

Facing the storm: a tale of extreme weather and a small grassland songbird

Dr. Koley Freeman is an avian biologist who has studied birds from the rainforests in the tropics to the tundra of the arctic. She received her PhD in 2020 from the University of Guelph in Ontario Canada where she studied how conditions during development impact young Canada Jays.

Currently, Koley is a postdoctoral researcher at Kansas State University studying **how weather affects Grasshopper Sparrow physiology, behavior, survival, and population dynamics.**



MARCH 13, 2:00 pm

Groesbeck Room

Manhattan Public Library Auditorium

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

- Mar. 1 -Board Meeting, 5:30 pm Manhattan Public Library
- Mar. 12 - Saturday morning birding 8am
meet at Sojourner Truth Park
- Mar. 13 - PROGRAM - 2:00 pm - Dr. Koley Freeman**
Manhattan Public Library -GROESBECK RM



Skylight plus

Pete Cohen



Late last December Margy Stewart and Ron Young were reviewing the videos taken on the solstice night by trail cameras they've placed about their Geary county land they manage as The Bird Runner Wildlife Refuge. In one video there appeared a bobcat feeding off the camera's deer carcass bait. An unusual bobcat in that it was adorned by a 5-foot-long pole attached by a loop around its neck. Clearly something needed to be done.

Evidently the cat had been freed from a trap by someone with a piece of regular trapper's equipment, and from whom she had gotten loose. Fortunately there are traps these days with plated jaws that don't damage the leg they clamp to, so with the use of her legs and the pole looped close along her body she had gained a freedom with some mobility. But her natural way of hunting had a serious hamper, and the attachment might still snag inextricably in some way.

The most practical response was more traps. Drew Ricketts, a mammalogist with KSU Extension offered to supply them, while warning that if they resembled the original trap she would avoid them. A neighbor, Al Aspach, volunteered to tend them. Thus began an active waiting game.

Fourteen days passed during which the weather turned wintry, and during which Al Aspach released a caught coyote. Interestingly the coyote didn't bolt away, but waited till Al was back in his pickup before leaving. The trap array remained cat-less.

Margy emailed Drew that hope for the beleaguered cat's survival now seemed futile and best retrieve the traps before other creatures were caught. Then she went for a walk through new snow and came upon fresh cat tracks accompanied by straight narrow furrow. Three days later the cat was seen by a camera along the creek. Drew then added a new carcass and a stronger lure that was too rare to have been used on the first half-hopeful sets. On January 13th she was caught.

How long she'd been burdened and how she'd also survived all through the 21 days since Margy and Ron sighted her is an unknown story. She was still in fit condition, but like the coyote she didn't leave when released. She waited till Drew and Al were back in their vehicle, then went streaking past them, ending a saga few people knew was occurring. Though now Drew has video reference to it on the Extension web site, and an illustrated account is available as a post at prairiecommunity.blogspot.com

Overhead at night this March the usual bright gleam of Jupiter will be missing while Venus steadfastly continues being the Morning Star. On the 2nd Mars will be a reddish-orange dot beneath Venus while Saturn and Mercury barely appear above a low, level horizon in the dawn light. Mercury then sinks while Saturn and Mars gradually appear higher, till on the 24th-26th there will be a morning triangle with Venus on top and Saturn at the left corner. On the 28th a crescent Moon will be below the three.

Thus the Moon and stars will have the evenings to themselves. On the 8th the Moon sidles between Taurus' red eye, Aldebaran and the Pleiades on his shoulder, then on the 9th to between the eye and El Nath, the tip of one long horn. On the 15th he's above Leo's Regulus at nightfall, and above Virgo's Spica the 19th. Scorpius' reddish Antares will be close below him the 23rd, before he joins the trio mentioned above on the 28th. The Moon will be absently new that 2nd at 11p35, full the 18th at 2a18.



Photos by Margy Stewart

Wine of Araby

Dru Clarke



My favorite task as a youngster was grinding the coffee beans for the morning's necessary brew. My mother had purchased an antique wooden grinder with a graceful and sturdy iron turning handle, two screws that adjusted the grind from coarse to fine, and a little drawer that caught the freshly ground beans. The fragrance was simply enchanting, and while I didn't drink the coffee at that age, I was completely captivated by the granules that had captured and subsequently released, due to my working arm, their aromatic magic.

The beans came in a sealed paper bag from our A and P grocery store and I had to carefully turn down and firmly secure the open top after pouring the just right amount of beans in the hopper of the grinder: it often took several fillings to generate the correct measurement for a fresh pot. My parents drank it black, as I did for years after I grew up. (Now, I augment it with cream, which some regard as a sacrilege.)

An alert goat herder, Kaldi, tending his herd on the Ethiopian plateau, recognized that his charges were especially active, even at night, after eating coffee beans. He took some to a local monastery where they brewed the first known beverage made from the beans. So the story goes. Some of the most expensive coffee today is from Yemen, on the Arabian Peninsula, where the cultivation and trade of coffee took off. (Another has the exotic name of Black Ivory.) In the 17th century it arrived in Europe (and in New Amsterdam, present day New York) and mid-century London hosted 300 coffee houses. Thomas Jefferson is to have said, "Coffee- the favored drink of the civilized world." The Dutch took seedlings to Java, Sumatra, and the Celebes; the French, from Louis XIV's Royal Botanical Gardens, to Martinique, from which all the coffee plants of today's Caribbean, Central and South America descend. (A disclaimer to this assertion excepts Brazil's famous coffee: supposedly, French Guiana's governor's wife was so taken with a handsome emissary that she secreted coffee seeds in a bouquet of flowers that he took to Brazil to begin their plantations.)

Coffee, I've learned, is an 80 billion dollar industry, ranking second to crude oil in the world economy.

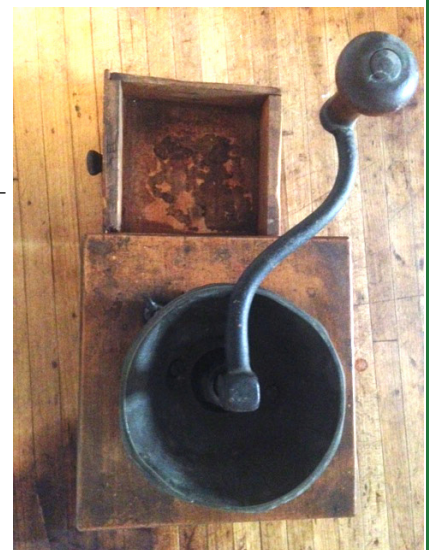
And, in many places throughout the world where it is grown, it is in danger of becoming extinct. How could that be? The reasons are manifold: climate change affecting large swathes of the geographic regions where coffee plants thrive; erosion on the high slopes where native vegetation – primarily large trees – grows; fungal diseases and insect damage for which the plants have no defense.

Some companies (Nespresso for one) are committing to sustainability and carbon sequestering through a growing trend of agroforestry practices. We recently filled out a U.S. Department of Agriculture survey regarding agroforestry as on a previous survey we indicated that we had riparian

buffers of trees. (They were natural as we had not planted them, but they had probably always existed along our narrow streams.) This was a lengthy report and actually included choices of aesthetic as well as economic benefits of the varied practices listed. Our cattle and horses run in our woodland, the cattle browsing on lower growth, the horses, seeking out rich harvests of mast, acorns from our chinquapin oak gallery. Multiple benefits accrue, and something analogous happens in coffee-growing regions, where the coffee crop as well as wildlife, especially birds, are gifted by allowing mature shade trees to flourish.

At a friend's home recently, we were offered an exquisite brew out of some African blend (Peet's Uzuri, a dark roast). Today, I purchased online a bag of Lavazza Super Cream medium roast beans, infinitely more pricey than our dependable Folger's. But the description was not to be resisted: akin to one for a fine wine, it is supposed to be deeply satisfying. (This was after researching the different results of doing a medium roast and that of a dark roast: varying roasting temperature and 'cracking' are the keys.) "Terroir" comes through better and stronger in a medium roast, while caffeine is more concentrated in a dark. To me and other coffee lovers, it would be a crime to allow any geographical place that allows the coffee plant to flourish to become unsuitable for its continued growth. Like ancient trees that are the source of 'golden genes' that allow their offspring and neighboring, younger trees to thrive, these places impart that essence of native earth to the bean that we have learned to cherish. Taking care of them will ensure that they keep giving.

Today, I own an electric grinder, but it gives a metallic, steely taste to the grind. So, I've dusted off the antique wooden grinder in anticipation of recreating that satisfaction I had as a girl, grinding the beans for my parents' morning coffee, and for me, a fragrant memory.



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Big Bird - Getting High

Jay Jeffrey

We're taking a brief intermission from the Lethal Beauty series, and touch on another extraordinary species.

Part 1.

My friend and I had the driver stop the small tourist bus out in the middle of nowhere, at an elevation of about 7,000 feet in the Andean mountains. We jumped out. We received quizzical and blank stares from all the passengers in the vehicle, and I couldn't adequately explain ourselves in Spanish, their native tongue. We adjusted our shouldered backpacks, smiled, and waved adieu. Thus started a long, grueling, and amazing journey toward the mountain summit of Aconcagua — at 23,000 feet, the highest peak in the world outside the Himalayas.

I've climbed various mountains requiring multi-day backpacking, notably in Costa Rica, Hawaii, Wyoming, Nevada, and Washington State; the joy and goal is always the ascent, and hopefully descent, through life zones. For me, reaching the summit is more a physical and spiritual challenge, and never the primary goal. Experiencing the life zones, for me that's the core essence, where you bathe in the region's secretive-to-spicy biodiversity. Backcountry. Wilderness. The unknown of a new area. My naturalist spirit thrives there.

Within a few days my companion and I came across Guanacos, the native wild mammal of the camel family related to domesticated llamas. I'd heard some rocks clattering, a faint bleating vocalization, and looking far up the grassy and treeless rocky slope, I saw several deer-sized animals clambering uphill before stopping and peering down at me; they were easily 400-500 yards away. Guanacos are often found up to 13,000 ft and have blood rich in hemoglobin, with four times more red blood cells than human blood of the same volume. Over the next few days, I would get closer looks at a few other Guanaco groups, but would see no more during my month in Argentina (only 3-7% of the Guanaco population remains since the 16th century arrival of the Spanish conquistadors). And I caught no good photos of them either, but wonderful photographic memories. All because of slow and quiet progress while hiking through life zones.

Mountaineering in the high Andes has a few additional celebrated attractions: the immobile giant vertical-spined snow formations called Penitentes, that can require a climber's creative navigation, and the rare sightings of the greatly mobile and emblematic high-flying Andean Condor. Later we would camp near Penitentes spread over an area the size of a football field, with some revealing various glacial colors that were illuminated due to their translucence from summer sunlight in late afternoon and sunset. I sighted at least two condors on our expedition, leaving me ecstatic and in awe.

My first condor observation occurred while resting after an anxious crossing of a narrow glacial river that was waist-deep, with strong current, and required — especially with heavy backpack — you to keep a firm grip of the thick rope that spanned the flooding ford (our trip relied on no guides, porters, or mules). Thankfully it was sunny and we were in a warm expansive rocky canyon. Staring far off at a barren mountain slope, a speck of movement caught my eye above the higher ridgeline. A dark bird. I watched as it maintained altitude yet

sailed motionless across the broad valley, coming in a direction closer to me and the large boulder I leaned back on. A raptor. A **very very** high raptor, not flapping, moving across the sky steadily like an airliner.

Initially it appeared the size and shape of a golden eagle soaring at about 1,000 ft, with noticeable fingertips, but moment by moment everything — especially wings, tail, body — became more thick, robust, broad; imagine a black-colored hang glider with fingered blunt wing tips and a large black doormat for a fanned tail. Or imagine the silhouette of a feathered B-52. What it was, was the world's largest flying bird, eventually disappearing over a ridgeline that loomed thousands and thousands of feet above me. It was the Andean Condor.

On another day, my second condor observation was closer and even more stunning and amazing, as was the landscape, although I was in the process of overcoming an unpleasant terrain feature. I had to cross the bottom of a large river valley over a mile-wide, in order to begin the ascent up a steep and deep canyon that would continue ever-upward for days. The valley bottom was composed of several long and wide islands formed from braided river channels, all lacking vegetation or driftwood and comprised of glacial rock, stones, and rubble. Two tributary rivers dumped into this area helping accentuate the webbing of braids and overall unpredictability.

Logistics research had generalized the river and tributary channels to be no more than knee or thigh deep, but ice cold (with other fine print caveats). All went smoothly: I wore quick-dry shorts and climbing boots while shouldering my backpack across islands, arriving at a river channel I'd drop pack and swap boots for thick neoprene socks, tie boots to backpack, re-shoulder pack, go through water — that's a helluva lot of weight on non-soled feet — arrive wet at next island, drop pack, don boots, hike to next river channel; repeat, repeat, repeat (you don't see many people doing this, you do see people on rented horseback gliding across the valley bottom's river channels with a smile, taking in the marvelous wildness of it all — at least that's what I read they do in today's era). Ah, I digress, back to the second condor observation:

Somewhere out there on a rocky island as I was swapping footwear — promising various things to my feet if they held together to the other side of the valley — I looked toward my desired destination canyon and then while scanning the skies for threatening weather, aerial movement caught my eye among blues skies and white cotton ball clouds. Around a few thousand feet high, quartering past my location, there was again a steady non-flappy feathered B-52, lower than previous sighting; seemingly blacker and with a white collar-like neck tuft showing when it soared into a cloudless blue gap, the giant wings and fanned-out tail immensely broad, almost resembling a monster bat — that couldn't move its wings...just sail motionless like an arrow gliding through air. I forgot where I was, who I was, what I was doing — this was a life's wildlife highlight!

Big Bird — *Getting High*, Part 2, providing details as to why Andean Condors are the largest flying birds in the world, and almost unbelievable life history details, to follow in upcoming issue.

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Andean Condor, wingspans of almost 11 feet with largest surface area of any bird.

Photo credit: jmarti20, under a Creative Commons license from Pixabay.



Jerry McGahan holds 6-month-old Andean Condor; over 9 ½ ft wingspan. Photo by Libby McGahan (Fair Use: Non-commercial, teaching/education; also used in NGS Journal, 1971, Vol.139, No.5).

ONLINE nfhas.org

Alice Boyle's presentation was so wonderful - there were ooohs and wows heard from the audience! If you missed it here is the YouTube Link: <https://youtu.be/ISJP8Qm1CEs>
It is also available on our website in Bird Blog



Dr. Alice Boyle Presentation for NFHAS
Feb. 16, 2022

[youtu.be](https://youtu.be/ISJP8Qm1CEs)





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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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