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Signals Wild...Signals Caged

By Wayne, N6KR

My son is an avid birdwatcher. As his understudy, I've learned the names of the birds that hang out in our yard and gather at local wetlands.



On a recent walk we saw one of our favorites, an American kestrel, a small raptor that terrorizes lizards and mice in the foothills on both sides of the San Francisco Bay. The bird's coloration is a surprising mix of blue, brown, orange, yellow, and white, adorned with an array of black dots.

Finding a kestrel in the wild is like stumbling upon a rare gem, lying on the ground.

The bird reminded me that when I was a kid, I often hunted for gems of a different sort: DX. I was a novice, and in the early 1970s, novices were limited to working DX Of The First Kind. CW.

Like brightly colored birds, each CW signal arriving from a distant land was unique.

Several factors were involved. In those days most ops used bugs or straight keys, so each operator had an identifiable fist. Rigs were not as stable as they are now, yielding timbres with a motley mix of buzz, drift, and chirp. Add fading and noise to the mix, and you had no shortage of audible intrigue.

In fact -- trust me on this one -- RST reports haven't always ended with a dependable "9." I once gave out an RST of 332. I'll never forget that poor soul's chaotic whoop, best described as a singular blend of yodel and kazoo.

Over time I became something of a CW pathologist, keenly aware of each station's affliction, including my own. These variations were useful. You could tell who you'd already worked. If you were a regular on the novice bands, you'd even get to know fellow travelers by their frequencies, since many, like me, were "rock-bound" -- slaves to a handful of crystals. VFOs were starting to make an appearance in novice gear...but see "chirp," above.

Now, in 2021, the chirp is gone.

CW signals still have many distinguishing traits, though. These include speed, keying weight, the operator's affectations and favored prosigns, and direction-specific propagation anomalies.

Here's where we stretch the central metaphor to just about max.

If randomly occurring CW signals on our bands are creatures of the wild, then...are FT8 stations the occupants of an urban zoo? Don't get me wrong: It's a pleasant place, with free tram rides, open 24 hours a day. The diversity of species is unprecedented.

But imagine, on a given day, that you've sampled the zoo's exotic offerings, memorized the brochure, bought the t-shirt, and partaken of the sumptuous snack bar. What next?

Take a walk on the wild side.

Yank the cord and jump off the tram at an unmarked stop. Hop the fence. Work your way down the unpaved trail from the upper mesa to the open savannah, then sit on the ten-foot wall and dangle your feet over the edge.

Welcome to the ecosystem of beings who are free to roam. They may be camouflaged, blending into the background. And if you listen carefully, you'll hear a hundred variations on their timeless song...CQ.

News & Updates

QSO Today Virtual Ham Expo

Elecraft Prize Drawing Winners Announced!

Thanks to everyone who attended the QSO TODAY Virtual Ham Expo 2021! The Elecraft team had great fun talking to so many of you at our lounge tables.

If you didn't get to watch Elecraft's presentations, you can watch them on our [YouTube Channel](#).



Drum Roll Please...

The Winners of Elecraft's Prize Drawing for the QSO Today Virtual Ham Expo are:

KX2 Shack-in-a-Box Winner - Kelley Andrews, KJ7HPP

T1A Antenna Tuner Winner - Michael Knighten, KE0OIT

*Prize Winners were selected randomly by Elecraft.

K3/K3S Options and Upgrades - **Place your order now!**

We are now taking deposits for K3/K3S options and upgrades.

Along with the upgrades, we will do a final run of P3s (both factory assembled and kit) and K3/0 Mini Remote Control Panel. If you've been wanting to upgrade your K3/K3S or purchase a P3 or K3/0, now's the time to do it. This will be our final production. [Order Here!](#)

Outside Magazine Article - *Inside the Summit-Obsessed World of Ham Radio*

If you haven't already read this article in [Outside Magazine](#) online by Chase Brush, then you really ought to check it out. Our friend, Steve Galchutt, W00AT, is featured in the article...of course on an 11,700-foot mountain peak operating his radio.

Elecraft Employment Opportunities

We have openings for two different technical positions at Elecraft!

Technician position for our product test group.

- This position requires good analog and digital skills with debug and repair capability to the component level. Involves use of Spectrum Analyzers, Oscilloscopes etc. and specialized computer software used for testing etc. Good understanding of radio transmitter, amplifier and receiver operation at the schematic and block diagram levels is also a plus.
- This is a full time or part time position working at our Watsonville, CA facility.
- FLSA status: Hourly, Non-Exempt

Customer Support

- This position will be supporting customer questions via phone calls and emails on our current products. Good social skills and detailed operating experience with our K3 or K3s, KX line, Amplifiers etc is a plus.
- Should also be familiar with reading and understanding schematics, debugging customer failures over the phone and via email etc.
- This position can be full or part time, working from our Watsonville facility, and possibly from home.
- FLSA status: Hourly, Non-Exempt

If you are interested, please email your contact information and resume/experience to hr@elecraft.com, and cc: eric@elecraft.com. If you know someone who may be interested and is qualified for either of these positions, please feel free to forward this information.

EEO Statement

Elecraft does not discriminate in employment opportunities or practices on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, disability, marital status, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding or related condition, ancestry, medical condition including genetic characteristics, veteran or military status, sexual orientation, gender expression, any persons holding an undocumented "AB" 60" driver's license, or any other characteristic protected by law. This provision also includes the perception that anyone has any of the above characteristics or is associated with a person who has or is perceived as having any one of these characteristics. All such discrimination is unlawful.

K4 Update

High-Performance Direct Sampling SDR



K4: Coolness factor meets production complexities

by Wayne, N6KR

Greetings from the mothership.

Q: Are Eric and I keeping up with the K4 megathreads on the forums?

A: You bet.

But we're not weighing in as often as we normally would.

On the one hand, it's affirming as a small company to be at the eye of a storm of anxious demand. On the other hand, we really feel your pain. On the third hand (we need three these days), we're both seriously overworked trying to ramp up production.

A radio with this many features and so much new tech -- the coolness factor -- comes with a lot of new assembly and test procedures. A whole lot of invention. New tricks we didn't know we had to learn. Over the past week alone our manufacturing engineering team probably shaved 50% off the total time per unit.

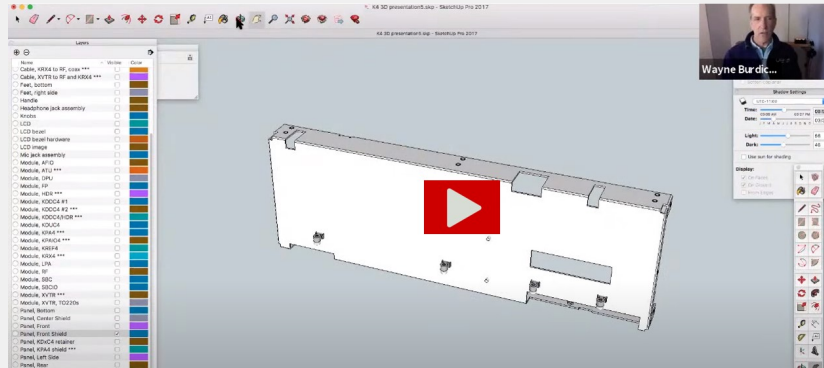
For me, it's feast/famine. I have serial #00002 on my workbench and use it every day. Every day there's new and improved software to be played with and thoroughly vetted. That's the fun part. But I also spend hours daily optimizing interaction between the K4's multiple processors, evolving faster ways to do alignment/test, and helping our software teamwork through a long wish-list of new capabilities.

The work can be tedious. Still, every evening when the team finally knocks off (and I do mean every evening, including most weekends), I get another chance to be a kid in the candy store. This rig's just so much fun to operate. And I'm confident that for every new K4 that comes off the line ready for its first test drive, there's an operator who'll experience the same feeling I do.

Despite the K4's advanced circuitry, I'm always reminded of my very first efforts at home-brew, when I was maybe 15. Discovery. Tweaking. From raw parts with their leads twisted together to prototypes only a mother could love to finished product to that first demo at a club meeting. It's much the same now, though the parts are smaller, the tools more exotic, and the stakes higher.

What I can promise is that we're putting everything we have into the K4, like we have with every product over the past 20 years. We can't wait to get them into your hands and hear the smiles behind the mics and keys.

Check Out HamCation 2021 K4 3D Presentation



K4 Documentation Now Available

If you're interested in the capabilities of the K4 transceiver, you might want to take a look at two user documents that are now available for download.

- [Introduction to the Elecraft K4](#)
- [K4Operating Manual](#)

Additional documentation will be released soon, including the K4 Owner's Manual and the K4 Programmer's Reference.

K4 Shipping Update

We are working hard getting your K4's out the door and we have just finished shipping our Group 1 orders from May 16th, which was 1 day before the 2019 Dayton Hamvention opened. We are now shipping from the May 17th group 1 orders.

We had a huge surge of orders on May 17th from both Dayton, on-line and telephone orders. We expect it will take us approximately 4-6 weeks to ship these group 1 orders. After that you will start to see the the order date that we are shipping change much more quickly. You can see K4 shipping status update on our [Shipping Status page](#).

How You Will Be Notified When Your K4 is Ready to Ship

A member of the Elecraft Sales Team will contact you by email when your K4 is ready to ship. They will verify your shipping address and provide you with any additional information regarding your order.

If your email address has changed, please complete the [New Email Address Form here](#).

Learn more about the K4 and pre-order [here](#).

Listen for us on the air - We'll likely be on a K4!