



**Defending wildlife and habitat  
through:**

**Advocacy  
Conservation  
Education**

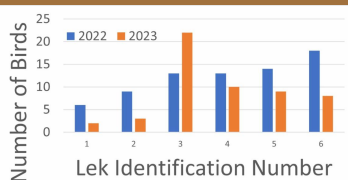
## News & Updates: March 2023

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[Visit our website](#)

## Lesser Prairie-Chicken Update



### Numbers Plummet Due to Ongoing Drought

Western Kansas is experiencing the worst drought in a decade. The drought started last summer

### Officially Federally Threatened in Kansas

On March 27, Lesser Prairie-Chickens officially became a federally threatened species in Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, and northern Texas. The population in New Mexico and western Texas was given endangered status.

AOK hopes that this listing



### Participants ready to flock to Kansas Lek Treks

Word has gotten out! The place to see Lesser and Greater Prairie-Chickens is the Kansas Lek Treks

and continued through the winter.

Drought not only stresses adult prairie-chickens, it can kill chicks directly due to exposure and indirectly through declines in insect and plant abundance and quality. Adult male survival is around 50% in a normal year, so lek size is maintained only when chicks survive to adulthood.

In preparation for the Kansas Lek Treks Festival, AOK Executive Director Jackie Augustine has been in western Kansas assessing populations and determining tour locations. Five of the six leks used last year have experienced declines, two of which are down to 2-3 birds.

will not only encourage oil, wind, solar, and transmission lines to be developed outside the the range of the Lesser Prairie-Chicken, but it will also provide additional sources of funding for private lands conservation.



Festival! We thought last year was successful with 90 people attending from 25 different states. This year, over 130 people have registered and most tours are sold out.

Although most tours are sold out for this year's festival, there is still an opportunity to see Tiffany Kersten speak at our banquet about "Birdie Big Year: Elevating Women Birders"

When: Saturday April 15 at 6pm

Where: Sternberg Museum of Natural History in Hays (3000 Sternberg Drive, Hays, KS 67601). Banquet tickets include a catered meal.

[Click here to see current drought conditions in Kansas](#)

[More information about Lesser Prairie-Chicken Listing](#)

[Sign up for the banquet with Tiffany Kersten](#)

## Farm Bill provides opportunities for private lands conservation

It is now 2023 and time to update the 2018 Farm Bill. Farm Bills pass every 5-7 years. Now that the Republicans have taken over the U.S. House of Representatives, questions remain how partisan or bi-partisan will the process be to arrive at a consensus?

Farm Bills drive cropping patterns in Kansas. Annual Farm Bill payments in Kansas total \$1+ Billion and 75% of these farm programs are commodity payments and subsidized crop insurance that go for four crops – wheat, corn, soybeans and sorghum. 88% of these farm payments go to just 20% of Kansas farms thus driving further consolidation. In 2017, Kansas had \$18.78 Billion in farm sales and 2,881 farms (5% of farms) accounted for 75% of these farm sales.



15-20% of these annual Farm Bill farm subsidies go for conservation programs. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) – created in 1985 - idles land for 10-15 years for wildlife habitat and ecosystem restoration. Today Kansas has 1.7 million acres in CRP. The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) – developed in 2008 – provides funding for working farms and their whole-farm conservation plans. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides funding for one-time conservation projects on working farms. In 2020, CRP + CSP + EQIP in Kansas

totaled over \$200 million.

CRP is an entitlement fully funded program that is being expanded from 24 million acres to 27 million acres nationally this year with an emphasis on grasslands and climate impacts. Unfortunately, CSP and EQIP are underfunded. In 2020, only 18% of eligible CSP applicants in Kansas were funded and only 23% of eligible Kansas EQIP applicants were funded. The good news is that in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), EQIP received an additional \$8.5 Billion and CSP an additional \$3.5 Billion over five years.

There should be a Farm Bill Summit this summer or fall with the key Congressional members (Rep. Mann and Rep. Davids are on the House Agriculture committee, Sen. Marshall is on the Senate Agriculture committee and Sen. Moran on agriculture appropriations), the Farm Service Agency director (that administers CRP), the NRCS director (that administers CSP and EQIP) and Kansas Legislative leaders. Feel free to reach out to these legislators and let them know the importance of increasing funding for CRP, CSP, and EQIP programs.

Text adapted from the [Kansas Rural Center](#) Legislative Updates

Video on how the Farm Bill supports farmers and birds by the American Bird Conservancy

## Mountain Bluebirds visit Hutton Sanctuary



We had an unusual visitor to Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary: Mountain Bluebirds. These birds tend to be nomadic in winter, and were likely just passing through ahead of a strong cold front that blew through the area the next day. Unlike Eastern and Western Bluebirds, Mountain Bluebirds do not have a rusty orange breast. Their breast is similar in color to their back - a shade of cerulean blue. Females and juveniles tend to be more gray than blue. Like Eastern and Western Bluebirds, they nest in cavities and utilize bird houses when available.

Photo by JK Augustine

Latest *Prairie Wings* has something for everyone!



Editor Michael Donnelly did another fantastic job producing this year's *Prairie Wings*. Members should have received a copy in the mail. Articles include:

- Update on Nature Adventurepacks
- A Biography of Founding Board Member, Bob McElroy
- AOK's Advocacy mission
- Update on AOK's sanctuaries highlighting the wildlife monitoring programs
- Standing ground with Prairie Dogs in Lane County
- The hazard of Neonicotinoids on insects, birds, and ecosystems
- Description of the history and ecology of Cross Timbers
- A tale of extreme weather and the Grasshopper Sparrow
- And more!



[Browse previous Prairie Wings](#)

## Philanthropy Central: Did you get your Prairie Wings?



The latest issue of *Prairie Wings* was mailed out a few weeks ago. Did you get yours yet? If not, you may need to renew your membership.

What does April bring? Showers? Hopefully! And Earth Day! Watch for the opportunity to celebrate Kansas and invest in our planet for Earth Day on April 22.



Kelley is happy to answer all your questions about membership:

Kelley Hurst  
Director of Philanthropy  
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785.917.0400

[Click HERE](#) to join AOK and get your copy of *Prairie Wings*!

## Save the Date!

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

your calendar!

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

April 15: [Banquet with Tiffany Kirsten](#)

April 22: Earth Day, Topeka Zoo, 9am-3pm

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

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

## See Sharp-tailed Grouse at AOK's Hutton Sanctuary in Nebraska NOW through May 8



Reservations are now being accepted for opportunities to view Sharp-tailed Grouse at AOK's Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary. Tours are happening now through May 8. You will get amazing views as the males strut their stuff to attract a female. The males' synchronized dancing is a spectacle unique to this grouse species. You will view the birds from a blind where males may approach as close as 20 feet!

We provide the blind, a chair, and a guide so you don't get lost in the dark! Lodging available for an additional fee.

All proceeds support Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary.

[Click here for more information about Sharp-tailed Grouse tours](#)

## Visit AOK at the Topeka Zoo on Earth Day!

Get ready to celebrate our planet at the Topeka Zoo! Join us for our "Party for the Planet" Earth Day celebration ☐ From games to eco-friendly activities, we've got a full day of fun planned. Let's work together to protect our planet and make every day Earth Day!

Board member George LeRoux will be representing AOK. He will be there with bison hides and skulls, and tell you fascinating



stories about bison.

When: April 22, 9am - 3pm  
Where: Topeka Zoo, 635 SW  
Gage Boulevard, Topeka  
Cost: Included with zoo  
admission



## AOK-sponsored Trip to Guatemala!



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! Click the link below for more information.

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

[Click HERE](#) for more information about the Guatemala trip

## Chapter Spotlight: Burroughs Audubon Society of Greater Kansas City supports Nature Adventurepacks in Linn, Miami, and Wyandotte Counties

Burroughs Audubon Society of Greater Kansas City funded the roll-out of the Nature Adventurepack program in their area. Libraries in Wyandotte, Linn, and Miami Counties will receive their adventurepacks this spring. A Johnson County roll-out is expected in the fall.

The program provides backpacks with adult and children's binoculars and fold-out field guides to birds, butterflies, and the moon to libraries. Patrons are able to check out the supplies just like library books.

The chapter is also actively involved with environmental advocacy and conservation.

Photo: Janet Reynolds of the La Cygne Library accepts 12 backpacks from AOK Executive Director Jackie Augustine to be dispersed among libraries in Linn and Miami Counties.



Visit Burroughs Audubon Society's  
website

Visit Burroughs Audubon Society's  
Facebook page

## AOK shares favorite walks, hikes and birding spots!

**See signs of beaver at  
Spring Creek Wildlife  
Observation Trail on the  
south side of Cheney  
Reservoir (south-central  
Kansas)**

Discover this 0.7-mile out-and-back trail near Cheney, Kansas. This trail is great for birding and walking, and it's unlikely you'll encounter many other people while exploring. Dogs are welcome, but must be on a leash.



This path is a short nature trail for watching birds or the various creatures of the marsh. An elevated boardwalk takes you into the heart of the swamp without ever getting your feet wet. It is recommended that folks walk the path to the end of the woods and then walk the trail in reverse. However, the parking area is a short walk out to the street from the end of the trail.

Board Member and Treasurer Tom Ewert recommends this trail because you can always see signs of beaver activity. Look for the pointed stumps or wood chips near a tree in progress. It is also reliable for winter wrens. There is a playground nearby and other trails that open to a beach on the lake to look for Ring-billed Gulls. Once he saw Great Horned, Barred and Eastern Screech Owls on the same day in the vicinity of this trail!

GPS Location: N37 43.586 W97 50.275

[Click here for a google map](#)

Information from [Alltrails.com](https://www.alltrails.com)

Photo from <https://wichitaonthecheap.com/spring-creek-nature-trail-at-cheney-reservoir/>

## Contact AOK!

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