

Technology and Birding

Sunday, February 16th
2:00 PM, Groesbeck Rm.
Manhattan Public Library

Jacob Riggs, the current president of the Kansas State Bird Club, will be leading an engaging presentation on eBird, the world's largest community science platform for birders.

Whether you're a seasoned birder or just starting out, learn how this powerful tool can help you document your sightings, explore local bird hotspots, and contribute to vital conservation efforts.

This session is designed especially for those new to eBird, and it has a step-by-step walkthrough to get you started. Even people who are used to eBird can learn something new. Don't miss this opportunity to take your birding to the next level!



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

- Feb. 4 - Board Meeting 5:30
Manhattan Public Library Study room 1
- Feb 16 - Technology and Birding, Jacob Riggs
2:00 PM, Manhattan Public Library



Snowbound

Dru Clarke

Shortly after the New Year began, winter asserted itself with a mix of frigid drizzle and fine snow, essentially grounding us with a 20" blanket.

The snow, dry and light, was deep enough to making slogging through it difficult, stimulating us to quickly crank up fossil fuel- powered machines to ease the passage. Our animals appreciated this, despite the questionable reliance on gasoline, diesel, and oil, energy-rich compounds distilled from the organic remains of plants and animals long dead, buried and transformed, supplying the world today with its insatiable appetite for those fuels. We use a share of it and are thankful for their being available, though that may not be the case for long.

It is tempting to stay indoors on days like this, once chores are done, but if it isn't too daunting, being "out" can be rewarding to one's senses, and, too, one's sense of place. Take this morning: a path of tracks left by a very determined cottontail rabbit led west along the lane to the corral where a fresh mound of hay escaped from a round bale. There, the tracks ended in a bounty of palatable leafy stuff. Bird tracks, delicate and twiggy, appear abruptly scattered but usually congregate en masse near spilled bird seed, creating a melange of indistinguishable marks.

The most amazing track – if it could be called one – revealed a predatory dive and halt of an owl in a drift of snow. Each primary feather was clearly etched at the edge of one outstretched wing where the bird had landed. A track of another animal is seen zigzagging through the snow in what seems a futile attempt to escape. Whether the owl had successfully taloned its prey is unknown as there was no blood or other sign of a struggle. The snow had captured a fleeting moment in time.

Once, in the mud by our big pond, I found a track that looked like one of a very large cat. There were no claw marks and it measured 4 and ½ ". Folks examining it had mixed opinions. Perhaps it was from a large dog, but there should have been nail impressions. It remains a mystery.

A friend, while visiting an island in one of the Great Lakes, knew that there were wolves living there and they had heard them howl at night but hadn't seen them. During the day, she ventured out on a rickety boardwalk over the water's edge and when returning saw a wet imprint of a wolf's paw on the boards. What a rush that must have been; and for the wolf, curiosity satisfied.

There is a resurgence of learning to track today, in an effort to ground truth what remote technology can only grossly reveal about an animal's movements and identity. Highly trained trackers, usually accompanied by similarly trained dogs, can tell not only the species who left the track, but how long ago, its registry (whether it was walking, trotting or running like hell), and often its gender and weight.

Eco Elsa posts a video weekly – I think it is on Wednesdays – giving real time tips on tracking. Her significant other films these forays into what is usually a snowy environment and the duo is fun and educational to listen to. Her long, blonde braid and apple-cheeked visage make you feel like you are being hosted by a true Viking lass who is completely at home in the challenging outdoors. For a real treat, look her up.

Occasionally a bouquet is captured by the snow: a dried forb, stiffened by rigid stems, imparts a simple symmetry that would be highly regarded in a Japanese scene. But, here it is as well, easily overlooked unless one was mindful of its presence.

These finds are compelling reasons to venture out, to explore, even when snowbound. You'll never know what you are missing unless you do.



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GOLDEN ENCOUNTERS – King of Birds

(Part 1) By Jay Jeffrey

“This magnificent eagle has long been named the King of Birds, and it well deserves the title. It is majestic in flight, regal in appearance, dignified in manner, and crowned with a shower of golden hackles about its royal head.” -- Arthur Cleveland Bent, 1937.



Golden Eagle, *Aquila chrysaetos chrysaetos*, adult photographed in Spain by Miguel Rouco (Cornell Lab, Macaulay Library, ML210931331).

Late 1980's, winter, Dr. Zimmerman gave me directions to where he'd been seeing an adult Golden Eagle at Konza Prairie (the Biological Station, I had a research access permit at the time). Golden Eagles, *Aquila chrysaetos*, are one of the most iconic animals in the world. In the Flint Hills, they are an uncommon winter transient, and when correctly identified are almost as rarely seen as bullfrog teeth. They've been an emblematic symbol of power and statehood since at least the Roman Empire. Today, they claim a place as the symbol of Germany, Austria, Mexico, Kazakhstan, and Albania. They're the most widely distributed eagle species in the world, found across the Northern Hemisphere.

An adult Golden Eagle, seen at the nascent end of my erupting birding passion, and during my early and exciting evolution as a biologist in a big unexplored natural world. This would be a grand and remarkable “lifer!” The day was somewhat dreary, overcast, but not too windy. I hiked close to the area Big Z described, then slowly stalked toward the prime area while scanning the surroundings incessantly. Things seemed very drab, silent, dead. Then, WOW, there it was! I'd found it, not flying, not moving, but perched on a large limestone slab on a grassland hillside; looking over its back directly at me. Body dark and richly brown, BIG, and the telltale golden head and nape. I was jittery, slightly shaking – what joy and exhilaration, what an encounter, an encounter with my first Golden Eagle! A “lifer!”

Several decades have passed, triple-digit observations of other Golden Eagles across the nation; all outstanding and life-enriching, and eye-opening...for better or worse. Mostly life-enriching. Professional and non-professional bird counts. Decades. Fortunate. Crystal-clear memories of weather and unbelievable observations of Golden Eagles in the early 1990's, some in Idaho but mostly in Wyoming, a few migratory incidentals in Kansas, more Wyoming observations in late 1990's, then into Y2K with countless observations in the western United States including the Pacific Northwest while conducting point counts, aerial big game surveys, specific nest searches and monitoring via helicopters, and non-professional life-highlight encounters while biking, paddling, and traveling in the backcountry. All-in-all, priceless stuff. All with Golden Eagles as a focal species or being unexpectedly surprised by them during all kinds of other marvelous outdoor pursuits!

Golden Eagle. The genus name, *Aquila*, is Latin for “eagle.” The species name, *chrysaetos*, is derived from Greek *chrysos* for “golden” and *aetos* for “eagle.” The bird was called *chrysaetos* by Aelian, a Roman who wrote in Greek in the third century A.D. Aelian is known for a 17-book series largely written in the form of anecdotes and folklore, called “On the Nature of Animals.” He was an admirer and student of the writings by greats such as Aristotle, Plato, Isocrates, Homer, et al. He spoke and wrote Greek fluently, his nickname translated to “Honey-tongued.” Golden-tongued might serve just as well.

Golden Eagles are within a broader group of different species known as the “booted eagles” because of their thickly feathered legs, resembling cowboy chaps or baggy pants; providing multipurpose armor, camouflage, insulated pants, with other truths and hypotheticals quite plausible as well. Up to 20 species of *Aquila* Eagles have been classified, but recent genetic analyses will likely spur more taxonomic rearrangements; several species were classified based upon only having similar superficial characteristics, possibly more dependent upon convergent evolution rather than blueprint genetic inheritance.

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GOLDEN ENCOUNTERS – King of Birds

Continued from page 3

Genetic analyses show Golden Eagles closely related to 6 other *Aquila* species, with the entirety termed the golden eagle clade. Of particular note are three of those other species: **Verreaux's Eagles** (Africa), **Wedge-tailed Eagles** (Australia), and **Gurney's Eagles** (New Guinea and Wallacea; yes, the latter an Indonesian Island region named after the Alfred Russel Wallace). In body weight, Golden and Verreaux's Eagles are the two heaviest living *Aquila* species in the world, with the Wedge-tailed Eagle weighing only slightly less but having the widest verified wingspan of any eagle -- 9 foot 4 inches! However, average wingspans for Wedge-tailed Eagles are similar to Golden and Verreaux's Eagles (7 to 8 feet). Also noteworthy, in captivity Golden Eagles have recorded 9 foot 3 inch wingspans! Clearly, all three species are quite large, and they're known to be extremely powerful and effective predators; often quite fierce predators. And evidently -- albeit ambiguous as often is the case with interpreting phylogenetic systematics -- part of a fabric comprised of an Indo-Pacific Australasian lineage with a schematic called the golden eagle clade. Whew!

Our **North American Golden Eagle** (*Aquila chrysaetos canadensis*) is one of 6 Golden Eagle subspecies (of *Aquila chrysaetos*). The others: **European Golden Eagle** (the "nominate" subspecies, *Aquila chrysaetos chrysaetos*), **Iberian Golden Eagle** (*Aquila chrysaetos homeyeri*), **Asian Golden Eagle** (*Aquila chrysaetos daphanea*), **Japanese Golden Eagle** (*Aquila chrysaetos japonica*), and **Siberian Golden Eagle** (*Aquila chrysaetos kamtschatica*).

For millennia, certainly before Europeans landed in North America, Native Americans have had a sacred bond with Golden Eagles. Broadly speaking, they're essentially considered the embodiment of the Great Spirit. For that matter, indigenous peoples throughout the Northern Hemisphere have had a similar or other intimate relationship with this species. It's been suggested that Golden Eagle feathers have also been found to be sacred and/or ceremonial to Neanderthals...I'm keen to investigate that further.

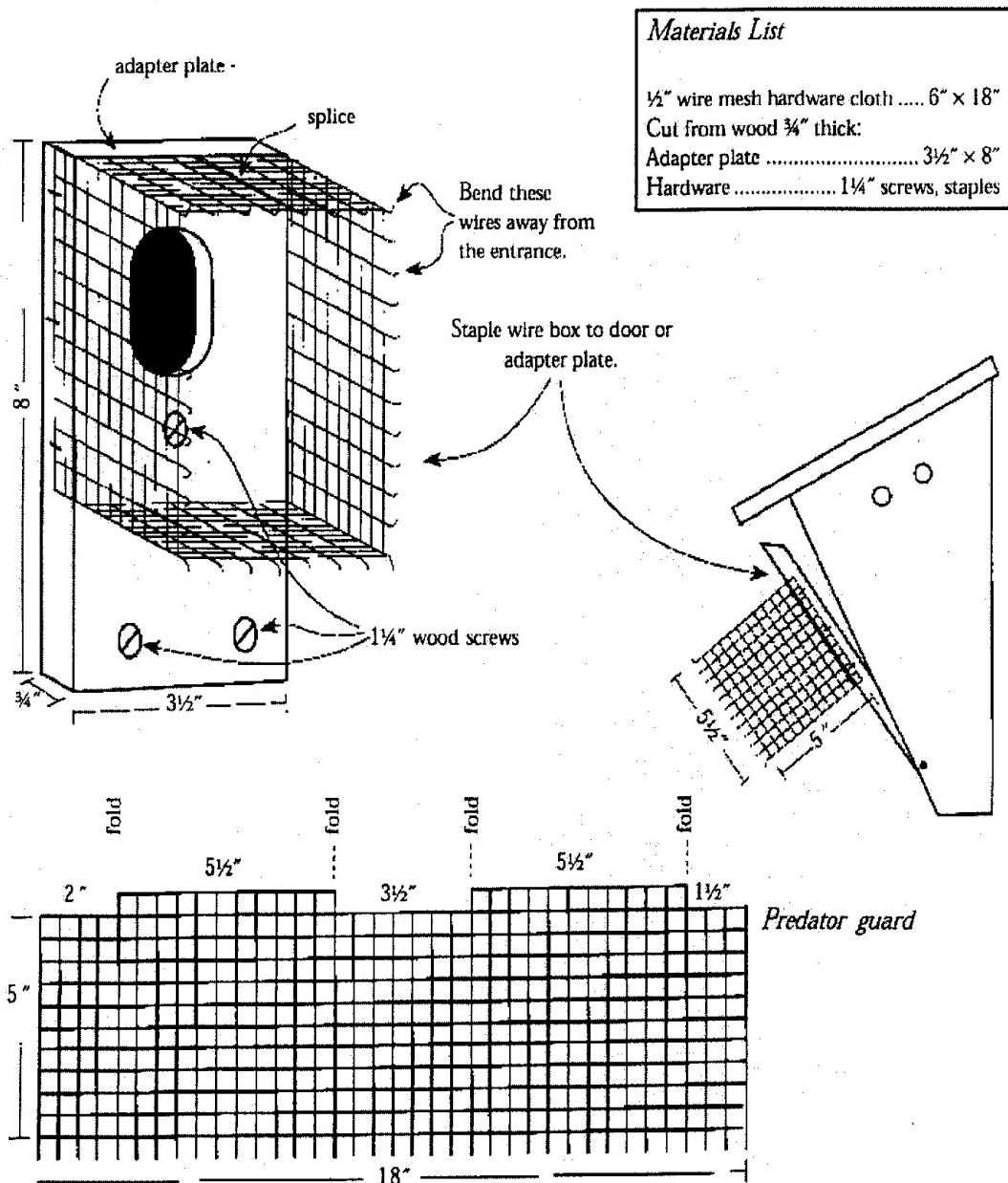
In the spirit of Aelian, this piece will be followed with Golden Eagle life history anecdotes, contemporary science, and ... possibly, folklore.

"When falconry flourished in Europe the golden eagle was flown only by kings. Its hunting is like that of the noble falcons, clean, spirited, and dashing." – Arthur Cleveland Bent, 1937.



Golden Eagle, *Aquila chrysaetos chrysaetos*, juvenile photographed in Sweden by Lars Pettersson (Cornell Lab, Macaulay Library, ML263214871).

Plan for Predator Guard for Birdhouse



The wire mesh guard may be attached directly to the box front by stapling along the edges of the door. (Edges may need to be planed to allow for the thickness of the wire.) To make the guard more versatile, staple the wire mesh to an adapter plate with an entrance hole that matches your nest boxes. The adapter can be screwed onto box fronts as needed. To further impede predators, you can string a piece of wire across the guard. Connect the wire to each side of the guard and position it across the entrance hole and about three inches away from the hole. Noel guards are most effective when installed after the first egg is laid.



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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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