

## Avian Rebbe

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:00:08] Hi. Welcome to A Talk on the Wild Side, your biweekly tour of all things wild in Texas. I'm your host, Sandra Rideout-Hanzak. And I'm flying solo today because my helpers are out sick. We have a bonus for you today that I think you're really going to enjoy. It's a little bit of a departure from our normal interview and our normal guest. We're not talking to a scientist today. We're talking to a teacher, spiritual leader, birder. And I think you're just really going to get a lot out of it if you enjoy wildlife like we do and we think you do, or you wouldn't be here if you don't enjoy wildlife, you're going to enjoy listening to Aaric Eisenstein, who goes by the Avian Rebbe. So let's get to it. So I am here today with Aaric Eisenstein. Aaric has an online personality that he goes by as the Avian Rebbe and we're going to talk about that a little bit later. But first of all, welcome to our podcast, Aaric.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:01:16] Thanks very much. I'm really honored to be here.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:01:18] Yeah, I think this is going to be an interesting discussion, but I want to just get started by having you introduce yourself to people. Tell us a little bit about yourself personally and professionally.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:01:33] Okay. Sure. So as you said, my name is Aaric Eisenstein and I write and teach and speak and share photos and thoughts as the Avian Rebbe. The website where I kind of post all of my work is called Avian Rebbe.com. And essentially I teach Jewish wisdom in the beauty of birds, and the perspective that I take is one that is informed by Jewish tradition, but really appeals to folks from a variety of faith backgrounds and actually folks who have no faith background. If there are people who appreciate spirituality or the divine in nature, they can come to my site, see beautiful photos of birds, smile, think, take a little joy, take a little inspiration, and just appreciate what really is given to everyone, which is the beauty that we see in the natural world. By way of background, I am not an ordained cleric, I'm not an ornithologist. I'm just a man that spends a lot of time out on the trails, thinking and coming up with thoughts that I like to share with others.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:02:49] Well, that's great. And I have been enjoying your podcast and reading a little bit of your blog here and there, and you say that you are coming from a Jewish perspective, but I'm not Jewish and I really enjoy it. So for our listeners out there, I hope that you will, you know, think of it as just more of a spirituality that anybody else could enjoy. You don't necessarily have to be Jewish, to enjoy your writing and your podcast is what I'm saying.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:03:21] Yeah, that's absolutely right. In fact, you know, it's funny, I have probably spent more time speaking lately and in the coming weeks in churches than I do anywhere else. Actually, there are lots and lots of folks that simply want to experience the beauty that's available in nature for all of us and find different ways of looking at it. So one of the things that I'm really enjoying is seeing, in fact, how much in common we have. They use different vocabulary and we certainly have some differences, but the commonalities greatly outweigh them and it's a really wonderful opportunity to share and learn together.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:04:10] Yeah, definitely. So I want to talk about how you got started in this. You know, what made you decide, hey, I'm going to do a podcast or a website or whatever about birding and spirituality.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:04:24] Well, I'm going to ask you to do something really terrible. Okay. I'm going to ask you I'm going to ask you to think back to about February of 2020. Okay. When COVID COVID was just starting here in the US and.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:04:41] Really just starting to hear about it in February...

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:04:44] That's right. That's exactly right. And my best friend lives over in Hong Kong where they had been dealing with it for some time. Wow. And yeah. And so I've been following it very closely and had a gut feeling that it was coming here. And I had a sense that what we were going to all end up having to do is exactly what happened. We were all going to be alone and outside. And so another friend had been pushing me for a while to get into photography. And I decided, okay, maybe this is my time. So I went out and I bought a camera. And as I started going to the parks every day, that's all any of us could do. So I took my camera outside. I went for hikes every single day and really started just kind of learning how to use a camera, learning about birds, learning how to write. All of these are areas in which I am self-taught and relatively new. And as I put these little jottings down on Facebook to kind of share with some friends, they started to resonate with people. And over time it developed. And my rabbi actually reached out to me and asked if I would do something, and I said, yes, what? And he said, Would you start teaching? And I said, Well, I'd be honored and everything is grown from there. Publishing the website, getting the podcast, publishing the book, speaking that I doing the teaching that I do. All of it grew out of a response to it and a way to, frankly, kind of poke in the eye. All the darkness and ugliness that we were seeing in the world at the time and try to deal with it, to grapple with it, and to give a little bit of comfort to others who were also dealing with these same issues.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:06:46] Well, that's great. You know, I've seen a lot of your photos. And for people who aren't familiar, Aaric's podcasts are usually just maybe like 4 to 6 minutes long. There's a photo for each one. You know, a unique cover art for each one in the photo is always a bird. And he'll have a little story about this bird and, you know, something that we can learn from it. I could never tell from your photos that you just picked up a camera two years ago. So congratulations.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:07:19] Thank you.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:07:20] Thank you. You've come a long way in two years, I have to say, especially for somebody who's self-taught.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:07:25] Thanks. There's a great deal of information available on YouTube. And, of course, for every photo that you see, there's close to a thousand cuts that didn't make the cut.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:07:39] So, yeah.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:07:41] It's a game of numbers, shall we say?

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:07:43] Yeah. Okay. Yeah, that's true. And so you mentioned the website, the podcast, the book. It sounds like it's been going pretty well. How have people responded to this?

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:07:56] You know, it's been incredibly gratifying. I have had such a variety of people. I'm thinking of a six year old boy who wrote a blurb for my book, who

asked his parents if he could stay up late to watch me. When I was speaking on Zoom to very eminent rabbis, to very serious bird people, ornithologists and scientists, to folks in every walk of life who have said, you know, something about what you're doing resonates with me. And, you know, of course, when COVID hit, there was this massive increase in the number of people around the world who got into birding and bird watching and folks who went outside for the first time and started paying attention to what they were seeing. I've had folks reach out to me who said, you know, I'm on vacation and normally I would just go for a walk or I would just do this or that. But now I start to find that I notice birds around me and when I hear that, I'm making people, awe inspiring people to be a little bit more conscious of their surroundings and their environment, that's the kind of thing that makes me really feel like I'm moving in the right direction. I'm not getting rich off of this. It's not my day job, but it is something that that creates a tremendous amount of satisfaction and that warmth in me, knowing that, as I say, even in the midst of all this horror that COVID was, there is still some light. And what I'm trying to do is pull it out and show it to folks.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:09:44] Yeah, that's got to be really gratifying. Yeah, I can only imagine how, like you say, it just gives you a sense of warmth and purpose to maybe.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:09:54] That's right. That's right. I mean, you know, when I started doing this, it was in a sense. Therapy for myself. What I have now found is that other folks profit from it as well, and that being able to share that is perhaps even more meaningful than just the value eternally to me.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:10:14] Sure. Sure. So let's get to I want to get into the meat of some of your messages that you have on your blog and website and podcasts. Lately, it seems as though we've been bombarded by bad news, often tragic news, like the invasion of Ukraine, the school shootings. One of the themes of your podcast is how birding or just enjoying wildlife in other ways can bring us solace in difficult times. Can you expand on that idea for our listeners, please?

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:10:49] You know, at the outset of COVID, I had two choices. I could stay in my house, which I did. There was a bunker for me and go crazy. Or I could find some kind of outlet by getting outside. And you know that was my therapy. And in getting outside, you know, very, very powerfully. What it reminded me of was that the world goes on and the seasons go on and the light goes on and the birds every single morning would wake up and sing. And I watched a lot of sunrises. And what I took away from that was a reminder that no matter how awful things seem at the moment and in the grand scheme, by grand I mean, you know, biological timeframes or geological time frames, even something as horrible as COVID was going to just be a blip. And I don't mean to minimize it or diminish it because thousands of people died and millions of people were impacted. But there are also aspects of our life that are natural and that are eternal and that are strengthening and that we can draw power from every single day. And that's what this represented to me. It wasn't about escapism, wasn't when I go to the park, I don't have to think about COVID. It wasn't trying to get away from what was going on. It was an effort to contextualize what was going on. And I think that that even today, you know, that's part of the challenge that we have is, you know, to probably misuse the scientific term. I'm not a scientist, but we have confirmation bias. When we look in the newspapers, you know, every story is about who got shot, who got hit and where the fire was. And, you know, this kind of political malfeasance or misfeasance, you know, all of these horrible things, certain things that make it into the papers. We never see in the newspaper the story about the 10,000 people that drove home from work yesterday without any event or any incident

that's not there. And so, you know, what I'm trying to, in a sense, to remind folks is that there are aspects of the world that also are real and also are valid and also are good. And maybe there's a little bit of comfort that we can find in answering the question of why do these bad things happen in a world that is supposed to be oriented towards the good? Mm hmm. And in fact, I wrote about it this morning, that very question of accuracy. And it's it's a tough one. It can be tonal. I mean, you know, I didn't come up with an answer any more than anybody else will. But maybe there's a perspective. And as I say, I hope that what I'm able to offer is a bit of comfort, if not in answers, because that's the only way we get through all this.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:14:31] You're absolutely right. There is definitely a bias out there. The news, I guess, is I mean, those things that are news they aren't, all the good things that happen every single day, the things that are newsworthy are the tragic things. And so that's what we hear about sadly now. So it's terrific that you found a way to do this, to bring comfort to folks. So when you are dealing with these issues excuse me, when you're dealing with these issues, when you're struggling, what's your favorite thing to do? What do you do? You have a favorite place that you go to there in San Antonio or what?

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:15:12] Well, I do. I'm in Austin now, but there's a park that looks pretty special for me. It's called Reimers Ranch. It's just outside of Barton Springs, up the hill country. And it's a bit of a drive. It's a place that I just go once a week, but that's kind of my special place. And it puts me in a particular frame of mind. And it also happens to be rich with wildlife, which is really wonderful physically, geographically. It's a gorgeous place. And, and because it's. Maybe just a touch. It's not a really crowded it's a little bit different than go into a kind of a neighborhood park or a place that people walk, dogs, that kind of thing. Yeah. So it's, you know, for me, the quiet and it's hours of quiet. I may go out there for three, four or 5 hours in the morning, depending on the heat. Yeah, but the quiet and the opportunity to think and to write, I do most of my writing while I'm outside dictated into my phone, coupled with the opportunity to see all the beautiful wildlife. And I share my bird photos. But you know, I've seen foxes out there, snakes and insects, coyote and deer and so on, all of those things or that. Again, kind of a reminder that, you know, the world of our hustle and bustle in which we live is not all that there is. And I suppose maybe that's the most important thing is to realize that, you know, whether you want to call it religion or you want to call it spirituality or the divine or whatever the terminology is, that's not something that takes place just on a Friday or Saturday or Sunday or just in a mosque or a synagogue or a church that that's baked into the structure of the world. And we can encounter it everywhere we go, and we can encounter it in the way that we want to. And it provides meaning and richness to our life.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:17:28] Yeah, that's a really good point. We just have to, like you mentioned earlier, open our eyes to it. Right.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:17:38] Well, that's it. That's it. I mean, I could tell you some stories about, shall we say, open guys or altered perspectives. And that really is, you know, the whole thing. There was a little event where I was walking through my neighborhood. I just got my camera and decided to go for a walk in neighborhood just to see what I'd see. Sure. And, you know, the normal birds appeared, the Mockingbirds and the Cardinals, titmouse and so on. But as I was walking through my urban neighborhood, I looked up and saw this huge kettle of pelicans flying over it. Yeah. And I thought that was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen. I mean, what are pelicans doing in my urban neighborhood away from any water? I mean, I thought it was a 911 event. So I immediately got in touch with Audubon and alerted them to this phenomenal experience. And they very graciously

wrote me back and said, Well, yeah, that happens every year at this time as the pelicans fly overhead. And I had never seen them before because I didn't look right. And once I started looking, it was astonishing how many things I started to see.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:18:59] Uh huh. So what do you think it is about birding or birds or just watching wildlife in general that brings us such joy. What quality is it that allows birds or trees or flowers or what have you to renew our spirits that way?

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:19:22] Well, I'll speak to birds first. If you do a survey of folks and you say, what superpower would you like to have forever? The leading answer is flight.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:19:37] Really?

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:19:38] Humans. Yeah. Humans want to be able to fly. Hmm. And. And there is something about flight that's magical to us. And it transcends time and it transcends cultures. If you look at ancient Chinese culture, you'll see the dragon, the big lizard with its wings. If you look to the Greeks, you have the story of Icarus. If you look at the Aztecs, you've got the flying serpent in Jewish tradition. The angels that are on top of the Ark of the Covenant have wings. Mm hmm. There is something about flight that just appeals to everyone. And I don't know if it's just a question of freedom or just a question of being able to move into a new dimension. You know, we typically humans operate typically in the X and Y axes and birds get to add the Z. But there's something about being able to fly and to be able to move through the air that is just different and inspiring. And, you know, with birds specifically, of course, there's color and there's motion. And you know, when you couple that together with the flight in in such a incredible variety of ways, that makes things very, I suppose, liberating for folks. Obviously, you know, birds are just about everywhere and accessible to people and accessible easily, even if you don't know all the names or you don't know all the habitat or you don't know all the lifestyle adaptations. You're familiar with birds. You've seen them. So it's something that's very resonant for people. And whether you're a kid or on your deathbed, the folks turn to birds as a way to gain inspiration and to gain comfort. And that that's very important to me. The other other aspects of wildlife or the natural environment, obviously, you know, there's been tons of studies about the soothing power of green and why we have lawns in our houses, these kinds of things. What does it mean to be out among the trees and take us for a spell? All of that is very, very real. And I think, oddly enough, we're just now starting to really understand what we probably intuitively do for 100,000 years prior to the last five or six generations. Sure. We're returning to that many ways. And I think that's the that's the power which I like to draw.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:22:46] Another thing that you've discussed on your podcast is that birding can show us that we humans are more alike than we are different. Can you explain how birding does this for us?

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:23:03] Sure. You know, as I say, I've been spending quite a bit of time recently teaching in churches, Christian audiences. And a few weeks ago I was in an Episcopal church for the very first time. I've never been in one and I watched some of the service and really enjoyed the liturgy. I really found it very, very interesting, just as a student, to see the commonalities, to recognize the differences, but to see the commonalities between that tradition and my own. Mm hmm. And just days later, I was out in the park, and I was watching a red bellied woodpecker, a bird that many of us have seen often. And he was involved in a bit of a squabble with the house sparrow, a bird that all of us and the sparrow and the woodpecker went at it for a little bit, and they finally

resolved their issues and everything got taken care of. And I got some nice photos of this interaction. And as I thought about it, I started to get the sense of how these two birds can be a commentary on differences and similarities. And by that I mean, for example, if you went to an ornithologist, somebody that really studies birds and you said, tell me about these two birds, the ornithologist would tell you all the different things that separate those two species. The sparrow and the woodpecker eat differently, they fly differently. They make different kinds of nests. Everything about them is different. And an ornithologist specializes in those differences. But instead, you went to zoologist or a general biologist and you said, here are two birds. But now I also want you to think about a bear and a tiger and a snake. Then if these were the range of animals being considered, obviously the sparrow and the woodpecker would be grouped together. Sure. And what we would see instead is the similarities between these two, how they're different to that of a bear or a snake or a tiger. And so what I was getting at in that particular branch, that particular teaching, was that it is a question of vantage point and perspective that tells us whether or not two things are similar or different. And the birds, depending upon your vantage point, can either be very, very different from each other or can be very, very similar. It's just a question of what elements of them do you decide to focus upon? And in the very same way, if you are looking at, let's say, a Jew and a Christian, they are both descendants of Abraham. And so they come from a very, very similar tradition. If you were talking to a Buddhist or a Jain or somebody who comes from a completely different faith background, if you ask the Jew and the Christian, are you the same or different, maybe they would emphasize the differences. But if you went to somebody with a slightly broader perspective, you might start to see the commonalities. And frankly, even the Jew and the Christian would probably recognize this commonalities as well. And so that's what I'm trying to get at, is that there really are as many similarities as there are differences. The question is simply what vantage point or what perspective do we choose to adopt and discuss?

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:26:55] That's an excellent point. And we just you just you got to believe that if we could focus on the similarities more than the differences, that maybe we wouldn't be bombarded with all of the negative stuff every day.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:27:09] Well, or better still, maybe all that negative stuff wouldn't happen.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:27:12] Yeah, you're right. I mean, it just wouldn't happen if we could see ourselves as the same or very similar.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:27:21] That's exactly right. That's exactly right. Yeah, differences exist, and differences can either be a cause for conflict or they can be an opportunity to learn from each other. I certainly have a preference for the latter.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:27:35] For those people who. You know, maybe they live in a downtown apartment or maybe they're out in the country. But it's kind of a public land desert where there aren't any parks anywhere nearby them. Maybe they only have, you know, 30 minutes or 45 minutes to get outside and enjoy. Where would you suggest that they start or what would you suggest that they focus on or think about or go if if they do have, you know, 30, 45 minutes?

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:28:07] Yeah. You know, it's interesting. I mean, I was I was sent to an article the other day about some folks that live in a downtown high rise in San Antonio,

way up high and a peregrine falcons are nesting on their balcony. And wow, what an opportunity. That is.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:28:29] What a treat.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:28:30] You know, what a treat. I will say that that some of the most beautiful birds and stunning encounters that I've had have actually been on the roadside. I mean, whether it was a strike, a loggerhead strike that was sitting up on a power line or, you know, the scissor tailed flycatcher, which is everywhere down in south Texas, sitting on power lines or fences, you know, the birds are there. They are there. It really is a function of just being aware of them and being attuned to seeing them. Yes, there are definitely birds that you've got to go hunting for and often to the expeditions of the wild. Sure. But you know, from the standpoint of can you have a meaningful encounter right outside your own house, including in a downtown or urban environment? The answer is absolutely yes. And, you know, I wrote a piece the other day on a pigeon, and this was actually a racing pigeon that not just a feral pigeon, but, you know, even the birds that are called the flying rats. Yeah. When you look closely at it, you start to see the iridescent colors and the variety of tones and textures in that bird's feathers, even grackles, you know. And as I say, I'm a Texan. Grackles are not my love. But wow. When you take some photos or those gorgeous birds, you know.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:30:21] I was just I'm sorry to interrupt, but when you were talking about the pigeon, I was thinking about grackles, and you just. Yeah, you just kind of have to. All right, maybe they're not supposed to be here, but they're here now, so why not just enjoy these crazy sounds and these beautiful colors that they have?

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:30:40] That's right. I mean, again, you know, a lot of it comes down to your perspective and the context. And, you know, when you when you when I go out to my car, which is parked under the oak trees on a summer evening, you know, I'm not a big fan of the arachnids, but when I when I come back with my camera or my binoculars and I put aside, you know, those kinds of situations and just study the bird from the standpoint of its own inherent beauty. Wow. I mean, those things are really pretty gorgeous.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:31:22] They are.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:31:23] So big. It's really all a question of how you want to approach it. You know, it's a relationship. And I think that's important. You know, it's not just a bird or just a tree or just a well, it's the relationship between us and that object. And we can control our take on how we want to experience it and when we, if you will, fix ourselves, when we see something that's pretty beautiful. Mm hmm. And I think we all have that opportunity.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:31:56] Such an excellent point that it's. It is all about your perspective and how you approach it, that whether you're going to get a negative or positive experience from it. I have really enjoyed learning and hearing your perspective just as a gifted storyteller and deep thinker and what have you in spiritual person. And I would love to see more people get into doing what you're kind of doing, you know, passing along these messages about all of the good things that we can get from birds, trees, flowers. I don't care. So what if there's, you know, for somebody who is out there thinking, Hey, I'd like to do a podcast too. Do you have or a website or a blog? Do you have any advice for them about how to get started?

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:32:47] Yeah, just do it. I mean, no, really. I mean, you know, the hardest thing, you know, I look back now and in fact, I've just been revamping my website from a technical standpoint the last couple of days, and it's a lot of work. And I think about the tools that I use. You know, I've got a website program, I use various software to manage photos. Obviously I've got a camera and then there's the, you know, the podcast and recording and that piece. And so you can, you can so easily get bogged down or intimidated by all the technology and all of the infrastructure and forget that really what folks want is your message, whether it's visual or written or recorded, that's what they're looking for. So if you find the simplest possible way to do that, do it. Mm hmm. So here's something that everybody can do on your iPhone and I presume on an Android phone as well, or on your computer, there's a voice recorder, recorded your voice. Just talk, you know, get your message up there, speak in your machine, record it post it on Facebook, or send an email to five or ten friends. And that's how you get started. And as you start and as you build and as you develop, then you can get into all of the infrastructure and all of the technology and so on. But, you know, the biggest kind of pause or caution that I would offer is that don't get so bound up in the mechanics of creating or distributing your information that you limit the amount of time that you have to think and to be creative. You know, as I say, I do this in addition to a day job and I don't have 20 hours a week to manage a website or to manage an email list at the expense of going out to the parks and receiving photos and writing and thinking, you know, don't ever underrate the importance of thinking, spending a lot of time to think that's what ends up getting reflected in your output. But at the end of the day, nobody cares whether you use this email program or that email program. They just want to know, What are you thinking about? Mm hmm. So that's where I'd really emphasize spending the time. Don't let the technology get in the way of the product.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:35:28] That's very good advice. I like that advice because, you know, I. I laughed when you said just do it because I was kind of a little bit convicted by that, because this podcast was funded very generously, I might add, by the Harvey Weil Sportsman Conservationist Award, and that's from the Corpus Christi Rotary Club, what they called for. When I read their call, I just kept thinking, they need a podcast, they really need a podcast. They're trying to get these messages out. After a few days of thinking about it, I just thought, "you know what, Sandra? If other people can figure out how to do a podcast, so can you. You just have to suck it up and do it." You know, just say you're going to do it and learn how to do it. You know, if you get funded. That's right. Just learn how to do it and figure it out. Because you want to talk about wildlife and you want to talk about conservation and you want to talk about managing the land properly and that sort of thing.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:36:22] Yeah, I mean, that's the thing, you know, and particularly I mean, if you're if your goal from the outset is to have 10 million listeners and a company of ten people that are doing it and, you know, making a bunch of money and so on, well then that's a different approach. Yeah. But if you're, if your goal is to get your message out, then focus on the message and, and the wrapper know the technology will come. Yeah. There's plenty of time to, to deal with that afterwards.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:36:54] Well, one thing that we always ask our guests is for a biology blunder. And, you know, that's just where something goes awry in the field. When you're dealing with nature, stuff happens and you wonder if you've ever had any birding days where, despite your best intentions, nothing went as planned and you got a fun story out of it.



**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:37:15] Well, yes. And if you've got four and a half hours, I'll tell you most of them. But let me let me pick out one, because I actually did turn it into a teacher. So I got to one particular park fairly often, and then start to see some of the same people out there and so on. And it's a place that I know very, very well, but it's a big park. I mean, it's big. It's probably, I don't know, 40 acres or something, which, you know, for a local neighborhood park, pretty good size. So I'm out there one morning and bump into an acquaintance when she asks me if I have seen the red shouldered hawks nest. And I said, Oh, no, I haven't, but boy, I sure would like to. And she says, Not to worry. Here's what you do. Go down this trail. You know this trail. Oh, yeah. I knew it well. Okay. Go down there. You're going to look for a little path that goes off to the left. And right there is the hawks nest. Okay, so this is going to be easy. So I head off, I go down to the trail, I get to the little path. I see it off to my left. I go down the little path and it's not too far. It's ten yards, not much more. And I get to a small clearing and I look down and I see bones, animal bones, quite a few. And so, of course, I'm starting to think of all the different explanations for why those bones are there, and maybe more importantly, how my bones will not end up joining them, because I have seen coyotes and snakes out there. Okay. So I look all around and for the life of me, I cannot find the red shoulder hawks nest. But it is really frustrating. Maybe I'm on the wrong path. Maybe I went on the wrong trail, you know? How could this be? I have followed the directions to a tee and I just didn't think that there was any other option. I look and look and looking look and I can't find it. So I'm a little frustrated and really disappointed. And, you know, as I say, I'm self-taught and all of this. And so I started to get a feeling of, well, maybe, maybe I'm just too dumb to find this, you know, maybe this is just past me. My acquaintances is a pretty serious birder. I'm not. And maybe, you know, this is just past me. Okay? So I go home the following day. I go back, I'm in the same spot, and I go down the trail and I get to where the path is. And I'm about to go walk down the path and look again when I hear the screeching of a red shouldered hawk. Mm. And it's right behind it and I turn around and bigger than Dallas is a nest up in the tree with the red shouldered hawk sitting on it. And it's right there. And the difference between yesterday and today is that today I looked in the right direction. That was the only part that I missed. Yeah. Was looking in the right direction. And did I feel stupid then? Yes. Do I still feel a little stupid? Yes. But I turned it into a teaching and I wrote about it and I said that there is a scholarly tradition in the Jewish world that I won't get into all the details. But essentially it's a bunch of people who got so far down into the weeds that they missed the big picture. And in the very same way, when I was out on the trail, I was so focused on following her directions. Give me that letter that I forgot the most important thing that you do out in the field, which is look, look around, just look, look around. And if I had just stopped where I was and looked around, I would have found that hawk's nest. And the second day I did. And so, you know, I atoned for my sin. But I looked around and I think that's probably the most important thing that any biologist or that any scientist or frankly, that most people can do is just spend a little time looking and you'll be amazed at what you see. So that that would be my blunder of the day. There are plenty more. There are plenty more. But maybe that's maybe that's the one that the others have made as well and to which we can all hopefully learn. Yeah.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:42:14] Well, nature. Certainly has a way of humbling us if we spend enough time out.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:42:18] And it is exactly right. That is exactly right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I'm glad for it.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:42:25] Yes. Yes, me, too. Me too. So is there anything else you would like to share with our listeners today?

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:42:36] Just thanks for listening. You know, as I say, it is tremendously gratifying to me to be able to share these thoughts, photos and hopefully a little bit of inspiration. I would welcome and invite folks to go to the website and see what's available and it's all there for free. And I hope that maybe it brings you a little bit of joy and inspiration. So I just closed with the same thing that I say every time, which is be grounded high.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:43:11] Very nice. Very nice. Yeah. Everybody go check it out. And if you're not familiar with the word "rebbe," and I was not, it is r e b b e so avian Rebbe dot com. Everybody check it out. Yeah.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:43:24] Thank you.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:43:25] Thank you so much for spending time with us today. I really enjoyed talking to you and I think our listeners are going to really relate to what you have to say.

**Aaric Eisenstein** [00:43:35] Thank you for the honor.

**Sandra Rideout-Hanzak** [00:43:36] Oh, thank you, Aaric. I appreciate you. A talk on the Wild Side is a production of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute of Texas A&M University Kingsville. Funding for this project is provided by the Harvey Weil Sportsman Conservationist Award by the Rotary Club of Corpus Christi. Podcast artwork is created by the talented Gaby Olivas. Tre' Kendall contributes with his creative talents as well, and editing is conducted by Andrew Lowery. For you hardcore fans. We're now putting bloopers at the end, so hang on.

**Rebecca Zerlin** [00:44:12] Well, to you, you're the problem. I did not have to run over here very quickly because I used the wrong P-card. Nope, not me. I'm going to make you.

**Tre'** [00:44:21] I'm going to make you the host.

**Rebecca Zerlin** [00:44:24] Look At ME I'm the host now. Look at me. I am the host now. This meeting is being recorded.

**Tre'** [00:44:32] Got it. Recording.