



# John Zimmerman

In memoriam:

John Zimmerman, a mentor to many, with a passion for nature and incredible knowledge of birds has passed.

He taught ornithology classes at Kansas State, helped start the Education/docent programs on the Konza Prairie, led birding trips, and inspired many of us to "go birding" and not just identify or count them, but learn their songs, their behavior and their habitat.

John was the one you had to convince that the bird you saw on the Christmas Bird Count was indeed that bird, and how you came to that conclusion.

He led many of us on bird trips, and had a quick wit and the intelligence to match anyone! His conversations were always informative and lively.



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



## prairie falcon

Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

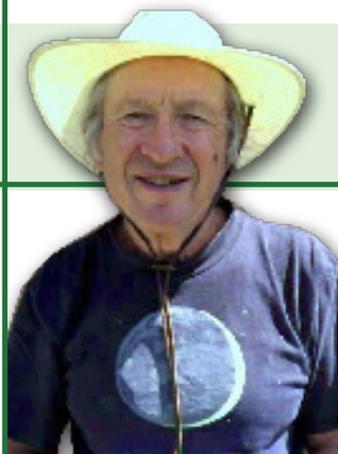
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### Upcoming Events

- Sat. morning Birding- none in winter  
Will begin in the Spring
- Mar 2 - TUESDAY Board Meeting- 6:00 pm,  
via Zoom. Contact a board member  
to attend.
- Mar. 24-26 Wings and Wetlands Festival  
See page 5
- Mar. 26- Bird Flight Patterns and Music  
See page 4



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Ahead may be judged another form of March Madness, while I prefer to call it whimsy. But first, seriously, before the sky loses its winter clarity let's take note of a constellation that generally doesn't get the notice it deserves, It's

one of the six Circumpolars, configurations that never get to set and rise but circle above our heads 24/7 throughout the year, invisible to us in daytime because the Sun outdoes them. Cassiopeia, she of the bright zig-zag, is a very prominent one, tending to be considered the Queen of the Sky; in myth the Queen of Ethiopia, and one quite overproud of her beauty. In fact, what we admire is her shining reclining-chair throne; the stars representing her body are hard to discern.

So what I'm referring to here is her nearby consort, King Cepheus, whose stars will reward a little directed focus, though they definitely don't stand forth. Actually, one of his variable stars played an important role in astronomy. In the early 1900s Henrietta Swan Leavitt, one of the corps of women working at Harvard and known as "computers", minutely studying sky photographs, recognized a relationship between a Cepheid star's 'luminosity' and its periodical changes. That led Edwin Hubble to discover that the universe is expanding. Additionally, Cepheus's star, Alderamin, is in line to be the next North Star, 5000 years hence.

Nonetheless Cepheus remains shyly dim. His triangle-on-top-of-a-square shape has been described as merely a house with a steep roof, and worse, as a dunce cap. So he is hesitant about attempting to expose himself to more attention, while I can imagine Cassiopeia, desirous of a more prominent mate, berating him for not shining boldly forth and claiming his importance. In a book I put out in 2019 I imagined their conversation as Shakespeare might have recorded it. I include here a condensation.

CASSIOPEIA (in Romeo and Juliet, Act II, Scene 2)  
O, Cepheus, Cepheus! Wherefore art thou Cepheus?  
Defy the stars that dimly frame thee.  
Oh, abide them not but be bold, oh King  
So you'll no longer be a "Where's it at?"  
Cepheus, spark thy stars for thy name,  
And for thy frame, the bright fame it deserves,  
And for thyself!

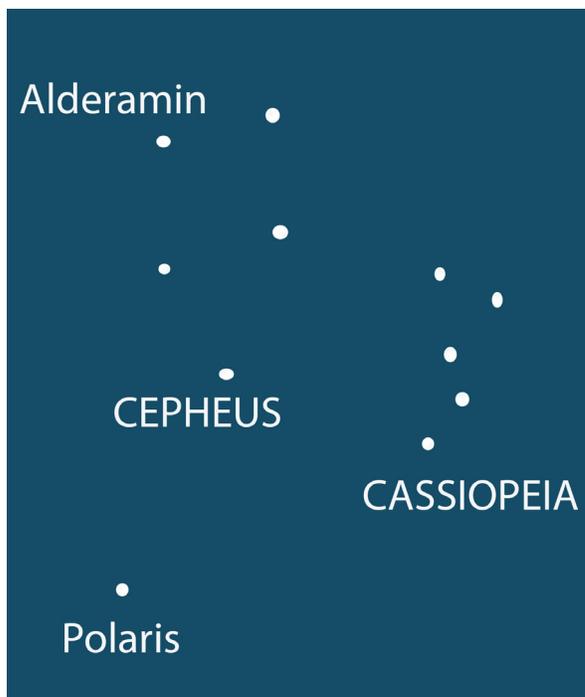
CEPHEUS (in Hamlet, Act III, Scene 1)  
To shine or not to shine; that is the question.  
Whether it is prudent in the sky to accept

The stars and placement by Earthly others assigned,  
Or to raise fires amidst a sea of sparkles,  
To flare; to burn; to ash. Ay there's the rub;  
That ashes after death  
Will undiscovered drift as frameless dust.  
No ashes am I yet (so I shall) gather the will  
To make all aware of the claims I have;  
that my worth be well attended.

However, he's yet to do it. And the Circumpolars are able to display just a varying part of their 360° daily circles each night as the seasons pass. They include also the Big and Little Bears, a Dragon winding between them, and a Giraffe reaching his long neck toward Cassiopeia. The King and Queen are shown here as they should appear above Polaris on March evenings.

Otherwise in the evenings this March the Moon will have two red companions the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. Mars will be above it with the star Aldebaran above and left the 18<sup>th</sup>, with Mars to lower right and Aldebaran to the lower left the 19<sup>th</sup>. Regulus the bright star at the bottom of Leo's backward question mark will be close to Moon the 25<sup>th</sup>, helping to signal the coming of spring.

Other actions take place as March begins with Mercury, Jupiter, and Saturn changing relative positions in the eastern dawn light. They first appear quite close to the horizon, and gradually each successive morning gain a little altitude. Mercury will move from above the Moon the 4<sup>th</sup> to lower left on the 6<sup>th</sup> with Saturn to their upper right. On the 9<sup>th</sup> Saturn will be above and left of the Moon, with Jupiter and Mercury to their lower left. On the 10<sup>th</sup> Jupiter has moved to the upper left of the Moon, above Mercury, with Saturn to the Moon's upper right. And the soundless band plays on.



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# Epigenetics and Unwinding

Dru Clarke



Sitting on the couch, getting warm after an hour of choring in 4 degree F, the new dog (a black lab male) snuggles close. I wonder about his lineage and imagine him as a tentatively approaching wolf deciding to do something similar around a campfire millennia ago. Dogs, of course, evolved

through our (unnatural) selection for traits we embrace as valuable: hunting prowess, guarding, herding, loyalty, companionship. Charley is what they refer to as a 'velcro' dog as he must attend his owners wherever they may go. (Even when they have to go.)

Our intrusion upon their ancestral wolfish nature has taken many forms, so we have all canine types from teacup pups to mastiffs, each with its own desired traits. Our guided evolution of the dog (and the chicken) involves epigenetics, or the modification of the expression of certain genes by messenger RNA serving as a bridge between a gene's machinery that turns it on or off. \*

I first heard of the field of epigenetics when I read a piece in Natural History Magazine about the effects of the Dutch Famine of 1944 during WWII: Audrey Hepburn was a survivor of that famine, (she ate tulip bulbs pounded into flour) and one could see in her diminutive stature and slender limbs the effects of malnutrition. The famine left its 'mark' on her and her development, as it did on many other survivors. But that 'mark' continued on through subsequent generations as it became encoded, attached to genes, and replicated through cell division. Generations distantly removed still express the morbid effects of that famine, ranging from infertility to immune deficiencies as well as stunted growth.

Today, studies have revealed that air pollution can create such changes in gene expression (e.g. H3K9 acetylation changes) and many more environmental factors are being studied for their long-term effects. Suspect, too, are organic chemicals – e.g. Roundup – that may be responsible for the wide spectrum of cancers afflicting humans (and other species) today.

The domestic chicken is another prime example of human manipulation of the wild genetic code of the jungle fowl, a bird native to Southeast Asia. (I think they may have been introduced to the Hawaiian Islands unchanged as we heard them from our cottage on Kauai crowing unabashedly at 3 a.m.). Certain genes for abundant egg laying, breast meat production, plumage variety and color have been selected for and led to the many breeds familiar

today. Our Araucanas lay lovely blue-green eggs, perfect for Easter egg hunts. Occasionally, we find a pink one!

In Novosibirsk, Russia, the silver fox, through an experiment going on since 1959, has been manipulated into a domesticated type, with a tame, cuddly disposition, floppier ears, a shorter dog-like muzzle, a reluctance to bite, and an appealing mottled or black and white coat. They wag their tails and whine when their keepers leave. Their adrenal glands have shrunk and the level of glucocorticosteroid (stress hormone) is lowered. Researchers call these traits 'the domestication syndrome' (and recent investigation has shown it to be linked to a certain chromosomal site). Many of these changes occurred within six generations, or six years, as their reproductive cycle has lengthened in comparison with other wild canines. There is some thought that other species could be 'tamed', but to what purpose? Might we regret toying with wild species, making them and their offspring unable to survive in their natural environment? And those which we have 'tamed': would they end up as boutique pets to be discarded when they no longer appeal or when a new, trendy beast arrives on the scene? Mini-rhinos? Miniature giraffes? Teacup tigers?

We are all too familiar with the deleterious effects of breeding domesticated animals 'in line': cattle like Angus who developed too short legs, or halter horses with HYPP that have lost the ability to relax a muscle after contraction. Do we know what lies ahead for lookalike pigs, eminently marketable now, but lacking in the flavor of our forebears' pork? One cannot distinguish Petunia from Petey in looks or taste. That might be alright if you don't remember how delicious pork chops used to be.

All the wolf has not disappeared from our new dog: he bites in exuberant greeting and 'plays' too aggressively with our old dog, chases but never catches the calves and wild birds, eliciting shouted commands to 'stop!' and rude, alternate names for his behavior. But when he curls up next to me and gives me that 'Lady Di' look, I'm pleased that unnatural selection worked some magic on his kin and that we have a companion animal to look forward to coming home to.

\* Coding RNA is used to make proteins; non-coding RNA helps control gene expression by attaching to coding RNA along with certain proteins to break down coding RNA so it can't make proteins. Other causes affecting gene expression are DNA methylation and histone modification. For an explication of these, go online.

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## Your Self-Guided Day Trip

In light of the fact that we are not gathering for Saturday morning bird watching for a while due to Covid-19 related interruptions, we decided to offer readers directions to birding destinations in the area. Generally there is a place to get out and walk at the destination but many can be valuable road auto tours on their own should you want to slow down and enjoy the scenery and the birds therein. A gravel road worthy vehicle is advisable.

### Our first is to the **Mount Mitchell Heritage Prairie Park**

Leave Manhattan on Hwy 24 E to Wamego. It is fun to start counting hawks from the start of your journey. You might be surprised how many you have tallied upon your return. They are especially visible in the winter.

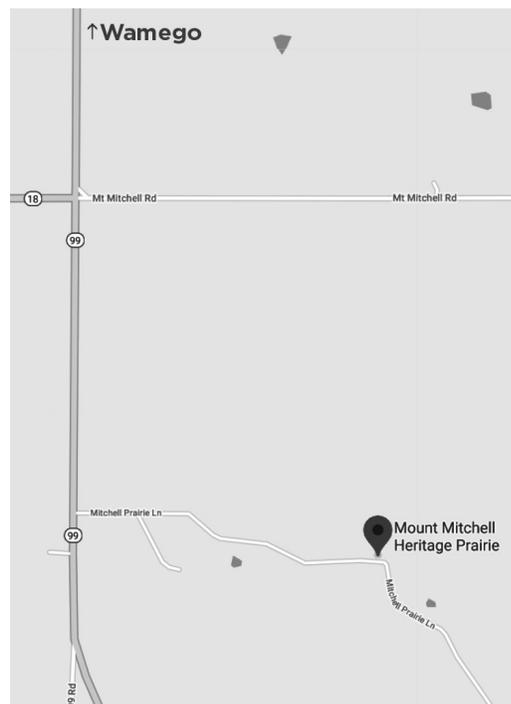
Mount Mitchell Heritage Prairie Park: When you arrive at the intersection of Hwy 24 and Hwy 99 turn south (right) .After you drive through downtown Wamego continue straight. You will want to slow down after you PASS the Beecher Bible Church turn (Hwy 18). Continue south on Hwy 99. DO NOT TURN on Mount Mitchell Rd. but instead just past it is **Mitchell Prairie Ln**. It will feel as though you are turning into someone's private drive but keep the faith and keep left and in a half mile you will find a parking lot, an information kiosk, a free will donation box, hiking trails and birds.

One trailhead starts at the parking lot. It has an initial steep climb (the steepest climb for this park) and leads to a picnic table at the top of the hill where you can stop and catch your breath, or maybe have a picnic. Trails continue from the picnic table.

An alternate trailhead is back (west) along Mitchell Prairie Lane just before you get to the parking lot that allows one to avoid that initial steep climb. There is a small trail access sign on the north side of the road (look hard, it's easy to miss). The hiking trails are all connected and it is possible to walk several miles. Please stay on the trails.

This area is being expanded and improvements are ongoing so there might be more trails. Habitat is mostly ungrazed/unhayed tall grass prairie. There are also a couple of monuments along the trails so you can combine a little history with your birding. If you want to stop for food or snacks there are several good restaurants in Wamego, most of which are located a couple of block from each other in the downtown area. There are also three fast food type restaurants located near the intersection of Hwy 24 and Hwy 99. Grab some food or snacks and eat in the City Park located one block east of the downtown area (across the street from the Friendship House, one of the downtown restaurants) or take it with you to Mount Mitchell Heritage Park, but please remember to take your trash with you when you leave.

Stay tuned for more self-guided birding trips in future newsletters.



### 2021 Virtual Wings & Wetlands Festival. March 24-26

The 2021 Wings and Wetlands Festival features renowned experts. These experts will walk you through topics of bird watching, identification techniques, Kansas wetlands, and conservation.

**Keynote Speakers** include Kansas Wetlands: "Crossroads of the Bird World" with **Kenn Kaufman**, "Today's Office" with **Sharon Stiteler** AKA The Bird Chick, and a presentation by **Alvaro Jaramillo**

**Other Presentations** include "Be a Better Birder: Techniques and Tricks for the Beginning Birder" with **Chuck Otte**, "Shorebird ID" with **Gene Young**, "Kansas Raptor Program" with **Pat Silovsky**, "Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area" with **Jason Wagner**, "Quivira National Wildlife Refuge Overview" with **Mike Oldham**, "The Diversity of Birds on Kansas Wetlands" with **Bob Gress**, and "Smartphone Birding" with **Sharon Stiteler** AKA The Bird Chick.

For more information and to register, visit our website. <https://www.wingsandwetlands.com/> Proceeds from the \$20 registration fee will benefit Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge.



### Join Us (Virtually) For The 2021 Wings & Wetlands Festival

# Crossword Puzzle #7

Patricia Yeager

## ACROSS:

1. Bachelor of Fine Arts
4. This bird is a mimic. \_\_\_bird
6. Stop
10. A Kansas wetland with salt marsh habitat
12. Sandwich of beef, pepper, onion and cheese
14. Lead character in The Lord of the Rings
15. One of the Vireo species has this eye color
16. Settlers gold find
18. A fossil fuel
21. Deer antlers shed this
24. Nickname for an unidentifiable sparrow
25. Relativity equation
26. A semi aquatic salamander
27. Arkansas
29. Informal no
31. Another vireo species named for its eye color
35. An honest man
36. Into the vein
37. Recently deceased
39. Louisiana
41. Eleven
42. Duck named for the color of its head
45. Federal work program during the Great Depression
46. Shorthand for Turkey Vulture
47. First name of actor who played #14 across
48. Canadian maritime province
50. Small dog breed
51. Place of cultivated grapes
53. News and gossip source
55. That is
56. A large beak
58. South
59. Cause mischief
61. Largest of Yellowlegs, Scaup, White-fronted goose
62. Temporary pond in a dry region

## DOWN

1. Smallest duck in Kansas
2. Evergreen tree
3. Shorebird with turned up bill and blue legs
4. Slang for crocodile
5. Alcoholic's helper

6. Shorebird with down turned bill and blue legs and striped head
7. Successful song
8. Margarine was originally commonly called \_\_\_\_.
9. Alabama
11. Idaho
12. One of the vireo species
13. November
15. Washington state
17. Animal's hiding place
19. Innings Pitched
20. Fib
22. Help
23. Love bug
28. Shorebirds are found in \_\_\_lands
29. Natrium (Latin sodium)
30. Double or two
32. Earthbound, early bird, Eddie Bauer
33. Tibetan ox
34. Sharp-shinned hawks display this when flying through trees
38. Continental drainage
40. Nickname for small shorebird
42. Sanctuary
43. Pickle ingredient added for crispness
44. To think about
45. Warbling vireo (code)
48. Pennsylvania
49. Long legged amphibian
52. Yellow-headed blackbird (code)
54. Female deer
57. Senior
59. All purpose
60. Each

Crossword Puzzle #7





## GREAT HORNED OWL

In his book  
“The Singular Beauty of  
Birds”

the wildlife painter,  
Louis Agassiz Leach,  
captures the ferocity of  
the Great Horned Owl.

“It is the earliest nester in Kansas, courtship beginning in December, laying eggs January -March. It has a wingspan of up to 5 feet and is one of the most powerful of the predatory birds in Kansas, capable of taking prey as large as foxes and adult turkeys. One of its most common prey species is the striped skunk.”

(Information credit: “Birds of Kansas” by Max Thompson, Charles Ely, Bob Gress, Chuck Otte, Sebastian Patti, David Seibel and Eugene Young} A great reference book! A must have reference book.



Crossword Puzzle #6 Answers

1	E	2	G	3	G	4	P	5	P	6	R	7	M	8	A	9	R	10	I	E	S
11	S	12	O	13	O	14	T	15	Y	16	I	17	N	18	A	19	M	20	A	21	V
22	N	23	O	24	H	25	A	26	N	27	A	28	A	29	N	30	W	31	Y	32	O
33	W	34	I	35	E	36	M	37	T	38	G	39	O	40	E	41	D	42	I	43	C
44	E	45	D	46	I	47	C	48	T	49	S	50	I	51	B	52	L	53	I	54	N
55	B	56	E	57	A	58	K	59	L	60	L	61	I	62	L	63	I	64	E	65	S
66	B	67	A	68	B	69	O	70	S	71	S	72	E	73	R	74	A	75	I	76	L
77	E	78	L	79	F	80	I	81	N	82	K	83	I	84	N	85	G	86	L	87	E
88	D	89	L	90	D	91	I	92	E	93	T	94	S	95	T	C	N	96	97	98	99
100	G	101	O	102	L	103	D	104	E	105	N	106	G	107	R	108	A	109	110	111	112
113	A	114	R	115	I	116	E	117	S	118	S	119	A	120	W	121	H	122	123	124	125
126	B	127	A	128	L	129	Y	130	U	131	A	132	C	133	H	134	E	135	136	137	138
139	T	140	S	141	T	142	F	143	R	144	T	145	H	146	147	148	149	150	151	152	153
154	W	155	L	156	L	157	S	158	W	159	I	160	D	161	W	162	E	163	164	165	166
167	S	168	A	169	M	170	A	171	L	172	A	173	R	174	175	176	177	178	179	180	181



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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](http://nfhas.org)

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Also available online at [nfhas.org](http://nfhas.org)

**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](mailto:join@audubon.org). Website is [www.audubon.org](http://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 <[list\\_serve@ksu.edu](mailto:list_serve@ksu.edu)> and join in the

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