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News & Updates: September 2023

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[Visit our website](#)

AOK supports USFWS's decision to protect its senior water right at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (unlike Kansas Governor Kelly)



In January, the US Fish and Wildlife Service ('the Service') requested that its senior water right be enforced so Quivira National Wildlife Refuge ('the Refuge') gets the water that it is entitled. Kansas has a 'first in time, first in right' water law which states that water is allocated according to the date that the water was requested.

So, water should go to older or 'senior' rights holders before they go to more recent or 'junior' holders. In the Quivira area, water has been over-appropriated for decades, meaning that there is not enough water to supply the needs of all those using water.

In early September, Kansas Governor Laura Kelly wrote a letter to Martha Williams, the Director of the Service. She pressured the Service to extend the timeline for protection and restoration of the Service's senior water right to allow for "collaboration" and "innovative solutions". AOK wrote our own letter to Director Williams reminding the Service that **collaboration has been tried multiple times over the last several decades—and has failed every time.**

In our letter, AOK outlined the following well-documented facts and history of the Refuge and the Refuge water right, as acknowledged and thoroughly described by an impartial third party, the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit, through its published opinion issued earlier this year in *Audubon of Kansas, Inc. v. United States Dep't of Interior*, 67 F.4th 1093 (10th Cir. 2023):

1. The Refuge is one of the premier wetlands in North America and the World supplying critical resources during breeding and migration.
2. The Refuge's water resources have been declining since the 1980's, due to groundwater depletions induced by junior groundwater pumping.
3. Decades of reliance on voluntary and cooperative agreements with local stakeholders designed to avoid priority administration of water rights have consistently failed to remedy the chronic impairment of the Refuge's senior water right, leading to the Service's decision to file a request to secure water in early 2023.
4. Immediate action is needed to protect threatened and endangered species that use Quivira.

AOK is awaiting the Service's response.

Photo: Whooping Cranes at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge.

[Read the AOK's full letter to the US Fish and Wildlife Service](#)

[View the decision of the Tenth Circuit Court](#)

Achterberg trails get extended during Work Day



AOK held its fall work day on Sept 10 at the Achterberg Wildlife-Friendly Demonstration Farm. We split into two groups, with one group working on trail

building and maintenance. The existing trails were mowed, and a new 0.1 mile trail was established to allow visitors to get closer to the confluence of Bullfoot and Horse Creeks.

The other group cleared cedars from the overlook and walked the grassland buffer strips removing invasive elm. These grassland strips were planted with a diverse mix of native grasses and wildflowers. They were burned two years ago to discourage trees from growing in the areas. However, the burn did not kill many of the trees. Volunteers had to use loppers to cut the trees and then use herbicide to prevent its regrowth.

Photos show before and after images of the new portion of the trail. AOK thanks the [Kansas Trails Council](#) for loaning us trail-building equipment.

Now is the time to look for 'Flying Cigars' (Chimney Swifts)



Chimney Swifts are one of those species that are overlooked until you become a birdwatcher. During migration and summer, they fly high over urban and rural areas eating insects out of the air. Because they are a drab brown color, never perch in the open, and rarely come down to eye level, they can be difficult to see and identify. However, once you learn their 'flying cigar' shape and chattery vocalization, you will find that they are present almost everywhere.

In summer, a pair of birds will build nests in chimneys, cisterns, or abandoned buildings. Nests are constructed by both members of a pair. Twigs are attached to vertical surfaces using saliva. Four or five white eggs are laid when the nest is half-finished with additional sticks being added during 19-day incubation period. Both parents participate in incubation. Additional adults may help with incubation and feeding the young. When the young outgrow the nest, they will cling to the wall.



Now is a great time to look for Chimney Swifts. The birds are currently migrating, so they are more abundant than other times of the year. It is also a good time to look for their roosts. Around 15 min after sunset, they will form large flocks with hundreds of individuals that fly in tight circles - a bird tornado! About a half hour after sunset, just as it almost too dark to see them, they will start plunging into the chimney.

Nestling Chimney Swift photo provided by [David Rintoul](#)
Chimney photo by JK Augustine

Let Jackie know
about Chimney Swifts
in your area

View a video of
Chimney Swifts
entering a chimney

Learn more about
Chimney Swifts

Philanthropy Central

Don't miss the next issue of *Prairie Wings* -
Update your address today!



Ah fall. Many of us are out watching for migration, and enjoying cool evening temperatures. One other thing that we are doing is planning. Starting to think of what we need to do for the rest of the year and starting to plan for next year are common fall actions.

At AOK, we are planning the next issue of *Prairie Wings* to send out later this year. You can help us. Have you moved in the past 12-18 months? Do you have a new mailing address? Make sure we have it by notifying Kelley at giving@audubonofkansas.org.

Are you considering donating through an IRA?



Retirement planning: Are you considering donating through an IRA? Have you started to plan for a required distribution from a 401(k) plan? Have you considered donating some of those distributions?

Donations cannot be made directly from a 401(k) but assets can be rolled into an IRA and then donated through a Qualified Charitable Donation or QCD. When you choose to donate this way, IRA assets go directly to charity, so the money given through QCDs is not considered taxable income (there aren't taxes collected on the QCD). **QCDs may provide greater tax savings than cash donations for which charitable tax deductions are claimed.** Make sure to check with your own financial advisor before making any tax-related decisions.

Contact Kelley to change your address or to discuss giving options

Save the Date!

Mark these AOK events on your calendar!

Oct 1: Open House at Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary, 88923 453rd Ave, Bassett, NE

Oct 21: Bird banding demonstration at Achterberg Wildlife-Friendly Demonstration Farm, 950 N 170th Rd, Lincoln KS

November 3-4: Celebration of Cranes at Quivira National Wildlife Refuge

[Registration now open!](#)

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

February 25-March 10, 2024: AOK-sponsored trip to [Guatemala](#)

April 11-14, 2024: [Kansas Lek Treks Prairie-Chicken Festival](#)

Registration open for Celebration of Cranes Nov 3-4



People come to the **Celebration of Cranes** to view the cranes! However, they also appreciate learning more about these unique birds through our afternoon presentations. Paityn Bower from the [International Crane Foundation](#) will talk about the life history of Whooping Cranes. Kathleen Kaska is the author of [The Man Who Saved the Whooping Crane](#).

[Register now](#) to get your preferred

tour slot!

[Register now for Celebration of Cranes](#)

2023 Celebration of Cranes' Speakers

Nov. 4th, Sterling College, Thompson Hall

For more information on our tours: audubonofkansas.org

12:00 - 12:30 pm

What is Audubon of Kansas? A brief introduction

What is Friends of Quivira? A brief introduction by Brandon Case

12:30 - 1:30 pm



Paityn Bower

Outreach Biologist, International Crane Foundation. Paityn joined the ICF Texas Program with the goal to increase visibility and engagement throughout the Gulf Coast and Central Flyway.

"The Wonderful Whooping Crane" Soar with us through the life history of Whooping Cranes as we describe this charismatic species' fascinating life. Highlighting the work the International Crane Foundation's Texas Program is doing for the last wild population of Whooping Cranes. You will learn about new research findings, current landowner and partner engagement, and the work ICF is doing to raise awareness and appreciation for this species.

1:30 - 2:00 pm



Dr. Jonathan Conard, Biology Dept. Sterling College
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCJocH1eN8k&t=2s>

2:00 - 3:00 pm



Kathleen Kaska is the author of *The Man Who Saved the Whooping Crane: The Robert Porter Allen Story*.

"Seeing the whooping cranes for the first time at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas and using their story in teaching my science class, eventually led to the writing of *The Man Who Saved the Whooping Crane: The Robert Porter Allen Story*. I discovered in my research that Allen's contribution to the recovery of the whooping crane population and the dwindling populations of other birds was too significant to be forgotten and that his story should be told. With the assistance of his daughter, Alice Allen, and the staff at Audubon's Everglades Science Center in Tavernier, Florida, I was given access to Allen's journals, correspondences, maps, and other written documents. This allowed me to understand the dire circumstances of North America's most endangered bird and the passion and determination of the man responsible for their recovery." — Kathleen Kaska

Fund-raising trip to Guatemala: Sign up before its too late!



Birds connect us. The birds we see in Kansas may breed here, winter here, or just pass through. Why not follow those birds passing through and see them on their wintering grounds?

Audubon of Kansas, in partnership with Sabrewing Nature Tours, is offering a trip to Guatemala to see our North American birds on their wintering grounds as well as the spectacular Guatemalan resident birds. Guatemala has incredibly diverse habitats and spectacular birds to offer visiting birders. From the cloud forests where Horned Guans can be found to the pine forests where species such as Pink-headed Warbler live, there is always something wonderful to see.



Guatemala is also a country with a rich culture which we will have the privilege of experiencing throughout our trip! [Sign up now](#) as space is limited!

When: February 25 – March 5, 2024, Extension: March 4 – 10, 2024

Cost: \$3,799, Extension: \$2,999; a portion of the cost benefits programs at AOK

Photo: Pink-headed Warbler from Sabrewing Nature Tours

Nature Adventurepack Presentations Continue

Hamilton County Library, Syracuse
Wichita County Library, Leoti
Dudley Township Library, Satanta
Haskell Township Library, Sublette



Thanks to a Chickadee Checkoff grant, Audubon of Kansas is able to bring Nature Adventurepacks to southwest Kansas. Adventurepacks are given to libraries for patrons to check out. They contain adult and children's binoculars, and fold-out field guides to birds, butterflies, and the moon.

To kick off the backpacks' availability, Executive Director Jackie Augustine is giving presentations about birds and birding throughout southwest Kansas. Below is a current list of presentations for October. Check out our [Facebook page](#) for updates.

Wednesday, Oct 11, noon: **Hamilton County Library**, Syracuse "National Parks"

Wednesday, Oct 11, 7pm: **Wichita County Library**, Leoti "Birding by Ear"

Thursday, Oct 12, 4:30pm: **Haskell Township Library**, Sublette "Beginning Birdwatching" - a presentation for all ages

Thursday, Oct 12, 7pm: **Dudley Township Public Library**, Satanta "Marvelous Migration"

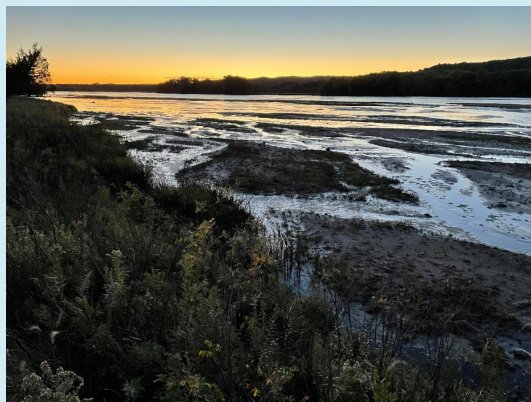
Photo above: Librarians at Plains Community Library show off their Nature Adventurepack

Open House at Hutton

Sunday, October 1

1-4pm

Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary,
88923 453rd Ave, Bassett, NE 68714



Did you know that there is a 5000 acre wildlife sanctuary near Bassett, Nebraska? The property is generally not open to the public, but it will be open for a FREE guided tour on Sunday, Oct 1.

The Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary is a 5,000-acre ranch and wildlife sanctuary located along the Niobrara National Scenic River. It consists of spectacular scenery, including upland prairie, steep canyons, woodlands, and high bluffs that overlook meadows, marshes, and riparian forest along the Niobrara River, which forms the sanctuary's northern boundary. Many species call the sanctuary home including greater prairie-chicken, sharp-tailed grouse, bobcat, porcupine, box turtles and countless native insects, wildflowers, and grasses.

Schedule

1-2pm gather at the Hutton House and tour the museum which includes Harold's books and Native American artifact collection and Lucille's paintings
2pm carpool tour of the property
4-4:30pm return to the Hutton House

If you haCall, text, or email Jackie at jackie AT audubonofkansas DOT org or 537-4385 (area code 785).

Bird Banding Demonstration at Achterberg

Saturday Oct 21

Sunrise-noon

950 N 170th Rd, Lincoln KS



Bird banding is a technique used by scientists to learn more about the movements and lifespan of birds. Birds are captured using 'mist nets'. A lightweight aluminum band is placed on their leg with a unique identification number. The bird is then released back into the wild.

Jackie is a master bird bander with over 20 years of experience. She will catch wild birds at the Achterberg Wildlife-friendly Demonstration Farm, band them, and release them. She will discuss how the safety of the birds is maintained and the valuable information ornithologists learn about birds.

This event is enjoyed by outdoor people of all ages! Bring water, snacks, and a camp chair. Call, text, or email Jackie at jackie AT audubonofkansas DOT org or 537-4385 (area code 785) for questions or more information.

Photo: A Black-capped Chickadee that was photographed before release by JK Augustine.

Chapter Spotlight: Topeka Audubon Society builds a chimney swift tower

Topeka Audubon Society President Sue Newland oversaw the installation of a Chimney Swift Tower at Topeka Collegiate School at 23rd and Eveningside Drive in Topeka. The tower was constructed off-site and erected on July 31, 2023. An explanatory sign about chimney swifts will be posted in the future. This is all part of a larger project at the school to make their campus ecofriendly and welcoming. The students will have a chance to learn more about the world around them and the environment. Who knows, some day one or more students may enter a field of study that will have a larger impact on conservation. If chimney swifts use the tower, then the school has plans to install a camera inside the tower so they can be observed during nesting and roosting activities.

There are many people to thank, but we especially appreciate Shelly Robinson and Dr. Lyn Rantz of Topeka Collegiate School, the members of the TAS committee who have worked for the last 2.5 years to make this project a reality, and TAS members who have donated to the project. The tower was partially funded with a grant from the Chickadee Checkoff of the State of Kansas. You can still contribute towards the costs of the tower if you like. Mail a check to the TAS mailbox, PO Box 1941, Topeka, KS 66601, or use PayPal on the Topeka Audubon Society website, topekaaudubonsociety.org. Contributions are tax deductible.



Text from the [September 2023 Topeka Audubon Society newsletter](#).

AOK shares favorite birding spots!



Expect the unexpected at the Dr. Howard Reynolds Nature Trails in Hays

Given its location next to an interstate highway and embedded in an urban area, you probably would expect the Dr. Howard Reynolds Nature Trails to not be the most productive place to go birdwatching. However, the diversity of habitats in a small area attracts a wide variety of birds. There is a creek with a forest that attracts woodland species and a grassland that attracts prairie species. About 140 species have been observed along these nature trails, including over 15 species of sparrows. If you live in the Hays area, or passing through, now is a great time to stop and look for migrants attracted to this island of trees in the vastly treeless west.

There are 2 miles of trails on 22 acres of land. For more information visit the [Sternberg Museum website](#). The trails are to the west (left) and a little behind the Sternberg Museum of Natural History (which is itself worth a stop). Look for the large sign pictured above.
3000 Sternberg Dr, Hays, KS
38.890013, -99.300887

Photo by Jackie Augustine

Contact AOK!

Jackie Augustine - Executive Director - General Questions, Programs, Sanctuaries Management jackie@audubonofkansas.org

Kelley Hurst - Director of Philanthropy - Estate Planning, Endowments, Grants, Events, Outreach khurst@audubonofkansas.org

Lana Arrowsmith - Hutton Niobrara Coordinator - Hutton Sanctuary Management & Reservations lanamicheel@gmail.com

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