



A Note from the Editor

Michael L. Donnelly, Editor-in-Chief

If there is a theme for this year's issue of *Prairie Wings*, it is "the Old and the New:" here we record a deluge of transitions: memorials to active supporters of AOK and conservation in Kansas who are no longer with us, and welcomes extended to new Board members. We also summarize some of AOK's new initiatives in its **three cornerstones of mission—Advocacy, Conservation, and Education**. We have some exciting new ventures to report in all three.

An article on **Advocacy** highlights some of the things AOK does in championing wildlife, habitat, and quality of life in the face of both inherited issues of law and land and water use, and new issues, both good and bad, posed by 21st century technology. AOK has continued to push for repeal of statutes that are over 100 years old mandating eradication of prairie dogs. We have supported efforts to confront misapplication of new technology by attempting to give legal protection to undisturbed prairie landscapes threatened with wind turbine development in unsuitable locations. While both efforts have so far proved unsuccessful, these battles are not done, and AOK will continue to press for sound conservation practices on both fronts as occasions arise. We do note at least one instance in which the prairie dog issue has recently reached a peaceful and satisfactory settlement: see Mike Corn's article on the visit of Lane County Commissioners to the Greenwald Ranch last August.

Another article highlighting **Advocacy** reproduces, expands, and updates my article from *The Kansas Reflector* on the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, under consideration in the U.S. Senate as this is written. And

of course, you will want to review the international importance of the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge and the background of AOK's intervention with a lawsuit to guarantee Quivira's senior water right—AOK's single most important and challenging involvement in conservation advocacy right now, treated in an article compiled with the assistance of new Board member Dylan Wheeler, one of the attorneys trying the case for AOK.

On **Conservation**, the centerpiece of AOK's efforts are our sanctuaries: the Hutton Niobrara Ranch in Nebraska, the Connie Achterberg Wildlife-Friendly Farm near Lincoln, Kansas, and Mount Mitchell near Wamego. Read about the process of vetting potential donations of land for AOK sanctuaries from the dual perspectives of a potential donor of property, and the AOK Chair of the Board and member of the Sanctuaries Committee, in Gary Haden's Letter from the Chair. Then see Executive Director Dr. Jackie Augustine's update on exciting new developments in AOK's sanctuaries: obtaining a Federal easement for the Hutton wetlands, an effort begun awhile back by Ron Klataske that has finally achieved realization; the placement of a Motus tower on a disused windmill at Hutton, to enable electronic tracking of wildlife movements; expanding public use of the iNaturalist app to census wildlife and plants at Mount Mitchell and the Achterberg Wildlife-Friendly Demonstration Farm; in cooperation with federal and state authorities, tracking a couple of mountain lions picked up by game cams at Hutton. We should also note here, thanks to the efforts of the Prairie Guards, endorsed by AOK, the successful listing of Mount Mitchell and the Mitchell homestead and underground railroad site on the National Register of

Historic Places. Congratulations to the Prairie Guards for thus further securing public recognition and public use of this site of historical and environmental interest.

Behind the scenes, in cooperation with Director of Philanthropy Kelley Hurst, Dr. Augustine has been actively engaged in rationalizing procedures, laying out concrete plans for sanctuary acquisition and management, and communicating with donors and potential donors. But we want to highlight her new efforts in *public* outreach and **Education**. Read Executive Director Dr. Jackie Augustine's account, looking back on the achievements of her second year applying her considerable energies and talents on multiple fronts. Our efforts to educate and inspire Kansans in the understanding and appreciation of their natural heritage include the fifth annual event at Quivira, the Celebration of Cranes—a success this year for the thirty some participants, registered and drop-ins, who came despite the drought that had left the marsh virtually dried-up. Fortunately, we did not cancel, and providential rains (and sleet, and wind, and icy temperatures) on Friday miraculously provided water (even if only inches deep) for thousands of geese and Sandhill Cranes and over 20 Whooping Cranes, the highlight for just about all the participants. Read about it in organizer Cindy Jeffrey's report in this issue.

If AOK's signature educational event in the Fall is the Celebration of Cranes, the second annual Lek Treks will join it as the sister big event in the Spring. Jackie reports on last year's first ever event, centered on Hays, Kansas, to see both species of prairie-chicken, and with sponsored trips to Cheyenne Bottoms, Quivira, the Hutton Ranch (for Sharp-tailed Grouse), a winery, and the Sternberg Museum of Natural History in Hays. Reserve your place in a blind or a van now!

In this issue of *Prairie Wings*, we feature a biographical sketch of the distinguished career of one of our founding members, Dr. Robert McElroy. Director of Philanthropy Kelley Hurst discusses that origin story in her piece

answering a recurrent question we get because of our shared name, "Audubon:" what exactly is the relationship of AOK to the National Audubon Society, and to the regional Audubon chapters in Kansas?

Feature articles also address urgent threats to the environment. The more general article, by Professor J. P. Michaud, Professor of Entomology at Kansas State University, treats the increasing peril to the environment produced by the commercialized spread of the use of neonicotinoids in seed treatments—a threat that can on Professor Michaud's testimony scarcely be underestimated. The second feature on environmental threat, by Dr. Koley Freeman, who studies Grasshopper Sparrows under the supervision of Dr. Alice Boyle at K-State, examines the effect of climate change, with its drought and summer heat, and increased frequency and violence of storms, on one grassland passerine whose populations are shrinking.

Finally, Dr. Elizabeth Dodd, Distinguished Professor of English at K-State and a noted poet and writer on nature and the environment, offers us classic piece of "writing about nature" in her treatment of her visit to a critically imperiled ecosystem of very limited range in Kansas, the Central Tallgrass Bur Oak Bottomland Woodland in southeastern Kansas, a unique forest type historically dominated by tall, fire-resistant *Quercus macrocarpa*, the Bur Oak. The trees at Cross Timbers have survived, some of them, for nearly 300 years, but despite the creation of a park around them, are now threatened, possibly by changes in the water table as a result of proximity to the Toronto Reservoir.

Once again, I hope that reading this issue of *Prairie Wings* will remind you of the manifold and powerful ways nature can engage and enrich—and sober—our minds and emotions, and inspire you to learn more and become more involved in preserving Kansas's rich environmental legacy.