



**Defending wildlife and habitat
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**Advocacy
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News & Updates: August 2023

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[Visit our website](#)

AOK welcomes Amy Kucera as AOK's first Sanctuary Manager

Audubon of Kansas welcomes Amy Kucera as AOK's first Sanctuary Manager!

As the fifth generation to be raised on a family farm near the Niobrara River in northeast Nebraska, Amy has a passion for prairie conservation. Before joining AOK, she has been the Park Superintendent at Smith Falls State Park and the Executive Director at the John G. Neihardt State Historic Site where she managed operations and habitat restoration while helping visitors have a great experience. She also coordinated book and journal publications as the Associate Editor for the South Dakota Historical Society Press and the Nebraskaland magazine, and organized

cultural educational programs for Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska. Throughout her career in conservation, she has accomplished numerous conservation goals including natural and cultural resource protection, prairie and forest habitat management, prescribed burning, invasive species removal, trail development, property and equipment maintenance, and staff and volunteer coordination.

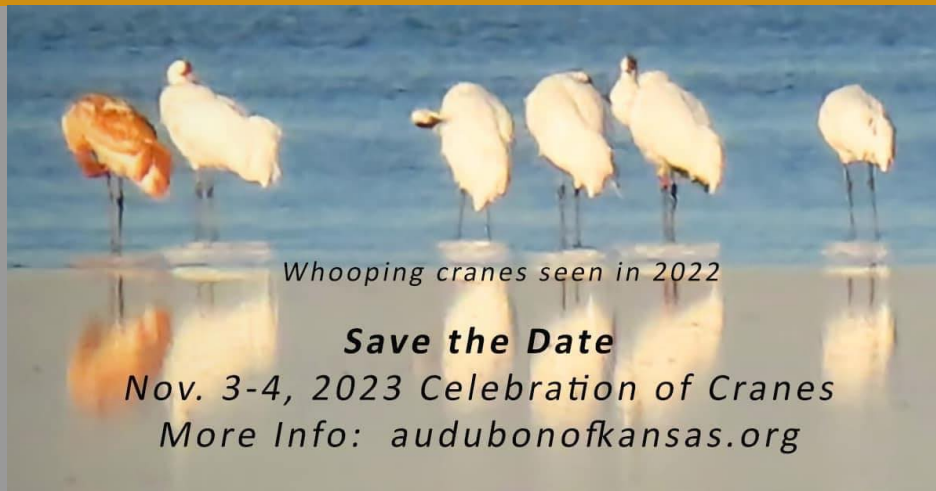
Amy's primary responsibility will be managing The Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary, near Bassett, Nebraska, but she will also be responsible for managing AOK's two sanctuaries in Kansas. The Hutton Sanctuary is a 5,000-acre ranch focused on demonstrating how ranching can support diverse habitat and wildlife that includes mountain lions, elk, waterbirds, and prairie grouse. In 2022, a portion of the Hutton Sanctuary along the Niobrara River was enrolled in the Federal Wetland Reserve Program. Funds acquired from the granting of the conservation easement to the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service and from an endowment to AOK in the estate of the late Jerry Busch have made it possible for AOK to hire its first full-time Sanctuary Manager.



We are so excited to have Amy join Audubon of Kansas!

Welcome Amy to AOK!

Register for Celebration of Cranes



Whooping cranes seen in 2022

Save the Date

Nov. 3-4, 2023 Celebration of Cranes

More Info: audubonofkansas.org

AOK's 6th annual Celebration of Cranes is coming to Sterling College and the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge November 3-4, 2023!

Early November brings thousands of Sandhill Cranes to Kansas and gives birdwatchers the best chance to see Whooping Cranes. In order to help people experience the spectacle that is crane migration, AOK hosts the "Celebration of Cranes", a birdwatching festival. Participants can either reserve a spot in a van or drive themselves through Quivira National Wildlife Refuge. Expert bird watchers will be in the van and at stations along the route to point out and identify the birds present. During the mid-day lull in activity on Saturday, participants will enjoy lunch and talks from experts (see below) at Sterling College in Sterling, KS.

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

Visit the Celebration of Cranes
Website

Register for Celebration of Cranes

Where have all the birds gone?

Around this time of year, I start to get phone calls asking "Where have the birds gone?" This question has multiple possible answers.

After asking for a bit more background, sometimes I find out that the caller is concerned about the lack of birds at their birdfeeder, but they see birds in neighbor's yards. This observation could be due to bad seed or food. Bird seed can go bad if exposed to moisture, with thistle/niger seed the most prone to have a short shelf life. Hummingbird nectar should be replaced weekly if the weather is cool, but daily during hot weather. In this scenario, changing the food should attract birds back to your yard.



Sometimes callers lack birds not only in their own yard, but in their entire neighborhood. This is a bit harder to explain. It could be birds are in adjacent natural areas. There is an abundance of natural food during late summer in the form of insects and seeds, and birds may have shifted their territories to take advantage of this food source and leaving bird feeders to be unused. Additionally, some summer birds may have migrated south, and our winter birds may not have arrived yet, leaving a 'gap' in the number of birds present. Waiting patiently should bring the birds back as the seasons change, and I encourage people to notice if the

same thing happens next year.

If people insist that they usually see lots of birds this time of year, I sadly tell them that they are seeing firsthand the decline of abundance of birds. A study has documented that North America has 3 billion fewer individual birds than it did in 1970. Grassland birds have been particularly hard hit - they have declined 53%. Another study has examined the causes of bird declines: habitat loss, feral cat depredation, window collisions, and increased insecticide/herbicide use are among the factors that are a bit easier to control. Climate change is also having a large impact.

Article by Jackie Augustine
Mallard photo by [David Rintoul](#)

Library patrons eager to learn about Nature Adventurepacks program

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. In August, she talked to 65 patrons at 8 libraries. Below is a current list of presentations for September and October. Check out our Facebook page for updates.



Monday, Sept 11, 7pm: **Coldwater-Wilmore Regional Library**, Coldwater "Beginning Birdwatching"

Tuesday, Sept 12, 2pm: **Dudley Township Public Library**, Satanta "Beginning Birdwatching"

Tuesday, Sept 12, 7pm: **Stanton County Public Library**, Johnson City "Beginning Birdwatching"

Wednesday, Sept 13, 11am: **Kismet City Library**, Kismet "Beginning Birdwatching"

Wednesday, Sept 13, 6pm: **Finney County Public Library**, Garden City "Hummingbirds"

Wednesday, Oct 11, noon: **Hamilton County Library**, Syracuse

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

Below: The AOK Bronco at Rolla, Plains, and Liberal Memorial Libraries



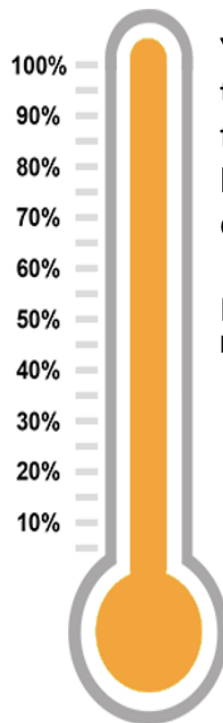
Learn more about the Nature
Adventurepack Program

Check out AOK's events page

Philanthropy Central: THANK YOU! Summer campaign for fire equipment a success

\$14,518

Goal: \$12800



You helped us burn right
through our goal! Thank you
for supporting our controlled
burn – prairie fire –
campaign!

It's not too late to give

<https://www.audubonofkansas.org/donate>



Powered by Silent Partner

Thank you so much! It is with generous donors like you that AOK is able to manage the habitat at our sanctuaries to reduce woody encroachment of our prairies.

Bobwhite quail, prairie-chickens, and sharp-tailed grouse thank you!!

It's not too late to give.

- 1) Donate now to help us purchase the equipment
- 2) Donate your used equipment (Contact Jackie)
- 3) Register your interest in being trained as a volunteer to work prescribed burns (helping before burns to prepare fire breaks, during burns to manage fire and assist

in logistics and monitoring, after the fire watching for flare ups and repairing equipment). (Contact [Kelley](#))

Donate to help us use fire to maintain healthy grasslands and forests

Save the Date!

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

September 10: Achterberg Work Day 10am-3pm

September 25-29: Hutton Work Week

Oct 1: Open House at Hutton

Oct 21: Bird banding demonstration at Achterberg

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

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

Hutton is AOK's sanctuary near Bassett, Nebraska

Achterberg is AOK's sanctuary near Lincoln, Kansas

All ages enjoyed 'Butterflies, Beetles, & Bugs - Oh My!' at Mount Mitchell Heritage Prairie

Despite the heat, about 25 people attended the afternoon 'bug walk' at Mount Mitchell Heritage Prairie in early August. Naturalists of all ages enjoyed hearing about the insects that participants found. The highlight of the afternoon was a Giant Prairie Robber Fly that was eating a cicada.

A smaller group gathered in the evening to see what insects were attracted to black light. Around 10:30pm things got exciting as new species started showing up. As we were reluctantly started packing up around 11:30pm due to an approaching thunderstorm, a rare mole cricket appeared.

AOK thanks Eric and Heidi Eaton for sharing their knowledge with us!



Mole Cricket
(photo by Heidi Eaton)



Robber fly with a cicada

White-lined Sphinx

Achterberg Work Day

Sunday September 10

10am-2pm

Lunch provided

950 N 170th Rd, Lincoln KS



We are having a work day at AOK's sanctuary, the Achterberg Wildlife-Friendly Demonstration Farm, on Sunday, May 7 from 10am-3pm.

With the help of volunteers, we will be doing maintenance on 1 mile of trail, clearing a new 0.2 mile section of trail, and removing invasive elm that is taking over our prairie habitat buffers. If you want something that's a little easier, you could pull garlic mustard (an invasive herb) or use iNaturalist to document the plants and animals using the area. We should have enough equipment for everyone, but workers may want to bring work gloves, pruners, loppers, chainsaws and string trimmers if they have them. Lunch will be provided.

Meet at the trailhead 0.5 miles north of the intersection of 170th Rd and Iron Dr., just south of the bridge. Contact Jackie via email or phone 785-537-4385 with questions. This is a great opportunity to help wildlife and see the wonderful riparian woods and prairie buffer strips which support Connie Achterberg's favorite bird, Northern Bobwhite quail.

Open House at Hutton

Sunday, October 1

1-4pm

Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary near Bassett, Nebraska

(directions provided when RSVP received)



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

Call, text, or email Jackie at jackie AT audubonofkansas DOT org or 537-4385 (area code 785) to RSVP.

Hutton Work Fun Week

September 25-30

Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife
Sanctuary near Bassett, Nebraska
(directions provided when RSVP
received)

Our 'work' weeks are growing in popularity! And who wouldn't want to come? You get access to a 5000 acre wildlife sanctuary that is not open to the public. You feel good doing habitat improvements for wildlife and making the place more comfortable for visitors. Most importantly, you get to hang out with others that love nature - just like you!



Volunteers generally arrive Monday afternoon. There is an orientation to the place and a nice dinner. Tuesday through Thursday, we start our day with doing 'work' while the temperatures are tolerable outside. We have a variety of work so that all skill levels can participate. Work generally involves cutting cedars for habitat improvement, sorting and documenting Hutton artifacts, and other odd jobs.

The afternoons and evenings, you are on your own. You can go for a hike, look for wildlife, or just relax on the porch.

Free lodging will be provided to volunteers in our two guest houses. They are complete with a full kitchen, a private bedroom, shared bathrooms, and plenty of space to relax. AOK will provide dinners, but volunteers should bring their own food for breakfast and lunch. Volunteers may also want to bring work gloves, hiking shoes, binoculars, insect repellent, sunscreen, and any other equipment needed for a safe and comfortable time outside.

Hutton is near Bassett, NE. Opportunities to carpool may be available. Directions provided when RSVP received. Volunteers can help out for longer or shorter periods of time if they cannot stay the entire week. RSVP is required to participate in this event. Call, 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.

Audubon chapter leaders throughout the state met in Strong City at their beautifully renovated historic train depot. Leaders meet monthly virtually, but they cherish the time they are able to get together in person to discuss important topics. The morning was spent talking about successes of local chapters as well as honoring the conservation legacy of Audubon while reconciling the abhorrent views and actions of John James Audubon. After a wonderful pot luck lunch, leaders discussed how to attract new members and leaders to chapters. We were joined by Amberle Smith, a recent KU graduate, and Brandon Franta, a graduate student at Emporia State. We thank them for sharing their insights about ways to reach out to students and early professionals.



AOK shares favorite birding spots!



Lakeview Playa a must-stop birding location on a road trip in southwest Kansas

Playas are seasonal wetlands that can be dry for many years. There are several playas in the area south and east of Meade, but at 1 mile long and a half mile wide, Lakeview Playa is one of the largest. When water is present during migration, thousands of waterfowl and shorebirds stop for a rest. Even endangered Whooping Cranes have been sighted on the lake periodically. In summer, look for nesting White-faced Ibis, Cattle Egrets, Black-crowned Night-Herons, Ruddy Ducks,

Mallards, and Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal. In winter, Short-eared Owls may be seen hunting here at dusk.

When I had the opportunity to visit the area, I was drawn to how close you could get to birds without leaving your car. When you park with the windows down, it was as if you were invisible. I got excellent views of endangered Least Terns, Black Terns, and cute American Coots; while being serenaded by secretive Sora. I was so enamored with the site that I visited during each of the three mornings I was in the area.

Lakeview Playa is 4 miles east of Meade on the southside of US 160. There is good viewing from US 160 or County Road 26.
37.283256, -100.199761

Photo and text 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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