

TICKS AND CHIGGERS - OH MY!!

Patricia Yeager

Chiggers



It was not until I was in high school that my dad revealed a secret. That secret was how to repel chiggers. I was mad. Why didn't he tell me this before! Truth be known he likely did but I did not listen. In any case, I have not had trouble with chigger bites (but one or two-a "mity" tough species) since. The secret is sulfur. Sulfur Sublimed powder to be precise. This can be purchased at or ordered from a pharmacy. Don't stop listening now like when I was a kid. Proper application garners the best result. Place the powder in a tube sock or the like and knock it about your ankles and waistband or anywhere else your clothing is tight BEFORE you set out. It is OK to mix a little baby powder with the sulfur for comfort and ease of application. Tuck your pants into your socks. You are not making a fashion statement but you will not suffer later. Do not suppose you will get by with wearing shorts. This is one helpful hint when walking in grasslands or wooded areas in the Kansas summer. Since you cannot see them, prevention is the best defense.

Then there are ticks. Fear not. Ticks need to be attached for a while to transmit Lyme disease. Typically, 36 to 48 hours according to Google's AI. Powassan virus is faster but usually not in Kansas. Rocky Mountain spotted fever can be transmitted in as little as 2 hours but usually takes longer. Although this is a little creepy, you can be assured that if you remove ticks promptly you will be fine. Let me share the best trick to remove them. That is duct tape. If this is too aggressive for your delicate skin, packing tape usually does the job. Just press the sticky side on the tick and pull. Tape does a thorough job of getting the smallest ticks as well as the large ones off you. So, take a bit of tape with you on your walk this summer and be safe.



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



prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Vol. 53, No. 9, May 2025

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Upcoming Events

- May 6 - Board Meeting 5:30
Manhattan Public Library Study room
- May 10 - Sat. Morning Birding
Meet at Sojourner Truth Park,
departs for birding at **8:00 am**



Mice in the Night

Dru Clarke



Mice seem to be pretty much nocturnal foragers, exploring the larders of the home to munch now, cache for later, what we have left unattended or packaged vulnerably. They especially like the stoneware pot of bacon drippings I store on the back of the sink. We see evidence where tiny dollops have been lapped up during the night.

Each morning while waiting for coffee to brew, I find utensils to wage an attack on breakfast stuffs, looking first in the flatware drawer of the sink. Often, I will find remnants of organic leftovers – a chicken bone, a bread crust, a cheese rind – in the drawer where knives, forks, and spoons are stored. Occasionally I do surprise a mouse who has been overcome with zeal at hauling its treasure into the darkened space, to feed undisturbed until I pull the drawer open, flooding it with daylight.

One morning I surprised not only a mouse, but a somewhat larger, longer, and serpentine (can you guess?) creature whose main focus was on snagging the unsuspecting rodent. A young – thank goodness – rat snake was winding through the second drawer utensils – a spatula, tongs, and assorted other handy helpers – who looked very alarmed at being discovered. I know snakes don't have eyelids, but it seemed its eyes got very large! It slid backwards to the back of the drawer and disappeared, probably crawling down under the sink and through the opening for the drain pipe that entered the cellar. There it may have reunited with its mother, our resident five-foot black rat snake, who overwinters near the water heater. I know too that snakes and their offspring don't have the same mother/child bond that many mammals do, but all the same...it did get quite a fright and may have sought some comfort.

Some nights, I'll hear a chewing sound coming from a glass-fronted bookcase in the corner of the bedroom. Shelves inside are many old volumes with desiccated pages, succumbing to time and an arid environment. Paper, when it ages, releases compounds that are fragrant, redolent of vanilla, an irresistible draw for mice (and some people who collect old books). Whether the mouse is boning up on its letters or is simply curious about Hemingway's writings or a first edition of "The Virginian" I'm not sure, but when I yell at it, it desists.

Off the kitchen, is a small bathroom, with a tub, sink and toilet and barely enough room to turn around. Each morning, my bare feet, expecting a nice, soft plush from the rug, step on what feels like small kernels: in peeling them off my soles, I see that each one is a cat kibble. The cats do not eat in the bathroom, so some scurrying rodent has dropped them inadvertently on its way to a cache – but there is none

in the bathroom I can find. In looking in a shoe box for a pair of winter quilted boots I discovered a cache, not only of kibbles but a mass of frayed yarn from an old forgotten sweater.

Industrious little varmints.

In choring each morning, I open the big hen house door, then the little one that lets them come and go to the run outside. This little door is firmly secured at night by a gravel-filled bucket that discourages any itinerant raccoon from marauding. The hens are clustered just inside every morning and wait for me to lift the bucket and open the little door. Invariably a litter of young mice who have sought cover during the night are exposed, and they scatter like marbles as the hens pounce. It is the same every morning, so it must be true that mice are quite prolific. I have not seen an adult mouse in this hidey hole, so where they over-night is a mystery. The hens are getting plenty of protein supplement.

I've had to come up with some ingenious ways to protect foodstuffs like pasta and flour, and found that metal containers are the only failsafe ones. And, of course, we have cats, but somehow they aren't totally effective deterrents. Occasionally we find a drowned mouse floating in the dog's water bowl. And we won't employ poisons or traps. (Traps work, but the poor mouse in its death throes, thrashes about and often the trap falls in a hidden space, to be retrieved only when the odor of the dead mouse becomes overwhelming.) So, we live with them, and are constantly stimulated to try to outwit them. And, you can't help but admire their perseverance. And, they are cute, don't you think?



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KSU Birding Club



The weekend of April 12-13, the KSU Bird Club competed in the Birding Big Day Intercollegiate Competition, made possible by OSU.

"We had four people participate on our first team which involved from left to right, Clayton Bickley, Carson Jones, Madi Walker, and Jacob Riggs. Also seen pictured was a Swainson's Hawk which we saw a lot of. We also had a second team led by Dr. Boyle. In total we saw 94 species of birds and placed 7th out of around 30 schools across 3 countries for the KSU Birding Club."

Jacob Riggs, President

Congratulation! Well done!

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GOLDEN ENCOUNTERS – Land of the Lost (Series Interlude)

By Jay Jeffrey

“...a few places have been mapped so recently – and remain so remote – as to hold about them an aura of the unknown. One of these is the upper stretch of the Owyhee River, ...” – Don Moser (1974, in The Snake River Country).

Early 2000's, summer, Owyhee Canyonlands, southeast Oregon. A friend and I prepare to launch our 14- and 17-foot-long expedition kayaks into the middle reach of the Owyhee River for a few backcountry days of escape; cramming food, water, wine, optics, clothes and camping gear into each boat's bow and stern waterproof hatches. And in moments we were paddling with the umbilical cord to civilization severed – into an otherworldly peopleless wild realm.

Phenomenal geologic wonder and beauty. We paddle through ancient land strata and formations of high desert plateaus, steep river shorelines of deep canyons quickly ascending a mile requiring a strained neck to peer skyward; as expansive as the encyclopedia of time iconic to the down-cut abyss of the Grand Canyon. Mind-boggling.

Such landscape masterpieces are mysterious and ridiculously complex when viewed in a day, a mere eye blink of what required eons of work. Reddish-orange lava rock was laid down repeatedly during explosive prehistoric volcanic eruptions while blasting ashes of diverse hues miles high, all covered millions of years later by numerous brown-black basaltic lava flows, before down-cutting by the river and weathered with water and wind. Creating spectacular cliffs, buttes, spires, ridges, honeycombs, benches, hoodoos and hills, sandstone and tuff, talus and scree; intermixed in some areas with steppe vegetation dominated by grasses and sagebrush found in places like open hillsides, ravines, drainages, arroyos, boulder fields and rock-dribbled side-slopes, plateau rims and hilltops.

A clear azure sky, distant blurry heat waves, invisible canyon wind streams, high afternoon glare, and everything under the faint yellow lens of arid country in summer. Traveling on water is reassuring, even if falsely so. The region is extremely dynamic, visually expressing itself in ways firmly spurring emotions and moods: euphoric to somber. While daydreaming, little imagination is required to change a feature into a dinosaurian monolith. This is nature's Disneyland for some, like my friend and I, it is also an ideal stronghold for birds of prey, notably Golden Eagles, hereafter referred to as golden(s).

We decide on a campsite at a large river bend with little current. Willows are spotty along the shoreline, a few stubborn cottonwood trees are enjoying success and we're enjoying the sandy site beneath them. At dusk, as we enjoy large burritos loaded with freshly grilled elk steak and veggies, a Short-eared Owl flies in and briefly alights on a snag about 20 yards away as if to check us out, and then flies away. I said, "Pueo" [pronounced, Poo-eh-oh]. My friend, who happens to be a gifted ornithologist, looked at me quizzically.

In the mid 1990's, I participated in bird studies on the Big Island of Hawaii where I learned much about native birds and their Hawaiian names. Pueo is the name for the Hawaiian Short-Eared Owl (an endemic and one of 11 subspecies of Short-Eared Owl). Pueo are considered ancestral guardians by many Hawaiian families. Obviously, the owl we'd just seen was not a true Pueo, but there was a connection in my mind's eye.

About 15 years prior, 1990, I'd worked in Idaho and spent time in the Owyhee Mountains east of where we were now. I learned that in the early 1800's, three Hawaiian fur trappers -- who were part of a larger Hudson Bay fur trapping expedition in the Snake River area -- went exploring and trapping up a large tributary of the Snake River (today's Owyhee River). They were never seen again and thought to have been killed by either Shoshone or Paiute Indians, both tribes consider the Owyhee Canyonlands sacred. "Owyhee" is an old anglicized word for Hawaii (the Hawaiian Islands and its people). In the early 19th century, British and American explorers and trappers referred to Hawaii as "Owyhee"; after the three Hawaiians disappeared, trappers called the region's river and mountains "Owyhee." After sharing this information with my friend, and finishing our elk burritos, I called our campsite Pueo Bay. My friend enjoyed it all and smiled big -- an unforgettable evening.

continued onf page 5

GOLDEN ENCOUNTERS –

Another evening, after paddling back from soaking in hot springs, we camped on a shoreline with bobcat tracks; we called that campsite Bobcat Beach. At sunset we had hiked high above our camp and looked over an incredibly diverse landscape with no people and no sign of ever having had people. At the summit of a high desert mountain across the river, we saw the large specks of two goldens hanging on updrafts, occasionally adjusting their wings to reposition near a rock cliff and adjacent grassy slope. We called it Eagle Mountain. Later that night, I was tranquilly mesmerized as I lay in my sleeping bag, staring at the jet-black star-studded sky with zero light pollution. A crescent moon, facing the cosmos, with three large stars perfectly aligned at its middle and forming a line as if marking the route for an arrow to the Universe. I was set for dreamtime. Another unforgettable evening.

Finishing our trip, I paddled close to a steep grassy shore littered with rock, boulders, and low cliffs. At water's edge, I watched an assortment of smaller weathered rocks going steadily past me while I paddled or drifted, as if viewing them on a conveyor belt; many looked like they came from another planet. Movement caught my eye from above, only 20-30 yards away was a golden flying around and over boulders, rock, grass, sagebrush; in sync with my speed heading downstream, and only 2-3 yards above ground like a Northern Harrier hunting grasslands or marsh. Wow! And why?

This hunting tactic is termed "Contour Hunting." Prey – large birds and mammals – see a sky empty of raptors, and then out of nowhere, only slightly above them, they are quickly surprised and ambushed – killed. In my case, I was unknowingly a hunting partner; by paddling my kayak I might distract prey or even flush them if they were close enough; with a hunting eagle nearby, I was what they call a "beater," like a hunting dog used by upland bird hunters or a person hired to flush birds out of the brush.

The river bends, and I paddle across the channel to the outer bend; the golden stays with the inner bend's rugged slope and continues contour hunting without me. An unforgettable morning.

Part 3 of this series will resume with more regarding goldens' flight, hunting tactics and exploits, and the promised description of an electrifying encounter with a hunting golden. [see Part 1 in Feb newsletter, Part 2 in March]

"...as she half turned in her flight the sun shone full upon the golden plumage of her neck, and she became a veritable eagle of burnished gold." – Seton Gordon (1927, in Days with the Golden Eagle).



A soon to be disappointed golden attacking a Canada goose decoy. Note the large hallux of each taloned foot (talon of the rear toe). Photo by Jeff Mullinix, Columbus, NE, in Nebraska-land Magazine, Jan-Feb 2025.



Golden about to seize a jackrabbit. Illustration by N. John Schmitt, in Ellis and Schmitt, 2017, Behavior of the Golden Eagle.



Northern Flint Hills
Audubon Society
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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.

Published monthly (except August) by the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society.
Edited by Cindy Jeffrey, 15850 Galilee Rd., Olsburg, KS 66520. (cinraney@ksu.edu)
Also available online at nfhas.org

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