

May 3 -Board Meeting, 5:30 pm Manhattan Public Library
PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING THE NFHAS BOARD



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

During a chance conversation on what freedoms photographers have in choosing subjects, a participating lawyer off-handedly opined that a tree does not have a right of privacy. Maybe not. But in Athens, Georgia, in the late 1800s a man was so fond of a 200-year-old white oak on his property that he devised to it a circle of land that it stood on, 16 feet in diameter. When it blew over in 1942 one of its acorn's saplings was set in its place and the city voluntarily tends it as a legitimate heir.

The concept of a "non-human person" is not new. Based upon the 1819 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Dartmouth College v. Woodward* (holding that the state of New Hampshire could not nullify the college's charter) corporations have increasingly been given the rights of human individuals.

Currently the rights of non-human animals as "non-human persons" is getting increased attention. The idea of a "right", it seems to me, implies that a corresponding "duty" weighs on some actor(s) to provide that the right has effect. I'd say non-human animals cannot be said to have a duty to not inflict injury. Does that exclude them from the ability to have legal rights?

India has banned a bullfight for violating the rights the bulls have under that country's constitution. Lower courts in Argentina have come to the aid of an orangutan held in poor conditions. The lower court Argentine decisions were overruled but the orangutan in question was nonetheless moved to better accommodations. In the U.S. several states have legislated that people who keep pets are "guardians", and guardians are held to a higher standard of care than mere owners. I've seen in the news that various food stores and restaurants are demanding from their suppliers the ability to declare that the chicken they sell is from animals that were not confined in small cages.

Quite recently the federal judge for Ohio allowed a foreign attorney to gather expert testimony in this country for case at bar abroad. This decision is unusual only because the attorney was representing a group of a hundred hippopotami. When the drug lord, Pablo Escobar, went extinct in a shoot-out, most of the menagerie of African fauna he'd brought to his Colombian estate were transferred to various zoos, but four hippos remained, and their progeny have made a home in the Magdalena River there. That to the detriment of the local ecology and a peril to neighboring real humans. Yet an AP news story has told that many locals were in favor of the hippos.

The Colombian government has opened the door to culling. The attorney wanted to interview experts in non-invasive sterilization in hopes of offering a milder alternative, one that would have to face a difficulty in that hippos are not di-morphic—males and females look alike.

In granting permission the judge referred to the hippos as "interested persons" in the case, and that use of the word "persons" is not off-handed. Meanwhile before New York State's highest court there is the case of Happy, a 53-year-old elephant which has different circumstances.

I read that at the Bronx Zoo Happy lives in an enclosure of less than two acres. Her only companion of sorts is another elephant separated by a fence because the two did not get along when paired. A Non-Human Rights Project (NhRP) declares that she is being denied the personal contacts and foraging experience natural to an elephant; that she is just standing in one place "showing signs of misery". They seek a writ of habeas corpus to allow them to remove her to a sanctuary in Tennessee or California where she could socialize with other elephants.

There are other groups seeking various rights for other species, and we should know more about the rights of non-human animals when these two cases are resolved.

The planets perform in early mornings this coming month, staying within the height of an extended fist-and-a-half above the horizon. On the 1st Venus will be to the left of a jagged line composed of Saturn in the middle and Mars on the other end. On the 4th and 5th the latter two come very close with Saturn the brighter. Next wait till near the month's end for the nights of the 24th-27th through which the Moon will help provide differently arranged bright accompaniment to Saturn, then Mars, then to a close pairing of Venus and Jupiter. From then into May 2nd Jupiter, moving higher, and Venus, shifting leftward, will move ever closer and pass, becoming kissing cousins on the 30th.

During the first half of April the Moon will have evening visits, starting with Taurus' eye, Aldebaran, the 5th, then with El Nath, the tip of the Bull's long left horn the 6th. He'll be left of the Gemini Twins the 9th, next moving from above to below Leo's main star, Regulus, the 11th-12th. Virgo's Spica is his companion the 15th-16th before he shifts into the morning sky, showing up above Scorpius's Antares in early light of the 19th.

The Lyrid meteor shower will have to contend with a waning gibbous Moon the 22nd as the Moon, having been new on the 1st (at 1a24) will be full the 16th (at 1p55).

Onion Snow

Dru Clarke



Just inside our south horse pasture gate is a gravelly rise where wild onions grow. A light granular dusting of snow, as if broadcast like seed, lay over the emergent onions. They persist throughout the winter months, oblivious to the waxing and waning temperatures, looking greenly pert and mildly defiant. The fine snowfall probably helps to insulate their tender shoots, as did a recent three-incher on the surface ice of the watering tank keep the water beneath fluid.



I have two chore coats, made for the gritty work involved, one denim and one canvas, neither warm enough for single digit air. The canvas one, a Big Dutch brand, has sleeves with ruptured seams, raggedy pocket edges and a greasy patina of grime. Ed Dillinger, the Lazy Heart bison ranch man, has the same sort of jacket that he mended with recycled denim jean legs: a handsome, wiry, and weathered octogenarian, he cuts quite a figure in that jacket and brimmed leather hat. A go-to purple down jacket that covers my be-

hind is my winter outer layer: it had a short respite when the zipper pull – not the zipper itself – failed and a good friend who is a consummate seamstress persisted in discovering its problem and fixed it for me (thank you, Ruth!).

While it was on hiatus, my 45 year old Cabela's long belted coat, filled with goose down and feathers, was called into service. It had lost- through mouse and cricket action - its red fox fur ruff on the hood long ago, replaced by a faux band of synthetic look-alike material. The lower left sleeve



was scorched and hardened to a shiny, leather-like finish, now, totally waterproof. An occasional burn hole from a spark can be seen on the long fall of the coat. The largest one is patched with a clot of Highland cow hair. Through several of the stitched quilted squares poke the quills of goose down feathers; unlike the plump, round down of chicks, sans central quills, these feathers have flattened through time, the quills aligning on a level plane, the coat losing its loft. A good tumble in a dryer after a gentle wash helps restore this, and I'm set to face the elements. (My go-to-town 'dress' coat is a shimmering cherry red CK 60% down, 40% Sorona polyester fill one that collapses into a ob-long purse-size bag. Methinks engineers may have recreated the geometry of the true down shape, because the coat regains its loft when released from its bag. I find this feature amazing.)

Down and feathers are quintessentially the best insulation. As I write this, it is 2 degrees and the birds

outside the window are actively hopping about, foraging on the ground and clinging to the feeders. One occasionally will fluff its feathers, give a little shake, then resume its task. Little chicks are covered completely with down, not having grown their body feathers yet. I remember my dad, an ag marketing director, created the 'peep peep show' at the county fair, where a huge, round galvanized tin viewing arena held dozens of tiny yellow, sometimes multicolored, balls of fluff that zoomed around like wind-up toys, eliciting cries of "ooh" and "ahhh" from the audience. Down is round and 'wants' to assume, maintain, that shape. When released after being pressed flat, it expands into a sphere. Wetting it defeats that. It is good that adult birds can preen, hence waterproof, their body feathers. Last summer, I rescued one of our hens from a water tank: she was floating like a cork, upright but waterlogged, on top, and I thought she might already be dead. I wrapped her in a towel and dried her as best I could, putting her in a nesting box to recover. The next day, she was walking around as if nothing had happened. But now, she lets me smooth her feathers when she goes to roost at night. She coos back.

In chunks of ancient amber, down has been trapped. Perhaps even dinosaurs wore down. Birds, of course, are the present day couturiers, with ducks and geese the main designers and providers. You can purchase down – Hungarian down is ranked the best – and it is rated for its loft. If you use it in pillows, the more you use, the firmer the pillow.

The saying 'onion snow' actually originated in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, home of the Pennsylvanian Dutch folk, who coined it as the snow that fell after they planted their spring onions. Well, our wild onions did not need planting, but they may have reaped the reward of the insulating effect of the snow. And I continue to reap the reward of an old down coat that has seen better days but continues to keep me warm.





Lethal Beauty — *Rapere*

Jay Jeffrey

“What appeals to us most in this daring little falcon is its lightness and quickness — the speed of lightning compared to the crash of thunder.” — Arthur Cleveland Bent (1939)

To state the obvious, watching falcons and hawks fly and hunt can be absolutely mesmerizing, and at times leave us breathless, wide-eyed, and open-mouthed in total wonderment — totally in the moment — when nothing else in the world matters; all barbed wire and dark clouds of our life’s circumstances don’t exist. The word raptor is one of many words derived from the Latin verb root, *rapere* (present tense, *rapio*). Its shortest description being, “To seize, take away.” A more encompassing definition covering various derivatives of *rapere* may include, “To seize, snatch, grab; carry off, drag off, take away by force, abduct; plunder, rob, pillage, destroy, prey upon.” The word raptor has the same etymological origin as rape. The title of raptor today is not commonly applied to plunderers, robbers, or beasts of whatever ilk — but to birds of prey. And by and large, feathered raptors have many more admirable qualities than raw ones.

Kestrels utilize several hunting strategies, some common to raptors, some less so. One often observed strategy is the Pounce-From-Perch. Kestrels often hunt from elevated perches such as fenceposts, utility poles and wires, trees, snags, and rock outcrops; they prefer perches 15 feet and higher. They are commonly seen on utility pole wires, easily mistaken for mourning doves, but differ with their pumping tails and bobbing heads rolling to and fro, as if tipsy from booze. Hypotheses abound regarding the drunken-like movements, it seems accepted that bobbing heads provide different viewing angles to allow precise distance evaluations to prey and predators (so not woozy, but elaborate avian triangulation). It is status quo to see kestrels alight and nosedive like a feathered bullet, hit the ground, and then launch skyward with a mouse clenched in their talons — à la *rapere*. In early spring, I’ve seen them cannonball, feet first, from a telephone line, disappearing in grassy water-filled ditches and then reappear flying back to perch with minuscule-sized chorus frogs; not a common sight, but maybe a tasty delight.

Hovering is a staple strategy for kestrels, and they use different styles that can be changed and modified with grace. Of raptors, kestrels likely rank as top hovering virtuoso, in fact, another colloquial name they’ve worn is Windhover. At times, the hovering repertoire can provide observers with entertaining and beautiful — sometimes staggering — aerobic displays. Glide, hover, glide, hover; fly flapping, hover, fly flapping, hover; hover with rapid flapping; hover with slow flapping; hover, parachute to lower altitude, hover, glide, hover — repeat. Kestrels can do this with little to no wind, they have longer tails than most falcons, smaller bodies, and have lower wing loading. This gives kestrels a “buoyant” quality.

Once while conducting a timed fixed-point bird count, on a long rocky ridgeline of exposed bunchgrass and sagebrush shrub-steppe, overlooking the distant three-way confluence of the Snake, Columbia, and Walla Walla Rivers, I was slipping into lassitude and deep bonified boredom. It was a hot summer day, I knew the site well, had long-ago scrutinized its

mysterious glacial erratics deposited from the Missoula Floods, watched beetles on blooming rabbitbrush, befriended gopher snakes and pygmy short-horned lizards, knew location of inactive badger’s den, burrowing owl haunt, had nothing more to contemplate regarding my girlfriend, and I’d been fruitlessly scanning an immense landscape for birds: perched, flying, calling — anything. As my brainwaves got slower, a slight movement in my peripheral vision yanked me from my trance.

There was a moderate upslope breeze. I looked where I thought the movement came from but didn’t see anything. I was looking downslope with a steep drop of over a mile to the valley below, which rose to another distant ridgeline. Another flare of movement, and then I saw the kestrel, not more than 20 yards away and seemingly hanging motionless not more than 6-8 feet above the ground. I quickly had my binoculars focused on the bird and then watched it almost imperceptibly flit the fingers of its wingtips to maintain static position, as its gaze was fixed to the ground. It appeared as if the bird was perched on an invisible fence post, as it kited on the current of the upslope wind. Then, as if the invisible post disappeared and gravity reappeared, the kestrel dropped to the ground like a feathered baseball and, just as quick, bounced back up like a feathered rubber ball — to the same exact place it was previously “perched.” But now it transitioned back and forth from flap-hovering to motionless kiting, while simultaneously bringing its taloned feet up to its beak with an extremely large grasshopper, and with electric-fast head movements disassembled and ate the hopper.

The bird returned to floating motionless, hanging in the air without any up-and-down or side-to-side movement. At 20 yards looking through 10x42 Leicas, this pint-sized raptor, a lethal beauty, had my rapt attention — indeed, it had carried my mind away. I was revitalized with boredom vanquished.



American Kestrel in rapere mode. Photo courtesy of Jody Melanson Photography (JODY7908, jmelanson.smugmug.com).

“The falcon hangs in space for second after second, motionless, as if suspended on a thread, its wings, body, and spirit in perfect equilibrium with the streaming torrents of the air.” — Edward Abbey (1982).

In variable winds, kestrels can appear randomly drifting, fluttering, at times with erratic flight, or easily pitched about; in strong winds their flight can appear pushed, shifted, drunk, or bulled. This is one reason kestrels have adjectives ascribed to them which typically differ from descriptions given to other falcons. For example: Dainty, fragile, delicate, slim, petite, endearing, jaunty, frolicsome, lighthearted, etc. Some of these, depending on your perspective, and maybe the kestrel's too, could be construed as unduly unflattering.

Paul Bonnot (1921) describes a kestrel which "sailed gently down to one of the [cliff] swallow's nests, passing over a group of about fifteen people, supported himself with one foot, hanging nearly upside down in the meantime, inserted the other foot into the nest, and extracted its owner. The captured bird was an adult Cliff Swallow." I think it fair to call that form of rapere an abduction strategy.

Floyd Bralliar (1922) relates observations repeated identically [by a kestrel] in method for killing chicks of domestic chickens: "The hawk watches until he feels sure of his prey, then swoops downward straight as an arrow, strikes the bird in the back with his talons, and with his powerful beak tears the top of the head off. The point of the beak is sunk into the base of the skull, and the skull is torn off with a swift forward motion." Bralliar immediately scares the kestrel away after each attack. He continues, "...every one had the whole upper part of the skull torn off, the brain exposed, and the medulla mangled with the point of the hawk's beak." This anecdote, based on diligent and keen observation, sheds light on the kestrel's adept surgical use of its deadly beak. Rest assured, there will be no more prose this raw concerning our Lethal Beauty.

Finally, and still overdue, the stage is set to address that specialized "tooth" of the beak, a falcon fang of sorts. And then wrap-up with the impressive diversity of prey and current conservation status of American Kestrels.

Wrap-up epilogue will arrive in a future newsletter, after I receive & review an upcoming special edition on American Kestrels in the Journal of Raptor Research.

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A resplendent and stunning male American Kestrel. Photo courtesy of Jody Melanson Photography (JODY8623a, jmelanson.smugmug.com).

Nature at its best

On the green and mossy bank,
I dropped my hook into a pool
To catch a silver perch.

I lounged in easy silence,
While my enthusiasm sank
My eyes were fixed on matted roots
That overhung the bank.

When her wary eye had told her
A sleek and graceful mink.
She floated quietly on the surface
And did but sniff and blink.

Out from the roots there tumbled
With squeaks of childish glee,
A funny bunch of youngsters,
Oh! What a treat for me.

Motionless, I stretched there
And watched the jolly sight
Of tussling, snapping baby minks
Like youngsters in a fight.

They climbed up the slippery banks
Like a puck of happy boys,
And came splashing into the water
With all their youthful joys.

As all minks are good providers
And keep their young ones fat,
The mother dived before my eyes
And caught a channel cat.

The family gathered on the bank
To take part in the feast.
There seemed to be no places reserved.
No bashfulness in the least.

A mosquito lit on my forehead,
My feet had gone to sleep,
Another insect perched on my arm
And pierced me with his beak.

To move meant disaster,
But this was more than I could stand.
I shifted position a little
And brushed slightly with my hand.

The old mink listened a second
Then into the water she flashed,
The young ones left the feast in hurry,
Plunk, plunk, plop, plop they splashed.

Gone from my sight in an instant,
In the twinkling of an eye,
Vanished one of nature's best dramas
I could not help but sigh.

~Arlo Mosier, submitted by Joe Mosier, his son

April is our Annual Fundraiser: “Birdathon”

If you are new to NFHAS, this is what it is all about. A group of birders or just one birder goes out and counts the number of species they see within a 24-hour period of their choice during **April 23rd and 24th**. Friends, family and anyone who would like to be a sponsor and contribute to NFHAS, pledges a certain amount for each species seen. From a dime to quarter or more, you would be surprised how much we can raise. Last year we raised nearly \$4,000! Some sponsors just pledge a set amount. You can be a sponsor and a counter!

The 24-hour period is up to the counter, for example, from 10 a.m. on the 23rd to 10 a.m. on the 24th. Whatever works best. Report your findings to your sponsor and collect your pledges.

Please send the name and address of each sponsor and the money to

Jim Koelliker,
3500 Mintons Lndg,
Manhattan KS 66503.

If you don’t want to go out alone or don’t think you are good enough to ID birds, contact Jim Koelliker (785-776-4915, voice or text) and he will help you find someone or a group to search with you. Also, you can contact a board member, or drop a note to NFHAS, PO Box 1932, Manhattan 66502 and we will find someone to count for you.

On average we see between 90-110 species this time of year. Those donating \$15 or more may receive a year’s subscription to the Prairie Falcon if requested. Please join us and help us support and protect the wild things.

PS: Jim compiles a master list of all species seen in the area during the Birdathon. Please report your list to Jim no later than April 29 to make your contributions to the master list that will be included in a subsequent edition of the Prairie Falcon.

Also, this will be the first year that the Birdathon will not have either Cecil Best or Clyde Ferguson, our deceased founders who started it in 1985. We hope to continue their legacy.

Birdathon Chair Jim Koelliker

Founders of the Birdathon:

*The Birdathon continues with Cecil Best and Clyde Ferguson
always in our minds and hearts.*



Birdathon Sponsor Form

Your name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Sponsor's Name & Address	Pledge/species	Total Pledge	Newsletter

Bluebird Nesting Boxes

Thanks to Jacque Staats for building 16 bluebird nest boxes, here are eight of them. We still need more to replace some that are falling apart. If anyone needs a project!

Our bluebird trails are:

Carnahan Creek Park, Cecil Best Trail (NE Park) and Stagg Hill Golf Course.

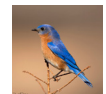
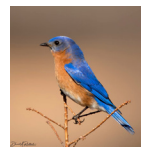


photo by Jacque Staats

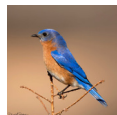
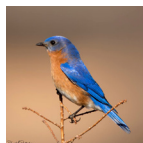


photo by Dave Rintoul

ONLINE [nfhas.org](https://www.nfhas.org)

Sunday, March 13th, program featured Dr. Koley Freeman. If you missed it, it is available on our website under Bird Blog. <https://www.nfhas.org/bird-blog.cfm>

(I apologize for the poor quality of the audio)

The Kansas Motus network is a collaborative effort, spearheaded by Alice Boyle (Kansas State University), Bill Jensen (Emporia State University), and Andrew George (Pittsburg State University). It consists of a network of automated telemetry towers in the state. Building upon the preliminary tower infrastructure, funding, and expertise brought to the region by the initiative by the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies. They envision a truly collaborative effort involving researchers, engaged landowners, non-governmental organizations, state & federal agencies, and birding associations to promote understanding, education, and conservation of grassland birds. This network began with the three towers installed in eastern Kansas in 2021; eventually they envision a tower in every county in the eastern third of the state, and expansion of the network further west. Even 12 well-placed towers will help better understand the movements, annual cycle, demography, and landuse of grassland birds - information that is crucial for their preservation.

Alice Boyle gave a presentation about this project at the March meeting (click this link for a recording of the talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISJP8Qm1CEs>) and is hoping that Audubon chapters or individuals will consider sponsoring a tower or tags. You can learn more about the project here: <https://www.kansasmotus.net>



photo by Alice Boyle

For all those interested in contributing to the project, please send a check to:

The Division of Biology, Kansas State University, Accounting Office,
104 Ackert Hall, 1717 Claflin Hall, Manhattan, KS 66506.

Please write on the check "Kansas Motus" and enclose your name, contact info, and any additional instructions you have.

Alternatively, an account is being set up with the K-State Foundation so if folks want to make a tax-deductible donation (minus the 5% overhead), contact Alice Boyle or check the KansasMotus webpage

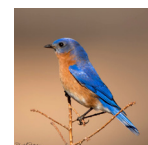
(<https://www.kansasmotus.net>) in 1-2 weeks for a link and further instructions."



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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

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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. Website is www.audubon.org.

Subscription Information: If you do not want to receive the national magazine, but still want to be involved in NFHAS local activities, you may subscribe to the Prairie Falcon newsletter for \$15/yr. Make checks payable to the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, and mail to: Treasurer, NFHAS, P.O. Box 1932, Manhattan, KS, 66505-1932

RARE BIRD HOTLINE: For information on Kansas Birds, subscribe to the Kansas Bird Listserve. Send this message <subscribe KSBIRD-L> to <listserve@ksu.edu> and join in the

WE NEED YOU! PLEASE consider joining our NFHAS Board.

NFHAS Board

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At-large: Susan Blackford

Contacts for Your Elected Representatives (anytime) Write, call or email: Governor: 2nd Floor, State Capital Bldg., Topeka , KS 66612. KS Senator or Representative: State Capital Bldg., Topeka, KS 66612. Ph# (during session only) Senate - 785-296-7300. House - 785-296-7500. U.S. Senator Marshall <<https://marshall.senate.gov/contact/>> U.S. Senate, Washington DC 20510. Jerry Moran U.S. Capital Switchboard 202-224-3121.