



Chuck Otte

## Kansas Bird Populations and Distributions - Does Anyone Really Know What's Going On?

Bird populations anywhere are in a constant state of flux. Researchers, wildlife managers and bird watchers all try to monitor, estimate, and predict, what is happening, but in many ways, it's often a shot in the dark or the classic six blind men describing an elephant.

**Chuck Otte** has been tracking bird distributions in Kansas for the past 20 years and will share glimpses of what he's seen, what he's documented, what other citizen scientists have postulated simply to point out how much we still don't know.



Chuck Otte

**When: Nov. 19th, 7 p.m.**  
**Where: Senior Service Center,**  
**4th and Leavenworth** (same place we meet after the CBC).  
**Dinner: 5:30 - Old Chicago**

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



## prairie falcon

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### Upcoming Events

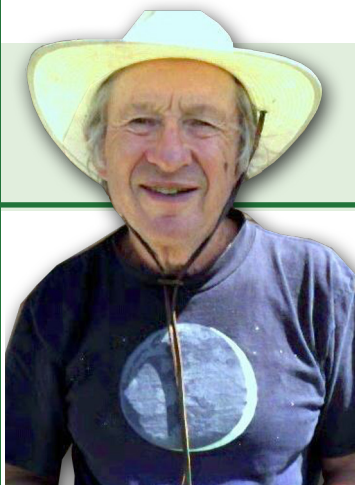
**Nov 3 - Board Meeting 6 p.m.**  
Home of Tom & MJ Morgan

**Nov 3 - DEADLINE birdseed order**

**Nov 8 - Saturday Morning Birding**  
8 a.m. Sojourner Truth Park

**Nov 19 - Chuck Otte**  
7 p.m. Senior Center, 4th & Leavenworth  
5:30 p.m. Old Chicago (with Chuck)

**Nov 22 - 8-11 a.m. Birdseed PICKUP**  
UFM parking lot



## Skylight plus

Pete Cohen

This past August folks who enjoy taking (in) meteor showers found their pleasure with the Perseids washed out by a “super Moon”, one that was just a day past full on the night it was its closest to Earth for the year, and thus out-shone all but the very brightest streaks. The Moon’s furthest and nearest distance from Earth varies from year to year from about 360,000 miles to 225,000, with an average of 239,000 miles, more or less, depending on one’s source.

Point being that its brightness varies, depending on its nearness and its position relative to the Earth-Sun position, though one has to take a particular interest to notice. One notice taken was that of the University of Texas’ *StarDate* which shone a light, so to speak, on a few examples of how those variations have been noticed, and not noticed. It did this largely by telling of the work of an astronomy professor at Texas State University, Donald Olson, and his graduate assistants.

Olson was first spurred by an English professor wondering if there was any scientific basis for the magical disappearance of the rocks along the Brittany coast, as described in Chaucer’s *The Franklin’s Tale*, part of *The Canterbury Tales*. Therein a wife, fearing for the safe return of her husband, responds to the unwanted attentions of another man by promising to yield to him if he would remove the dangerous rocks. The suitor then promises to pay a magician, who removes the rocks. The husband returning and being informed feels she must honor her promise. She feels she must kill herself to preserve her honor. But the suitor, impressed by the magnanimity of the husband, releases her from her promise, and the magician similarly releases the suitor from his debt.

Doing his own computer work, Olson reported that on December 19, 1340 (somewhere around the uncertain year of Chaucer’s birth) the

Sun, Earth, and Moon happened to be in a straight alignment with at the same time the Earth its closest to the Sun (perihelion) and the Moon its closest to the Earth (perigee). The result would have been unusual strong tides that could’ve had serious impacts on shorelines, and on the output of storytellers. With Chaucer there’s a happy ending, told after-the-fact.

Sometimes it can be important to be aware of the Sun-Earth-Moon juxtapositions before-times, as exemplified by a mystery that emerged from WWII as to why Marines attacking the island of Tarawa did not receive the expected amount of tidal rise, and so were forced to wade 1000 feet ashore from their stranded landing craft, a situation that very probably contributed to the count of nearly 1000 dead and more than 2000 wounded. Olson, looking back, found that on November 20, 1943 the Moon was simultaneously at apogee (its furthest from Earth) and at quadrature (off at a right angle from the Sun-Earth alignment) helping to provide a tide on the expected time, but with its weakest influence.

The professor has been using his re-visualizing of cosmic arrangements to give insights as to the composition of various paintings, other references in literature, and historical events.

Meanwhile in our November skies, the changing displays alternate between dawn and evening. Mercury is briefly about ten degrees above the western horizon the first ten mornings, about forty minutes before sunrise, near Virgo’s Spica the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. Then to evening: the Moon and Taurus’ eye, Aldebaran, rise together the 7<sup>th</sup>, and closer to each other the 8<sup>th</sup> with Orion’s right shoulder, Betelgeuse, the Moon’s companion on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

Morning again: the Moon and Jupiter rise together at first light of the 14<sup>th</sup> with Leo’s Regulus tagging along below, then Jupiter takes the lead and Regulus comes up second the 15<sup>th</sup> and Spica chases the Moon out of bed the 19<sup>th</sup>. Evening of the 25<sup>th</sup>: Mars and the Moon will be drifting off to bed early-on. The Moon will be full the 6<sup>th</sup> at 4p23, new the 22<sup>nd</sup> at 6a32.

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# Little Criquer

Dru Clarke



*"What sort of insect do you rejoice in, where you come from?" the gnat inquired.*

*"I don't rejoice in insects at all," Alice explained...*

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass, Lewis Carroll

Usually when I go to bed I know who is in it with me (my husband or a cat). So when I threw back the covers and a scurrying black leggy creature emerged, I was a bit startled: a field cricket, probably driven inside by a sudden cold snap, had taken up residence but wasn't sure of the safest fold to settle into. Encouraged to jump off the bed, it scrambled to a corner where it probably thought we couldn't see it. I occasionally woke in the night and heard its slow chirping. I hoped it would avoid the cobwebs that accumulated there.

The name 'cricket' is from the French *criquer* which means "little creaker." And not all crickets chirp or sing. Those who do have four distinct 'songs', and it seems only the males have this ability: one song is to court a female cricket, and she will respond only to her own species' tune; a second follows successful mating; another is to aurally fence off territory, and another to defend it against male interlopers. The sound is accomplished by a file-like vein on the forewing and a scraper on the other forewing being rubbed together. The papery wings amplify the sound. It appears that most crickets are right-winged, drawing the right over the left when stridulating ("making a harsh sound" in Latin). The courtship song of the field cricket is a constant trilling that is at the upper limits of human audible detection: it is the background music of our natural environment and is much less annoying than Muzak. Male field crickets, while they sing, also are given to breaking into dance during courtship, probably in an effort to further excite the female.

There is a relationship between ambient temperature and the rate at which a cricket chirps

(faster when the temperature rises and slower when it falls). A.E. Dolbear developed a formula named for him that approximates Fahrenheit temperature by counting the cricket chirps in a minute. Dolbear's Law is:  $T = 50 + \{(N-40)/4\}$ , T being temperature and N the number of chirps. This works for the field cricket, as rates differ for other species.

While there is a house cricket (yellowish brown instead of black in color), 'the cricket on the hearth', field crickets are driven inside homes when autumn is in full stride. Sometimes, when parasitized by horsehair worms, field crickets are driven mad and seek out water where the worm emerges: I witnessed this bizarre transformation on a field trip to Hackberry Glen one fall. We have also found camel crickets, the pale humpbacked and wingless ones, in dark recesses of closets and the cellar. But they don't sing. The Chinese regard a cricket singing in their homes as good luck. Charles Dickens said that 'to have a cricket on the hearth is the luckiest thing in the world'.

Unlike poor Alice, I welcome, even rejoice in, the song of a cricket, and find it a comforting sound. And it may stay inside as long as it restrains itself from munching on favorite articles of clothing, like my mother's plum wool dress or my alpaca muffler. Howard E. Evans penned a sentiment agreeable to me:

*"...an intimacy with the world of crickets can be salutary...because they remind us, if we let them, that there are other voices, other rhythms, other strivings and fulfillments than our own."*



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***If you have enjoyed Dru's stories over the years, you are in luck! She has compiled them into a book. Watch for more information in Dec. Prairie Falcon.***





For those who missed last month's program by Jim Crawford - here are just a few of the great photos that illustrated this presentation.







Six week old eaglets

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Jim getting ready to place one in a laundry bag to lower down to the waiting crew to be banded, and measured.





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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 discussions.

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