



**Defending wildlife and habitat
through:**

**Advocacy
Conservation
Education**

News & Updates: November 2022

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AOK vehicle graphics highlight Kansas Prairies



Thanks to the contribution of a generous donor, we were able to add graphics to AOK's new vehicle. The left side of the vehicle highlights prairie flora and fauna. Pictured are a Black-footed Ferret, Prairie Dogs, Greater and Lesser Prairie-Chickens, a Regal Fritillary, milkweed, and purple coneflower. We thank [David Rintoul](#), [Bob Gress](#), and [A Bender Photography](#) for providing photos. Stay tuned to see what habitats are featured on the

right side and back of the vehicle!

The 2021 Ford Bronco Sport was a used vehicle purchased in June using donations to the Greater Manhattan Community Foundation: Grow Green Campaign in April. It replaced a Ford Expedition that was sold to the junk yard. The new vehicle allows AOK to spend less on transportation costs when compared to reimbursing staff for mileage.

Photo: AOK's Ford Bronco Sport with [Mount Mitchell Heritage Prairie](#) in the background.

Winter is a great time to visit prairies



Prairies are wonderful places to visit, even in the winter. With winters becoming more mild, it is not uncommon for Kansas to have an unexpectedly warmer day with calmer winds. If you find yourself with nothing to do on such a beautiful winter day, visit your closest prairie. Although birds may be harder to find, wildflowers are still eye-pleasing adding a variety of shapes among the amber prairie grasses. Pictured are a few of the many wildflowers identified on a recent trip to [Mount Mitchell Heritage Prairie](#).

To identify 'winter weeds', we recommend using the [iNaturalist](#) app or the book *Winter Weed Finder: A Guide to Dry Plants in Winter* by Dorcas Miller (ISBN 10: 0912550171 / ISBN 13: 9780912550176).

Photo (left): Blazing Star

Photo (below from left to right): Wild senna, goldenrod, coralberry (buckbrush), milkweed, Illinois bundleflower



Rain makes Celebration of Cranes a success



In the week leading up to our 5th Annual Celebration of Cranes Festival, we thought we might have to cancel the event due to a lack of rain. Western Kansas is experiencing extreme drought with drought emergencies being declared in 67 counties including Stafford County, where Quivira National Wildlife Refuge is located. We decided to continue with the event, rain or shine, but we let participants know that seeing cranes was not guaranteed.



When rain was forecasted for Friday, hope returned. It started raining early Friday morning, and the rain continued throughout the day. Our evening tours to see the cranes were cold and damp, but no one complained about the rain. We all knew that the cranes and wetlands desperately needed the moisture. Almost 2.5 inches fell throughout the day. The dry, cracked dirt became mud, and started holding small pools of water. The cold front that brought the rain also brought cranes. Thousands of Sandhill Cranes started to land. The first Whooping Cranes were seen at Little Salt Marsh at 5pm on Friday - three adults and one juvenile! Then nine Whooping Cranes landed at Big Salt Marsh. At the end of the evening, there were eight Whooping Cranes at Little Salt Marsh and 16 at Big Salt Marsh, for a total of 24 Whooping Cranes! Although that was our high count for the weekend, participants saw Whooping Cranes during each of the tours on Saturday morning, Saturday evening, and Sunday morning.



Between the morning and evening tours

on Saturday, participants enjoyed talks from Alice Boyle about bird migration, Brandon Case about Friends of Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, Vinita Karki about technology applied to avian conservation, and Jackie Augustine about AOK and early efforts to save Cheyenne Bottoms.

Plan to join us next year! Nov 3-5, 2023

Photos from top to bottom:

- 1) Whooping Cranes at Big Salt Marsh on Friday evening
- 2) Dry wetlands
- 3) Vinita presents to participants
- 4) Participants using the AOK truck to block the wind while viewing cranes
- 5) Sandhill Cranes



Monitoring Mountain Lions at Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary



Audubon of Kansas is partnering with the state of Nebraska to monitor mountain lions at Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary. The goal is to estimate movements and population size of this rare predator.

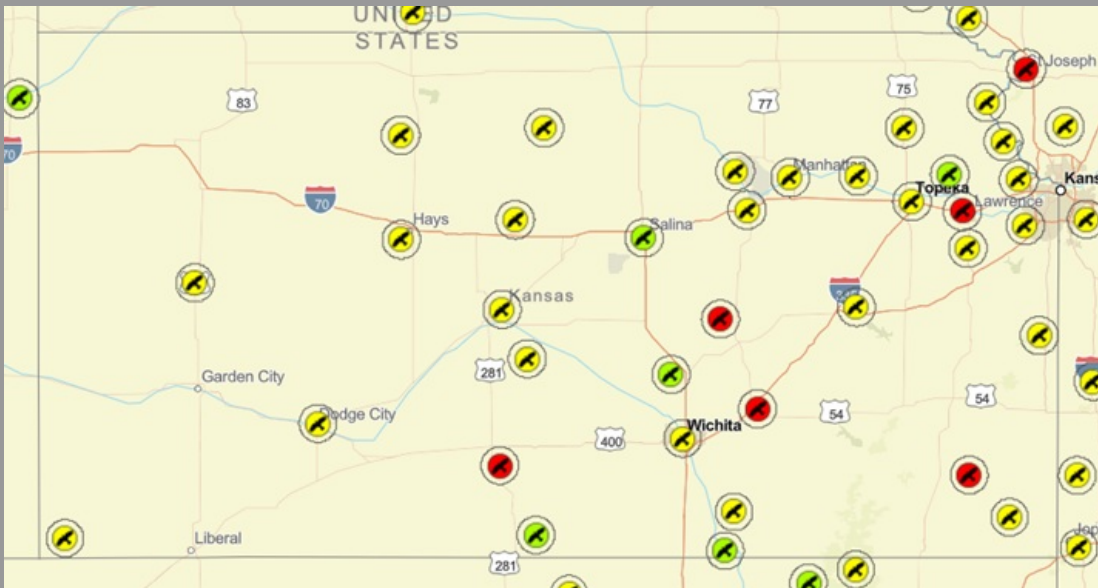
In March, a young male was captured, collared, and released. He was 4-5 years old and weighed 150 pounds. The collar allows biologists to monitor the cougar's movements from the comfort of their office. Hutton is one of several properties that it visits on both sides of the Niobrara River. A second mountain lion has also been seen on the game cameras. Hopefully, it is a female and we will see her leading her kittens on the camera soon!

Another mountain lion captured on a nearby property has made the news! It was a young male looking for a territory to call his own. It traveled from Nebraska to Springfield, Illinois, where it took up residence in a suburban neighborhood. There, the neighbors didn't appreciate the large predator living in their backyards, so it was trapped and now lives in a wildlife sanctuary in Indiana. The full story can be read

[HERE](#).

Photo: Male visiting Hutton again after being collared. Photo from a trail camera network monitored by Lana Arrowsmith, AOK's Hutton Coordinator.

It's Christmas Bird Count Time!



Christmas Bird Counts are a great way to learn more about birds, get to know fellow birders and contribute to science! Expert birders are paired with novices. Expert birders benefit from an extra pair of eyes looking for birds. Novice birders learn how to identify birds and where to find birds in the area. This data contributes to information on population trends of birds that winter in the United States, Canada, and around the world. An example of how the data is used is the recent study which documented a [loss of 3 billion individual birds](#) in North American since 1970.

To find more information about Christmas Bird Counts, click [HERE](#).

To find a list of Christmas Bird Counts in Kansas, visit the [Kansas Ornithological Society's page](#).

Give a gift membership
to Audubon of Kansas



GIVING
TUESDAY

We are grateful for you - you, who stand with us in protecting wildlife and habitat. For this season of giving, we are asking you, as part of the AOK community, to consider helping AOK connect with others who share your love for local wildlife and habitat.

Help us reach our goal of 20 new members!

Help a friend or family member connect with the work of protecting our wildlife and

habitat All Over Kansas.

Memberships start at just \$20 per year. Give an AOK gift membership today!

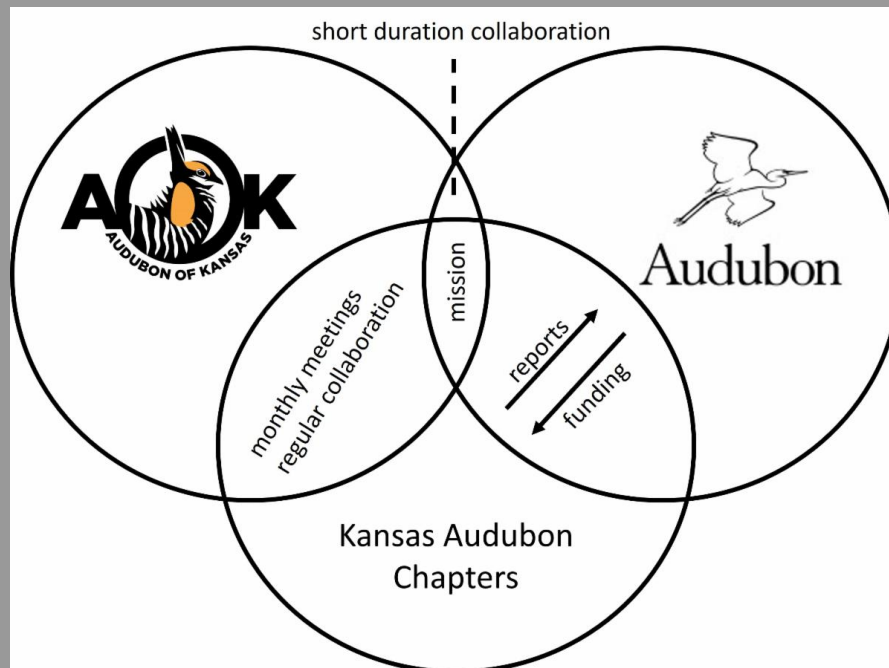
We wish you the very best during this season of gratitude,

Kelley

Kelley Hurst
Director of Philanthropy
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Click [HERE](#) to give a gift of membership

Audubon - National, Kansas, and Chapters: What's the difference?



Many organizations share the 'Audubon' name. We are linked by our mission to protect birds and other wildlife. The National Audubon Society is a national organization with a presence in almost all of the 50 states. Audubon of Kansas addresses environmental issues affecting Kansas and the Great Plains. Chapters focus on their local territories. So besides our focus on Kansas and the Great Plains, what makes Audubon of Kansas different?

- We do not side-step controversial issues
- We are strong defenders of the environment, taking agencies to court when necessary
- We are a resource for local chapters and help them connect with each other
- We pursue three missions in one organization: advocacy, conservation, education
 - Advocacy: advancing environmentally-friendly legislation and policies
 - Conservation: our sanctuaries demonstrate how people and wildlife can coexist
 - Education: Our publications, public presentations, and Nature Adventurepack program inform people about the value of nature so

they are encouraged to protect it

Visit Audubon of Kansas's website

Save the Date!

Audubon of Kansas is starting to plan events for the coming year. Mark these events on your calendar!

mid-December: Registration opens for the [Kansas Lek Treks Prairie-Chicken Festival](#)

February 18: Great Backyard Bird Count, location and time TBD

April 13-16: [Kansas Lek Treks Prairie-Chicken Festival](#)

April 22: Earth Day, location and time TBD

May 7: Achterberg Work Day

May 22-26: Hutton Work Week

June 4: National Prairie Day, location and time TBD

July 24-28: Hutton Work Week

September 10: Achterberg Work Day

September 25-29: Hutton Work Week

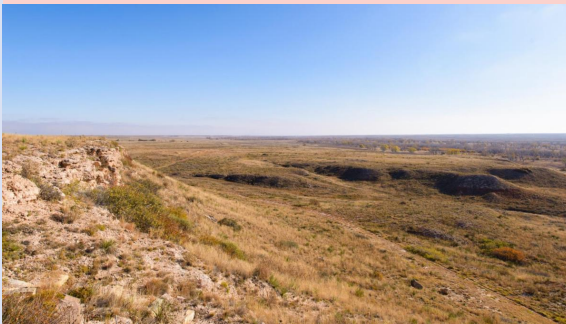
Oct 1: Open House at Hutton

November 3-5: Celebration of Cranes at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge

Hutton is AOK's sanctuary near Bassett, Nebraska

Achterberg is AOK's sanctuary near Lincoln, Kansas

AOK shares favorite walks, hikes and birding spots!



Cimarron National Grasslands

Cimarron National Grasslands has an extensive human history. A reliable water source attracted wildlife and multiple Native American tribes who used the area for hunting. Coronado visited the 'Point of Rocks' in his search for the seven cities of gold. Both the water source (Middle Springs) and Point of Rocks were notable landmarks along the Santa Fe Trail. The Homestead Act of 1862 and the railroad brought agricultural and urban development. The area was hard-hit during an 8-year drought in the 1930s known as the Dust Bowl. The federal government purchased 107,000 acres of the worst-hit areas by 1939, with the National Grassland designation in 1960. The area is now a thriving mix of shortgrass prairie, sand-sage prairie, and woodlands along the Cimarron River. It is home to pronghorn antelope, elk, mule deer, and lesser prairie-chickens.

Text adapted from [Kansas Trail Guide](#) by Jonathan and Kristin Conard

Photo from [Cimarron National Grassland](#)

Learn more about Cimarron
National Grassland

Learn more about the auto
tour

The Santa Fe Companion Trail follows the Santa Fe Trail. Interpretive signs

Directions to the Conestoga trailhead:
From the junction of US-56 and K-27 in Elkhart, drive east on US-56 for 6.6 miles to County Road 16. Turn left (north), and continue approximately 10 miles. The trailhead is on your left after you cross the Cimarron River.

Address:
US Forest Service District Office
242 E. Highway 56
Elkart, KS 67950

point out the ruts from wagons and points of interest including Middle Springs and Point of Rocks. Although this trail is relatively flat, it is long - 6.2 miles one way. For those not ready for an all-day trek, an auto tour provides overlooks of many of the attractions along the route.

Contact AOK!

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