

Lethal Beauty - Prelude Jay Jeffrey



INSIDE



Gone
Dru Clarke

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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Inside

- pg. 2 Skylight
Pete Cohen
- pg. 3 Gone
Dru Clarke
- pg. 4 50th Celebration
- pg. 5 Lethal Beauty - Prelude
Jay Jeffrey
- pg. 6 Burning Questions
- pg. 7 My favorite Bird butt photos

Upcoming Events

Jan. 4 - Board Meeting - 5:30 pm Manhattan Public Library

Get out and enjoy our winter birds! My Favorites:

Northern Harrier

Harris sparrow

Yellow-bellied sapsucker



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Let's celebrate the season of more shadows, during which January plays a large part. The Sun appears relatively low in the sky so its darkenings become long. And the

view one has, whether of an artifice or for real, depends a great deal on contrasts between darker and lighter. Lacking shadows, things trend toward appearing two-dimensional. In an extreme, or perhaps dazed, condition, railroad tracks seen narrowing to a vanishing point could become a cross-hatched triangle on a flat vertical surface. In such a case there would be no rational point in trying to step forward; one could only move sideways, or dare to step backward—onto what? Happily, I think such an extreme is rarely encountered, and to befuddle someone it would have to overcome our foreknowledge that things diminish in size with distance.

Shadows can provide not only visual experience, but can be felt by a cooling, however incremental, the sensitivity depending on what species of creature is involved.

But it was visually that shadows enabled the innovation of the art form we call the 'silhouette' which began sometime late in the 1600s and had a reign of popularity for a couple centuries. A bright light could project blank though recognizable images upon various surfaces that could be cut to form, quite inexpensively compared to the price of a talented portrait in pre-photograph days. And because they were the cheap version of what was really wanted, they begot their sobriquet in reference to Étienne Silhouette (1709-67), a French minister of finance whose policies of high taxes and miserly services made him so famously disliked that his tenure lasted scarcely half a year, while his name continues to survive. And, of course, one's own shadow can possibly still tell one something about one's self obtainable from no other source.

There are two lines in 1884's "Love's Old Sweet Song" (by C. Clifton Bingham and James Lyman Malloy) that go: 'Just a song at twilight when the lights are low/ and the flickering shadows softly come and go', that reflect how the common human-produced lighting in pre-Edison days was mixed with shadows, and it seems life in general must have had a different 'feel', absent the fixed glare of so much modern illumination.

From 1937 to 1954 a popular radio program, titled "The Shadow", featured an unofficial detective known as The Shadow, whose activities were introduced by

a rat-voiced announcer saying, 'Who knows what evil lurks in the minds of men? The Shadow knows. Snicker, snicker'. Not an uplifting half hour but indicative of the negative connotations that shadows can carry. There's usually something apparently amiss about anything called 'shadowy'. Yet what relief they can bring against too much brightness or heat. It seems to me they play a very active yet rarely recognized role in our daily experience.

For our (clear) nightly experiences just ahead the constellations of our era will be back in their January positions. The Milky Way will be oriented across the northern sky during mid evening as the four small stars of Pegasus' big square will be going down, forming a diamond shape as they did when rising to announce the autumn. Andromeda's two slender arcs of stars will be trailing back from the NW-most star of the Square.

While with much more brilliance, the six members of "the Winter Clock" will occupy a major part of the sky. Canis Major (The Big Dog), with Sirius the brightest of stars, will be shortly above the southern horizon in the 6 o'clock position, standing on hind feet and reaching northwestward toward Orion the Hunter striding along higher up between 3 o'clock and 4, wearing his famous three-star belt. Aldebaran the red eye of Taurus the Bull will be still further north at 2 o'clock (the Pleiades will be a little further westward). Auriga the Charioteer, will have Capells, the northern sky's third brightest, just to the left of the 12 o'clock top of the Clock. Left wise down eastward the Gemini Twins will shine with Castor above Pollux at the 9:15 spot. And completing the circle at about the 8 o'clock position will be the two-star constellation, Canis Minor (The Little Dog), Procyon the dominating star.

Four planets will start the year right off, showing (though rather lowly) in the first evenings. Venus will be the brightest below Jupiter's strong yet lesser brightness, while between them Mercury will start below Saturn. The Moon joins them the 4th and 5th, after which Venus disappears (to return at mid-month as a low morning star) and Mercury rises above Saturn the 10th-14th, getting about an extended fist and a half above the horizon. Mars will be the Moon's companion during the year's first dawn, then again on the 29th. The

Quadrantid meteor shower 2022, due the 4th, may be much or little, whatever bursts originating just off the end of the Big Dipper's handle. The Moon will be new the 2nd at 12p33, and full the 17th at 5p48.

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Gone

Dru Clarke



"Don't it always seem to go
That you don't know what you've got till it's gone..."
Joni Mitchell, "Big Yellow Taxi"

The 50th anniversary of the founding of the Northern Flint Hills Society chapter brought together a host of folks who through those years had a significant impact on saving what mattered. Increasing access to aspects of our natural world, spurring citizen interest and action, raising awareness of what was imperiled and working to protect it have accompanied each person's love of birds, perhaps their original motivation for joining the chapter and the national organization.

My original membership in National Audubon Society was purchased by two women who recognized my love of nature. They lived together in a small cottage tucked into a grove of trees near Rosemont, New Jersey. Ethel, known as E.J., was a repentant convicted murderer – she killed her bus driver in a fit of anger when she was a volatile teenager – and earned her freedom from Clinton Correctional Facility for Women after becoming a trusty and subsequent employee of my mother's boss, a board member of the Department of Corrections. Her partner, Lillian, was a social worker with the Bureau of Children's Services, where I worked at the time, and together, they made a jarringly distinct but loyal couple. That was in the 1960's, before I emigrated to Kansas. Gifts from unlikely sources are the most memorable.

Perry Conway, the first president of NFHAS, revealed, in his 50th anniversary speech given at Lake Elbo Community Center, the many influences that led to his professional life working with birds, especially raptors like the golden eagle and an assortment of falcons, buteos, and owls. John Zimmerman (birds), Duane Kerr (photography), Ron Klataske (the prairie) and others provided the links for the chain of events that became his life's calling. He, with Gary Ward, science teachers at Manhattan High School, saw the promise of an outdoor environmental lab and, with the blessings of the city, established Project WOLF (Wildcat Outdoor Lab Facility) that encompassed grassland, deciduous forest and a riparian area next to Wildcat Creek. How many of us can point to someone or some place that grounded our affection for the natural world? Perhaps every one of us who reads this.

Patricia Yeager shared a story with me that I am humbled by. Her room mate in college started her bird watching and revealed to Pat that it was in a class she took with me that got her hooked on birds. I had no idea that had sparked that passion. Pat, now an avid birder, is also a fierce protector of places – the Alsop patch in the middle of a busy city; the Cecil Best trail; the Michel-Ross Preserve; the Butterfly Garden – she's singlemindedly kept the ties bound to these places so they have not been lost.

And others: Sil Pembleton's (alongside Jan Garton, gone too soon) work to save Cheyenne Bottoms; Kent Foerster's enduring activism; Cindy Jeffrey's tireless editing of the Prairie Falcon (among her other commitments to the chapter), so many who have contributed without need for recognition or overt praise. Kevin, Jacqui, Jim, Susan, Michael, stalwart supporters who come to mind.

We've lost some places and some people. Project WOLF grassland is now a parking lot (They paved paradise, put up a parking lot) and the woodland is fenced off. Students get their 'immersion in nature' virtually. (For over twenty years, I, who filled Perry's position when he left, did stream studies and ran transects in WOLF, introducing kids who normally would not step out of doors to the natural world just outside that door. My colleague tried to protect WOLF after I retired, to no avail. A school administrator who had no interest in it told officials that when Dru retired they could do what they wanted with it. And they did.) Soon, Eagle Island, at the confluence of the Blue and the Kansas River, will be up for auction by the Vanier family. Years ago, a young man wanted to homestead the island, but we fought that as overwintering bald eagles used the trees as roosting places. I remember Monty Hinten's bold pen and ink sketch of an eagle's head on our brochure encouraging people to join us in our fight. (The island flooded completely in the '93 deluge.) People, too, gave significant portions of their lives to the chapter. Three I knew well were Leanne Harrell, Jan Garton, and Clyde Ferguson. Others who had lasting influence were Cecil Best and beloved Chris Smith.

Life goes on but all changes are not what we'd consider 'progress.' Do we really need more impervious surfaces? Another parking lot? Probably not, but we do need people like those who keep the chapter alive. We won't know what we've got until it's gone.

Dru Clarke, Dec. 14, 2021



The 50th Anniversary of NFHAS - full of stories

Perry Conway talks about the "Project Wolf"
- see Dru's article.



"Save the Bottoms" seat cushion - brought by Sil Pembleton



Lowell Johnson and Carla Bishop study "Dave's Bird Butt Quiz"



Kent Foerster's typewriter, used to type the first Prairie Falcon



Lethal Beauty - Prelude

Jay Jeffrey



As we drove down the gravel road heading toward a remote rocky ridgeline of the Flathead Indian Reservation, Montana, an American Kestrel flushed off a telephone pole loudly calling its “klee klee klee, klee klee klee!” The reservation’s Native American biologist who was driving, simply said “Little Man.” I looked at him and asked, “Little Man?” He gave a slight smile and said, “That’s what we sometimes call kestrels, because they’re always yelling and complaining; upset about something.” I smiled too, that was a clever name-association for the piercing attention-getting calls of this small raptor.

But I thought calling an American Kestrel, “Little Man,” was a tad inappropriate if not somewhat belittling of such a death-dealing falcon with dazzling good-looks. Described at times to be noisy and a bit brash, maybe, but their beauty, agility and aerobatics in flight, entertaining vocalizations, and an extravagant hunting skillset to sate a diverse palate, make this one of the most recognized and admired falcons of the world. That said, I knew my companion adeptly labeled the diminutive falcon with a name intended to be playful and befitting of storytelling -- a practice often used in Native American cultures -- and more impactful in many cases for describing facets of our amazing natural world. And at that moment, riding along in the truck, I was incredibly privileged to be on tribal land savoring a private tour in some of our nation’s most gorgeous backcountry -- so, the moniker Little Man, it was.

Although I’d never previously heard kestrels called Little Man, I knew up until the early 1980’s they were called Sparrow Hawks; and formally as Eastern Sparrow Hawk before the American Ornithological Union (AOU) officially changed and standardized the common name to American Kestrel (in 1983) -- based upon appearance and behavior matching true kestrels typical of Europe and Africa. In the early 1800’s, John James Audubon created the folio, *Birds of America*, and his painting with American Kestrels was labeled American Sparrow Hawk (plate 142). The painting includes a male -- arguably the most colorful raptor in the world -- taking off from a butternut tree in pursuit of a flying insect; however, it’s the perched female with her sharp hooked beak, looking down at a dead sparrow firmly grasped in her talons, that immediately grabs the viewer’s attention. Kestrels do eat sparrows, but that’s not why they were initially called Sparrow Hawks.

As a raptor, the kestrel is by default a predatory bird with a daily livelihood involving prey acquisition via “seizing or taking by force” -- the literal meaning of the Latin word, *rapere*. The kestrel’s scientific name, *Falco sparverius*, is Latin and identifies the bird as a falcon with sickle-shaped curved beak, talons, and wings; and, having a species name meaning “pertaining to sparrow.” But still, this is not why kestrels were formerly called Sparrow Hawks.

Kestrels were called Sparrow Hawks because early American pioneers, and possibly the settlers on their heels, mistook the American Kestrel for accipiters of the Old World, likely the widespread Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*), which uncannily resembles our accipiters the Sharp-shinned Hawk and Cooper’s Hawk; of note, there are upwards of 20 different accipiter species around the world with Sparrowhawk as part of their common name (e.g., Chestnut-flanked Sparrowhawk, Spot-tailed Sparrowhawk, Red-thighed Sparrowhawk, etc.).

Interestingly, Common Kestrels (*Falco tinnunculus*) are extremely widespread throughout the Old World -- notably the only kestrel throughout the United Kingdom -- and very closely resembling our female American Kestrels. Many Americans, both in recent past and today, call all small hawks and falcons “Sparrow Hawks,” and it’s plausible that many early pioneers and settlers called all their Old

World hawks and falcons “Sparrow Hawks” as well. There are about a dozen “true” kestrel species throughout the Old World and Australia

(principally in Europe and Africa). The American Kestrel is the sole New World representative (our smallest, most common and widespread North American falcon; extending from Alaska and B.C., south throughout the U.S., and continuing farther through Central America to the very southern tip of South America).

In simple terms, true kestrels are small falcons that characteristically exhibit hunting behavior in the manner of hovering above the ground in a stationary spot aided by wind or active flapping of wings. Most kestrels are similar in appearance -- sharing proportional shape and size of wings, tail, and head -- and molecular data provides evidence they also have a phylogenetic clade that’s distinct from other falcon groups. Yet, our New World representative appears to be struggling with acceptance: Past molecular analysis hasn’t supported justifiable inclusion of American Kestrels into the distinct kestrel group of falcons, and recent DNA analysis suggests that American Kestrels are more genetically similar to our larger American falcons: Peregrine Falcon, Prairie Falcon, and Aplomado Falcon (all of which are distinctly different genetically from our largest North American falcon, the Gyrfalcon, which is one of four species of hierofalcons). Further elucidation as to who’s who in the falcon world seems to continue to gain speed with samples being analyzed from various populations around the world.

A colloquial name often used for American Kestrel is “Killy Hawk,” because of its similarly sounding call “killee-killee-killee” or “klee-klee-klee.” In general, kestrels have three primary vocalizations: the “killy” or “klee”, the whine, and the chitter. Another researcher adds two: “klee-chatter” and “whine-chitter.” Each vocalization is tied with life’s different circumstances: from frequent copulations to defending territories, feeding young or food transfers to mates, being pestered or attacked, pestering or attacking others, or maybe, Little Man just being upset and complaining. To summarize, calls can be simple and staccato, or a diverse mix of kleees, killies, chitters, chatters, and somewhere in there, also whines. No wonder some ornithologists have so much fun.

What are we to do with our unique pint-sized beauty? Over 75 years ago, Arthur Goodrich authored the book, *Birds in Kansas*, and provided an admirable account of the Eastern Sparrow Hawk (today’s American Kestrel). He included a colleague’s suggestion that Killy Hawk would be a more appropriate name for that species, emphasizing the association with the “killee-killee-killee” call notes. In the back of Goodrich’s book there is a list of colloquial names for each of the AOU’s common names; for Eastern Sparrow Hawk, Killy Hawk was listed as colloquial. And in that list, something else clasped my curiosity: Eastern Pigeon Hawk at that time was the accepted AOU common name for today’s Merlin, but what’s interesting is that American Kestrel was listed as a colloquial name for Eastern Pigeon Hawk -- in Goodrich’s 1945 book -- for our Merlin of today. I’m left perplexed, it would seem there may have been competition between two small falcons for being named the first and only New World kestrel; surely, Drs. Zimmerman and Smith would have provided the historical clarity and answers I seek.

To be continued...

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© Jay Jeffrey

PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING THE NFHAS BOARD

We celebrated the NFHAS's 50 years in existence. And now is the time to consider our future.

The Present:

Patricia has been President for over 10 years. Oversees our sanctuary properties, especially the Alsop Bird Sanctuary. (Thanks to all who have helped!)

Cindy has been Newsletter editor for over 20 years. Is AOK representative since Hoogy H. passed.

Jacque Staats has handled membership, Northeast Park, and now Butterfly Gardens.

Susan Blackford was caring for the Butterfly Garden and is still an "at-large" member of the board. And lends a hand when needed.

Kevin Fay and Patricia have managed the monthly birding and the bluebird trails for years and with help from a few others.

Clyde Ferguson and Jim Koelliker loyally did the annual Birdathon, and now Jim Koelliker carries on with it.

Birdseed sales have been hanging on due to Cindy (getting the prices and making the order forms) and Patricia hosting the pickup - with help from the Jacque Staats/Obest and Kevin Fay.

We have had several Treasurers in the past 20 years (Carla for a long time). And our last one, Patty Kline, is moving on.

We have not had a secretary since Donna Roper passed.

Many committees have also dwindled, with no one to head them.

BURNING QUESTIONS:

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR NFHAS?

Do you care? Can you help? Do you know someone who might be interested?

Do you have ideas that might bring in more younger members?

My Favorite Bird Butt photos
by Dave Rintoul



black-and-white warbler



prothonotary warbler



red-breasted nuthatch



song sparrow



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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

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