

**“Owls in Kansas!”
A talk by Chuck Otte
Feb. 16th, 7 p.m. Groesbeck Rm., Manhattan Public Library
(Dinner with Chuck at 5:30 p.m. at Old Chicago)**

Chuck Otte grew up on a family farm in York County, Nebraska. He attended and received two degrees from the University of Nebraska. B.S. in Agronomy (Crop Production) – 1979, M.S. in Agronomy (Plant Breeding and Genetics) – 1981. He has been employed by the Geary County Extension Office since February 1982.

Chuck has the sole programming responsibilities for agriculture, horticulture and natural resources for Geary County, Kansas. As County Director he also has responsibilities for budget preparation and financial oversight of day-to-day office expenditures.

He has been the Geary County Extension Agent for 28 years. He served as President of the National Association of County Agricultural Agents in 2007. He served as Chairman of the Junction City/Geary County Metropolitan Planning Commission for four years, serving on the commission for a total of nine years. Chuck is currently president for the Kansas Ornithological Society (KOS), served as the KOS newsletter editor for over twelve years, served as secretary of the Kansas Bird Records Committee for six years and has served as Chairman of the Kansas Nongame Wildlife Advisory Council, an advisory group to the Secretary of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

An avid birder and naturalist since early boyhood, Chuck spends considerable time in activities and with organizations that foster support, outreach, and knowledge of the natural world.

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. 7 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.
Tom & MJ Home

Feb. 12 - Sat. Morning Birding
Meet Sojourner Truth Park, 8 a.m.
(will visit good backyard birding)

Feb. 16 - Chuck Otte presents -
5:30 - Dinner at Old Chicago
7p.m.- Groesbeck Rm.
Manhattan Public Library

Mar. 7 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.

Mar. 12 - Sat. Morning Birding

Mar. 16 - “Warblers” by Paul Griffin



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

Anyone who read the last paragraphs of last month's column and looked up on a clear night might have noticed a disconnect between the words

and the sky. I'm a reporter in setting forth celestial events ahead and like a good reporter seek more than one source for every story. In this case my two sources agreed and the predictions were accurate--for January 2010. Those two sources are continuously published in the same formats, so while the pictures change the frames remain the same, and I should've looked at least one more time at the dates on the frames.

That discovery started me looking at the concept of "error." I expected to find a cat's cradle of philosophy, and in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*--I checked two different editions--there was no shortage of references whose relevance to given situations provide more food for thought than templates for action.

Then in two different encyclopediae and two different dictionaries, I found much more precise considerations. "Error" was disassembled into two legal meanings (of fact and of judgment), and three scientific components (external causes, observatory failure, and implement defects). And these distinctions have specific applications to the subject matters that come within their reach.

The baseball definition of "error" was also included, though not the remark attributed to John McGraw, the once famous manager of the New York Giants. He reportedly said "Errors are part of the ballgame." Presumably he included the umpires in that appraisal, and it seems to me a lot of sporting events would produce more really pleasurable entertainment if more people shared it.

In applying the term to astronomy our *Chamber's Encyclopedia* expresses McGraw's sentiment more broadly and in 19th century prose: "...no man, however equable his temperament, can always rely on

making proper use of his senses...it is the constant care of the observer to detect and make allowances for errors." It also says, "the best instruments have imperfections..." leaving one to wonder how many faults could be in an instrument that carries humans to the Moon and back. Thankfully, the Mars space craft that was fatally compromised by confusion between English and metric measurements carried no lives.

In any case, my apologies for providing an example of how the wisdom to check more than one source applies. So, getting back on track, Mars will be overhead in February but invisible in the Sun's glare. Venus, although gradually giving up some luster, will be noticeably aloft as the morning star. The Moon will take up its role as sky-host, providing introductions to various objects through the month. On the 6th and 7th it should be nearly arm-in-arm with Jupiter, and companionably (and fulsomely) accompany Leo's Regulus on the 17th-18th. On the 20th it will be having a skating party with Saturn, who will glide a little behind, with Virgo's Spica a little below and left of the planet. On the 21st, they'll perform in a vertical line with the Moon below and Saturn on top. Then the Moon will conduct a morning show with Venus on the 28th.

Meanwhile the bright winter constellations will be sailing brightly nightly across the sky. Orion with raised arms will be confronting the V-face and long horns of Taurus, who keeps backing away as the Big Dog, with Sirius a-gleam, does a slow leap to keep pace with the Hunter's heels. The long rectangle of Gemini and the pentagonal Auriga will drift along above them. Directly below Orion's feet, Lepus the Rabbit will be making its own leap and with a clear southern horizon the dome-like curve of Columba the Dove might be seen beneath. The grouping of stars below the Big Dog's feet, referred to as Puppis, represent the poop, or stern, deck of a sailing ship, that is, presumably, trying to get past Lepus and onto the river Eridanus, a sharp bend of which is faintly visible west of the Rabbit. They all will have a head start westward at dark, for Leo ahead of Virgo, the beast and beauty of spring, will be pressing them from the east. Moon is new the 2nd at 8p31. Full the 18th at 2a36.

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Winter Walk Dru Clarke



The air clips my nostrils like steel scissors, the sky, grey and uninviting, not even a bird winging through it, and I am walking, body hunched and leaning forward, with my big dog. I think of Rory Stewart (author of “The Places in Between”) walking across Afghanistan, from Herat to Kabul, along Babur the Conqueror’s route through the Hindu Kush Mountains, also accomplished during the winter. Our Flint Hills are more forgiving than Afghanistan’s slopes, yet here we both were, defying people’s warnings, walking with our dogs. Mine is an older black-mouth cur, adopted from a foster home where he was more than likely forsaken by a disgruntled outdoorsman when he wouldn’t bring game to bay; Rory’s is a mastiff-wolf cross, perhaps the oldest hybrid dog in the world, a gift from villagers to keep him safe from wolves. Neither dog is a fighter, so we are on our own recognizance.

The cedars in winter show off their bagworm ornaments, neatly spaced on gently bowed limbs, as if hung by a careful hand. A red-bellied woodpecker starts from the crown, rasps a feral chord, then lands in another of the windrow cedars. A scurry of tiny birds slide along the fence wire, blown like dry leaves along its slickness. Nothing else sings except the high wires from the communication towers on a high point in the county. Rory sees a magpie among silvery leaves on slim poplars, and orange and bright yellow branches of dogwood-like shrubs along the Hari Rud, the river running 1100 km from the mountains in Afghanistan to Turkmenistan, disappearing in the Kara-Kum Desert of Asia. It is frozen to 18 inches, thick enough for a conqueror’s army on horseback to cross safely. Our south creek, running under the gravel road, trickles like melted tin with a scalloped collar of ice rimming the banks pock-marked with raccoon paw prints. It is narrow enough to jump across. It flows to Hopkins Creek, which runs to Rock Creek, then to the Kansas, Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, and finally to the Gulf of Mexico.

I walk, steadied by a polished stick from a sycamore root, my footfalls striking iced gravel, chipped from pitted, discolored limestone, yellowing like old teeth, formed eons ago in a shallow sea. His walking

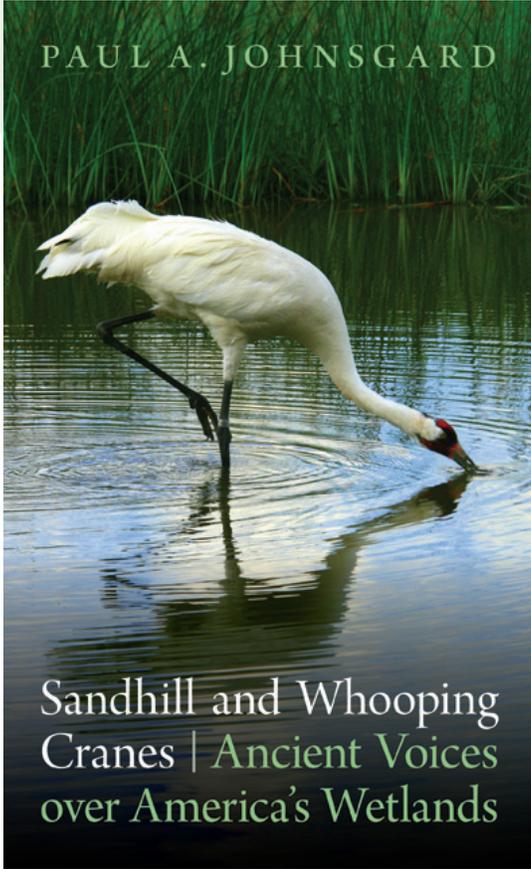
stick, called a “dang,” is a broom handle headed and heeled with a ball and sheath of iron forged by a resourceful villager. His path takes him across scree, loose rock frost-peeled from steep mountain slopes that are struck with color where the snow has slipped away: blue, clay, orange and yellow, green, betraying the rich mineral trove locked in rock.

He sees the spoor of leopard and wolf and domestic donkey, the chief form of transport in that land. I see deer tracks and horseshoe indentations from the equines being exercised from a nearby ranch, and big truck ruts. It is so quiet when I stop to pat the dog’s head, I am aware of each heartbeat, and maybe can hear them too. Rory, lying face up on a snowy plain, hears the quiet, too, above and beyond the snuffling of his dog. I pass the wildlife crossing where a week before three bobcat, one adult and two half-grown, their stubby tails erect, sauntered across at midday. A fence wire droops near a wet culvert: there the soil is churned up by the hooves of deer that have leaped over it. The markers on his road are painted red, indicating the presence of mines laid by the ousted Taliban. I find empty shotgun shells instead. Here we turn for home.

Descending a gentle grade, I see a sock of webworm threads, hanging empty and forlorn, spinning in the wind. From a distance it looks like a twirling squirrel, hanging by its foot from a twig, trying to decide where to leap. Rory encountered spinning snow and flapping prayer flags. My walk has been short, but satisfying: I have found a piece of chert that is banded and hard and smooth and fits well in my closed fist. His walk is a string of true *journees* (*journee* is “a day’s walk”) requiring endurance, fearlessness, and a sense of mission. I am simply glad to be arriving at the front gate and the lane that takes me home.

Dru Clarke
January 3, 2011

PAUL A. JOHNSGARD



Sandhill and Whooping
Cranes | Ancient Voices
over America's Wetlands

Paul Johnsgard's first book, **"Those of the Gray Wind: The Sandhill Cranes,"** was published in 1981.

Johnsgard, has just published his fourth crane book – his 52nd book. The new book, **"Sandhill and Whooping Cranes: Ancient Voices over America's Wetlands"** comes out in March.

In June, Johnsgard will turn 80. He plans to celebrate a little early - March 9-13th along the Platte River, near Kearney, NE – watching the crane migration.

An article about Johnsgard's new book (Lincoln Journal Star, Jan. 17, 2011) can be found at: http://www.journalstar.com/news/local/article_98093a86-8673-5f0b-b9ff-8885fbf9950c.html

An excellent article (and caricature) about Paul Johnsgard (Prairie Fire Newspaper) can be found at: <http://www.prairiefirenewspaper.com/2009/06/a-profile-of-dr-paul-a-johnsgard>

BIRD SEED SALE FUNDRAISER A SUCCESS

The Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society (NFHAS) thanks its members for their support during our annual birdseed sale fundraiser. Members helped raise over \$900 including an additional \$314 in donations. Here's the recap by the number: Members placed nearly 60 birdseed orders during three seed sales, held in October, November, and January. Seven volunteers dispensed over 170 bags of seed, totaling 4500 pounds, and 140 suet cakes. The most popular mixes, by far, were Black Oil Sunflower, Flint Hills Feast and Cheap Cheep, as well as Nutty Butter suet cakes. NFHAS continues to offer bird seed for free to 12 care homes from seven local communities. NFHAS recognizes Tarwater Farm and Home Supply for supplying the birdseed and the UFM for providing the seed sale location.

A big Thank You to NFHAS volunteers – Carla Bishop, Susan Blackford, Kevin Fay, Dick Oberst, Leo Schell, Jacque Staats, and Madonna Stallman.

Annie Baker, Coordinator

THANK YOU, Annie, for doing a great job as the Bird Seed Coordinator for 4 years! We appreciate all your work. Annie can no longer do this, so that means we need someone for the job. Preparation begins in August. Annie will be glad to give you all the information you need to be our next "Bird Seed Coordinator," and if you wish, co-coordinate with you through the first sale or two.

OWL facts

wikipedia

Owls can rotate their heads and necks as much as 270 degrees in either direction. Owls are farsighted and are unable to see anything clearly within a few centimeters of their eyes. Caught prey can be felt by owls with the use of filoplumes, which are small hair-like feathers on the beak and feet that act as “feelers.” Their far vision, particularly in low light, is exceptionally good.

Owl eggs usually have a white colour and almost spherical shape, and range in number from a few to a dozen, depending on species. Eggs are laid at intervals of 1 to 3 days and do not hatch at the same time. This accounts for the wide variation in the size of sibling nestlings. Owls do not construct nests, but rather look for a sheltered nesting site or an abandoned nest in trees, underground burrows, or in buildings, barns and caves.

Much of the owls’ hunting strategy depends on stealth and surprise. Owls have at least two adaptations that aid them in achieving stealth. First, the dull coloration of owls’ feathers can render them almost invisible under certain conditions. Secondly, serrated edges on the leading edge owls’ remiges muffle an owl’s wing beats, allowing its flight to be practically silent. Some fish-eating owls, for which silence is of no evolutionary advantage, lack this adaptation.

There are some 220 to 225 extant species of owls, subdivided into two families: typical owls (*Strigidae*) and barn-owls (*Tytonidae*)

The smallest owl is the Elf Owl (*Micrathene whitneyi*), at as little as 31 g (1.1 oz) and 13.5 cm (5.3 inches). Some of the pygmy owls are scarcely larger.

The largest owls are two of the eagle owls; the Eurasian Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*) and Blakiston’s Fish Owl (*Bubo blakistoni*)—which may reach a size of 60 – 71 cm (28.4 in) long, have a wingspan of almost 2 m (6.6 ft), and an average weight of nearly 4.5 kg (10 lb).

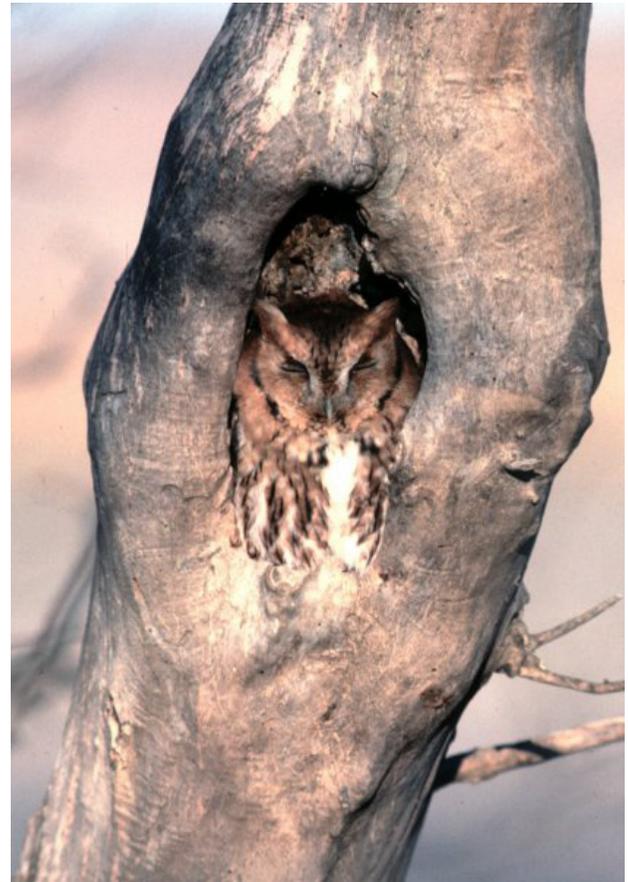


photo by Dave Rintoul

The literary collective noun for a group of owls is a parliament.

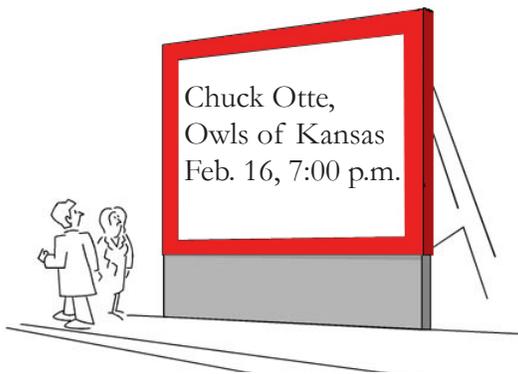


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Membership Information: Introductory memberships - \$20/yr., then basic, renewal membership is \$35/yr. When you join the National Audubon Society, you automatically become a member of the Northern Flint Hills Audubon Society. You will receive the bimonthly Audubon magazine in addition to the Prairie Falcon newsletter. New membership applications should be sent to National Audubon Society, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Make checks payable to the National Audubon Society. Membership renewals are also handled by the National Audubon Society. 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, 66502-1932

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> and join in the discussions.

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