

Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick



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AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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Notes: The account from Africa was in the *Nairobi (Kenya) Daily Nation*. The report in *The Auk* was in the January 1930 issue. The Audubon account comes from his classic *Birds of America*. Other sources included a 1987 report in the *Florida Field Naturalist* titled "Osprey Killed by Lightning at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Florida." Twig hitched a ride on a passing common loon that apparently took shelter during storms and is currently vacationing at an undisclosed location in the UNESCO Niagara Escarpment World Biosphere Reserve. This column first ran on May 14, 2006.

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Q. Dear Twig: Do birds ever get hit by lightning?

A. Yes, they do. But not too often. Here are three examples: In May 2006, a newspaper in Africa said **49 pelicans got hit by lightning** as they flew through a thunderstorm. The luckless birds fell on a school, in a stadium and in front of a guy's house. "It was terrifying," the guy said. Most of the birds died.

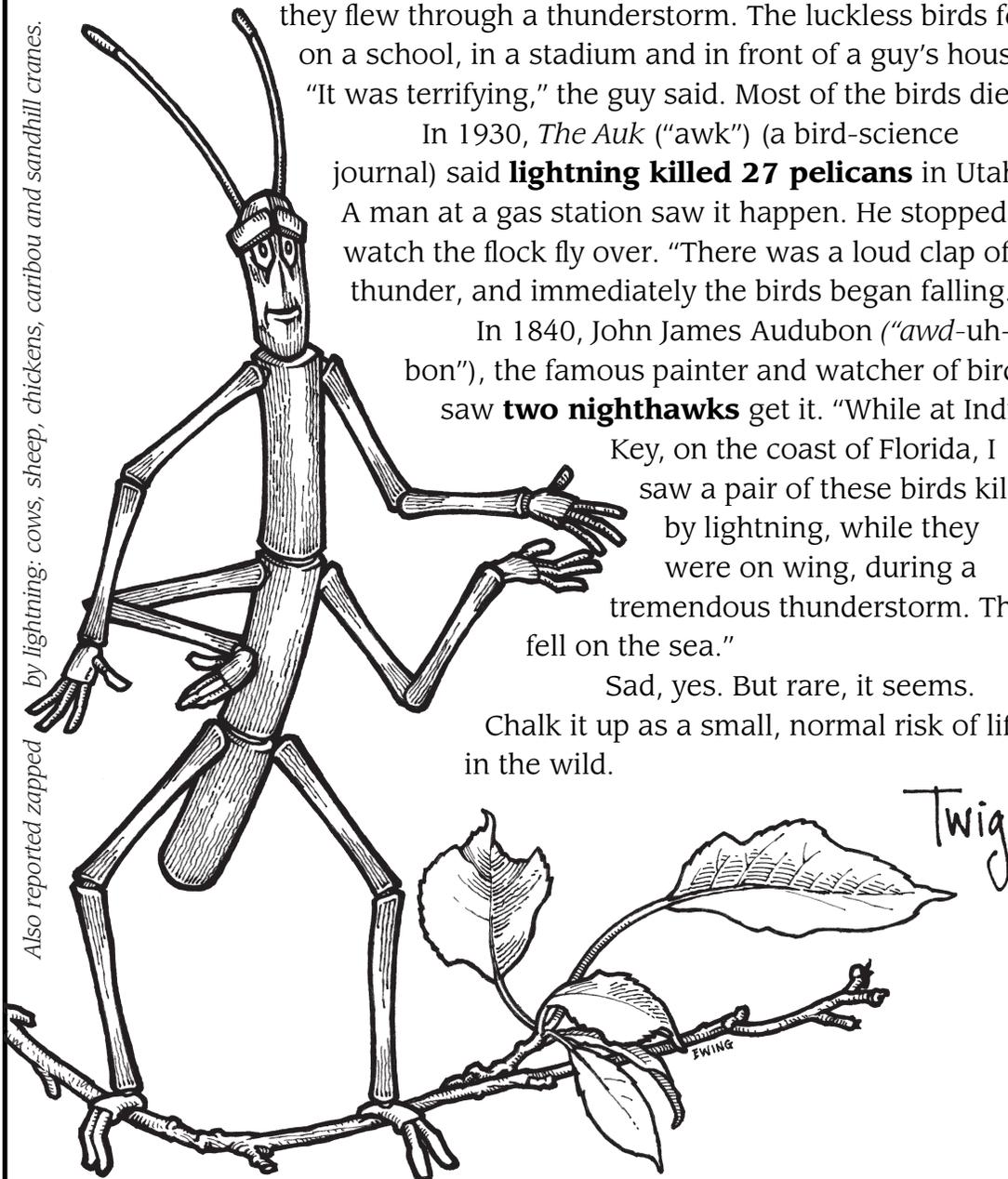
In 1930, *The Auk* ("awk") (a bird-science journal) said **lightning killed 27 pelicans** in Utah. A man at a gas station saw it happen. He stopped to watch the flock fly over. "There was a loud clap of thunder, and immediately the birds began falling."

In 1840, John James Audubon ("awd-uh-bon"), the famous painter and watcher of birds, saw **two nighthawks** get it. "While at Indian Key, on the coast of Florida, I saw a pair of these birds killed by lightning, while they were on wing, during a tremendous thunderstorm. They fell on the sea."

Sad, yes. But rare, it seems.

Chalk it up as a small, normal risk of life in the wild.

Also reported zapped by lightning: cows, sheep, chickens, caribou and sandhill cranes.



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