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**Advocacy
Conservation
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News & Updates: February 2022

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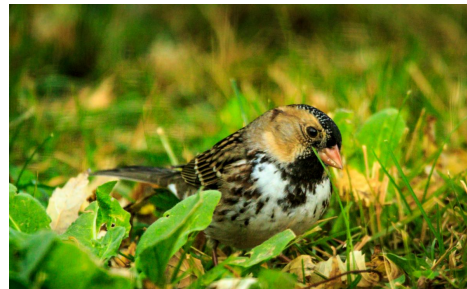
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Participate in the 25th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count, February 18-21

Who goes bird watching in February? There are many excuses not to go... It is too early for migration. It's too early for breeding (for most species), so many birds aren't singing. Besides, it is just darn cold outside!

However, intrepid birders are sure to be rewarded! Some species are only in Kansas in winter, like the dapper Harris's Sparrow (photo by Jay Dee Miller). There are no

leaves on the trees to hinder viewing. As water freezes over to our north, birds fly to Kansas and areas farther south and congregate near open water.



Despite all the potential rewards, you may still need extra motivation to head out. The [Great Backyard Bird Count](#) provides such motivation. Not only will you benefit from the fresh air, but you can also contribute your sightings to a project 25 years in the making. Scientists started this event when they realized that [Breeding Bird Surveys](#) were great for recording the abundance and distribution of breeding birds, but there was nothing quite like it for winter birds. ([Christmas Bird Counts](#) are sometimes too early to detect a lot of wintering birds as they are still migrating.) To participate, all you need to do is 1) Decide where to watch birds, 2) Watch for 15 minutes or more, 3) Report your sightings on [Merlin Bird ID](#) or [eBird](#).

Anyone can participate. There are awesome tutorials for beginners on how to use the Merlin Bird ID app to identify birds. For experienced bird watchers, there is information on using eBird via an app or your computer. There is even a [webinar](#) to "brush up on bird ID, unlock the mystery of bird songs, and practice counting birds no matter how large the flock or busy the feeder."

[Click here to learn more about the Great Backyard Bird Count](#)

Jerry Thomas is the featured artist at Kansas Lek Treks Prairie-Chicken Festival!



KANSAS LEK TREKS

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The stunning depictions of the wildlife, landscapes, history and personalities of the American West have garnered renowned artist, sculptor and historian **Jerry Thomas** wide acclaim. His attention and passion for accurately capturing, portraying and researching his subjects are hallmarks of his beautifully designed images.

Through his artwork, Jerry has helped fund and promote the preservation of important wildlife habitat restoration projects in the U.S., Mexico and Canada and has been instrumental in the preservation of national landmarks and historic sites.

Jerry's boyhood home, Scott City, Kansas and the State of Kansas honored him with the building of the Jerry Thomas Gallery and Collection in 2010. Beautifully created with Native American Southwest architecture, the Gallery not only displays his incredible original paintings and sculpture, but also houses Jerry's amazing world-class Western historical collection. The treasured collection showcases items from Lt. Col. George A. Custer's Seventh U.S. Cavalry, Little Big Horn Battlefield, Punished Woman's Fork Battlefield, Civil War (Gettysburg), Cowboy Trails artifacts and one-of-a-kind amazing Plains Indian items, including Northern Cheyenne, Sioux, Kiowa and Comanche artifacts.

All registrants for the 2022 Kansas Lek Treks/Prairie-Chicken festival will receive a signed and numbered Jerry Thomas print with their registration. The print features a Greater Prairie-Chicken and is part of the Kansas Wildlife Art series.



Why is the Prairie-Chicken Festival so important?

We need to learn from Missouri's failed attempt to preserve Greater Prairie-Chickens in its state. Wayne, an AOK member from Missouri, recently told us, "I used to have the largest Greater Prairie-Chicken lek in Missouri with 49 males on my land. I haven't had any in 6 years."



Lesser Prairie-Chickens are being considered for listing in Kansas as a 'threatened' species under the federal Endangered Species Act. Many landowners view prairie-chickens, especially Lesser Prairie-Chickens, as a way for the federal government to impose even more restrictions on what they can do with their land. Audubon of Kansas wants landowners to view Lesser Prairie-Chickens as indicators of healthy cattle-grazed rangelands and to value them for their aesthetic beauty. Additionally, offering viewing opportunities could be a source of income in the spring. With only about 40,000 Lesser Prairie-Chickens left in the wild, and >95% of Lesser Prairie-Chicken habitat on private land, it is imperative that we connect with willing landowners to save the species while there is still time to do so.

Kansas Lek Treks Prairie-Chicken Festival will attract bird watchers from across the United States. Press releases will inform local landowners, business people, and the public about these fascinating birds. All this positive press about Lesser Prairie-Chickens should motivate people to find out more about what they can do to save this species before it disappears, like the Greater Prairie-Chickens did in Missouri.

**Get your Audubon of Kansas
and Kansas Lek Treks Merchandise**



What you need to know:

- 1) Orders will be printed after the ordering period closes. Orders placed within the next few days will start shipping on Feb 17th.
- 2) Go to our [store](#) to order.



[Visit our store](#)

Chapter Spotlight: Jayhawk Audubon Society hosts a Nature Photography Exhibition



Jayhawk Audubon Society is hosting a nature photography exhibition that is open to all nature photographers. This is not a photography contest but an exhibition and an opportunity for photographers to get exposure to their work. The exhibition supports the general programming of Jayhawk Audubon, which includes educational programs, field trips, and conservation projects. To learn more about Jayhawk's work, click [here](#).

AOK shares favorite walks, hikes and birding spots



Smoky Valley Ranch is located in southern Logan County, Kansas. The hiking trails are located on the west side of the ranch, along County Road 350, between Plains Road and Indian Road.

Coordinates of the trailhead:
Lat/Long 38.8875459 -101.018183

Photo taken from [The Nature Conservancy's website](#).

Information from:
Conard and Conard (2015) [Kansas Trail Guide](#). University of Kansas Press.

[Smoky Valley Ranch Hiking Trails brochure](#)

Made up of expansive grasslands and chalk bluffs overlooking the Smoky Hill River, Smoky Valley Ranch is home to prairie-chickens, pronghorn, mule and white-tail deer, ferruginous hawks, burrowing owls, golden eagles and swift fox. The over 17,000 acres is managed by The Nature Conservancy. A portion of this landscape can be explored via two trails conveniently called the Short Loop and the Long Loop. The Short Loop is about 1 mile and passes by Cretaceous formations where large marine reptiles, sharks, and giant clams have been found. The Long Loop is 5.3 miles and passes a site where University of Kansas scientists excavated bones from 10 giant bison and a spear point.

There is little protection and no amenities along the trail, so it is best enjoyed with an empty bladder, sunscreen in summer, and warm, wind-resistant clothes in winter. It is a working cattle ranch, so you may be watched by some curious cattle. In summer, watch out for rattlesnakes especially at dawn and dusk.

Contact AOK

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