

Prairie Wings

Fall 2002

A Visit to the Hutton Ranch

by Bob McElroy, Vice Chairman, Board of Trustees

At five a.m. I am out of the sack and headed to the farm with a borrowed truck and horse trailer. This is to be the start of an eight-hour drive to north central Nebraska to visit a ranch on the Niobrara River. At the farm the horses are easily caught and to my surprise easily loaded on the trailer after only a moment's hesitation, and the bribe of a bucket of oats. An hour later we are at Ron's south place next to the Konza prairie. Strider, my big Tennessee Walker, shows his impatience by pounding the floor with his front foot. Ron appears and his Appaloosa mare is loaded and we are on the way.

Continued on page 5

Are Wild Turkeys Really Velociraptors with Feathers?

by Ron Klataske, Executive Director

My Audubon of Kansas cap features a Greater Prairie Chicken. But there are times when it might be as appropriate to be sporting a hat from the Wild Turkey Federation or Quail Unlimited. Whether I am talking to fellow farm landowners, friends from Topeka who are physicians by profession but hunters by avocation, or the barbers at the Aggieville barber shop in Manhattan, I am frequently asked to verify or respond to the now-common belief that the increase in Wild Turkeys is responsible for the widespread decline in Bobwhite Quail populations. Even the lady sales clerk at Wolf's Camera raised the prospect.

Continued on page 15

Birding Kansas Nets 225 Species

--Setting New State Record--in One Extraordinary Day

by Mike Rader

The "Big Day" team of Mark Robbins, Roger McNeill, and Mike Rader set a new record for number of bird species seen in Kansas for a single 24-hour period on Monday, May 13th, 2002. The impressive total of 225 breaks the old record of 210 species, set in 2000 by the team of Robbins, Rader, Chris Hobbs and Sebastian Patti. Team leader Mark Robbins, is a professional ornithologist at the University of Kansas, while McNeill is an ECO-Tourism Guide based in the Kansas City area. Mike Rader is employed by the Kansas Dept. of Wildlife & Parks at Wilson State Park. The participants aren't nearly as varied as the birds they identified, because they all share a passion for birds and bird watching.

Continued on page 21

Inside:

AOK Ornithological
Library.....Page 2

7th Annual Kaw Valley
Eagles Day.....Page 2

Xeriscaping in Kansas
with Ambrosia
Trifida.....Page 3

Flint Hills Poster
Available.....Page 4

View From the Prairie
.....Page 8

Prairie Birding & Flora
Trails.....Page 10

The High Stakes Game
for the Future of the
Flint Hills.....Page 11

Wind Turbines & Prairie
Chickens..... Page 14

KDOT and Audubon
Society Hatch
Partnership...Page 18

Clyde's Prairie - a poem
.....Page 20

AOK Is On The
Way.....Page 24

Board of Trustees

Dudley Alexander, Platte City, MO
Harold W. Andersen, Omaha, NE
Phillip L. Baker, M.D., Topeka
Bernita Berntsen, M.D., Berryton
William R. Browning, M.D., Madison
Carol Cumberland, Wichita
Joyce Davis, Dodge City
Kristine B. Davis, Hutchinson
Ernest Hasch, Bassett, NE
Donald E. Heikes, Lenora
Irwin Hoogheem, Ogden/Manhattan
Patricia Marlett, Wichita
Eddie J. McCullough, Kansas City
Robert T. McElroy, M.D., Topeka
Jan Meyers, Overland Park
A. Scott Ritchie, Wichita
Robert J. Robel, Manhattan
Wesley Sandall, Bassett, NE
John Schukman, Leavenworth
Richard Seaton, Manhattan
Ron Slaymaker, Ed.D., Emporia
Gordon Stockemer, Wichita
Marge Streckfus, Salina
Richard G. Tucker, Parsons
Elsie Vail, Altamont
William G. Watson, Wichita
Joe Werner, Kansas City
Paul M. Willis, Topeka
Bruce Wilson, Manhattan
Joyce A. Wolf, Lawrence
Charles E. Wright, Lincoln, NE

Executive Committee

Dick Seaton, Chairman
Robert T. McElroy, Vice Chairman
Patricia Marlett, Secretary
Bruce Wilson, Treasurer
William R. Browning, Past Chairman
Dudley Alexander
Carol Cumberland

Staff

Ron Klataske, Executive Director,
ron_klataske@audubonofkansas.org
Ferdouz Vuillienet, Office &
Communications Coordinator
ferdouz@audubonofkansas.org

210 Southwind Place,
Manhattan, KS 66503
785-537-4385

www.audubonofkansas.org

AOK's Great Plains Partnership Program

In recognition of the establishment of the Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary, and the AOK Great Plains Partnership Program, the Audubon of Kansas Board of Trustees has been expanded to include additional members from Nebraska and adjacent states.

AOK Ornithological Library - Menninger Collection

Dr. Walter Menninger recently donated his private collection of bird books to Audubon of Kansas. We are proud to have these informative books, some quite rare and historical, available in our Ornithological Library. AOK members as well as other interested birders, students and visitors are welcome to come and read in the office library.

For a full listing of Audubon of Kansas' Menninger Collection of bird books by author or category please visit <http://www.audubonofkansas.org/pages/library.html>. You might catch sight of something rare. Thank you, Dr. Menninger.

We welcome contributions. Audubon of Kansas welcomes contributions to our Ornithological Library. If you would like to donate any books related to Kansas birds, wildlife or flora please contact us so that we can receive your donation.

7th Annual Kaw Valley Eagles Day



Plan to travel to Lawrence on Sunday, January 26, 2003 for Jayhawk Audubon Society's 7th Annual Kaw Valley Eagles Day. The event is held at the Douglas County Fairgrounds. Each year approximately one thousand people of all ages take part in the festivities which feature live Bald Eagles and other wild animals; interesting speakers; and educational displays from community groups, along with local, state, and federal agencies. Weather permitting, opportunities to view Bald Eagles in the wild are provided by US Army Corps of Engineers staff at Clinton Lake.

One of the highlights of the day is the performance by the members of the Thunderbird Theater, a dance and storytelling troupe from Haskell Indian Nations University. The group has performed at Lincoln Center and other prestigious locations throughout the country. Other fascinating speakers include: Thor Holmes, KU Museum of Natural History; Bob Gress, director of the Great Plains Nature Center in Wichita; Mike Watkins, Wildlife Biologist for the USACOE; and Marty Birell, Director of the Prairie Park Nature Center in Lawrence.

Editing, layout and design for this newsletter was done by **Patty Marlett**.

Xeriscaping in Kansas with *Ambrosia Trifida*

by Bill Browning, Board of Trustees

Jennifer thinks our yard resembles an abandoned construction site and refers to the vegetation generally as "Kudzu." When we moved to the ranch 25 years ago we divided up the responsibilities for interior decorating and outside landscaping. This worked fine at first when I mowed everything on our two or three acre yard. But mowing is so boring and hot that I began to mow less and less. Pure stands of brome grass grew up all around the yard and these became boring, too. So I smothered the brome with discarded plastic sheeting and even used some Roundup.

In it's place I planted a lot of brush that I dug up in our woods and a lot of the stuff the Kansas State Forestry Extension Service sells. But on most of the area I did nothing but remove the grass and was rewarded with a luxurious growth beyond my expectations. The dense greenery is up to twelve feet tall and in places nearly impenetrable. In wet seasons it makes me feel like I'm in the tropics.



The most successful plants in my spontaneous jungle have been Yellow Ironweed, tall thistle, Pokeweed (a beautiful perennial that looks like a huge succulent with racemes of purple berries), groves of asters and White Snakeroot, beautiful stands of American Germander with their attendant bumblebees, and Three-seeded Mercury. My most magnificent plants however are the *Ambrosia trifida*, tall, thick, covered today with blooms and entwined with bur cucumbers up to 15 feet long. Never has Giant Ragweed formed such a beautiful stand.

Ease of maintenance is the character of any xeriscape and mine is no exception. There is no planting, no fertilizing, no watering and no weeding (there would be nothing left). Once in a while I do have to chop it back a little.

Through all this I have mowed narrow, grassy paths, perfect for early morning coffee sipping strolls and a fascinating diversity of birds, mammals, insects and reptiles.

Thank you, Jennifer.

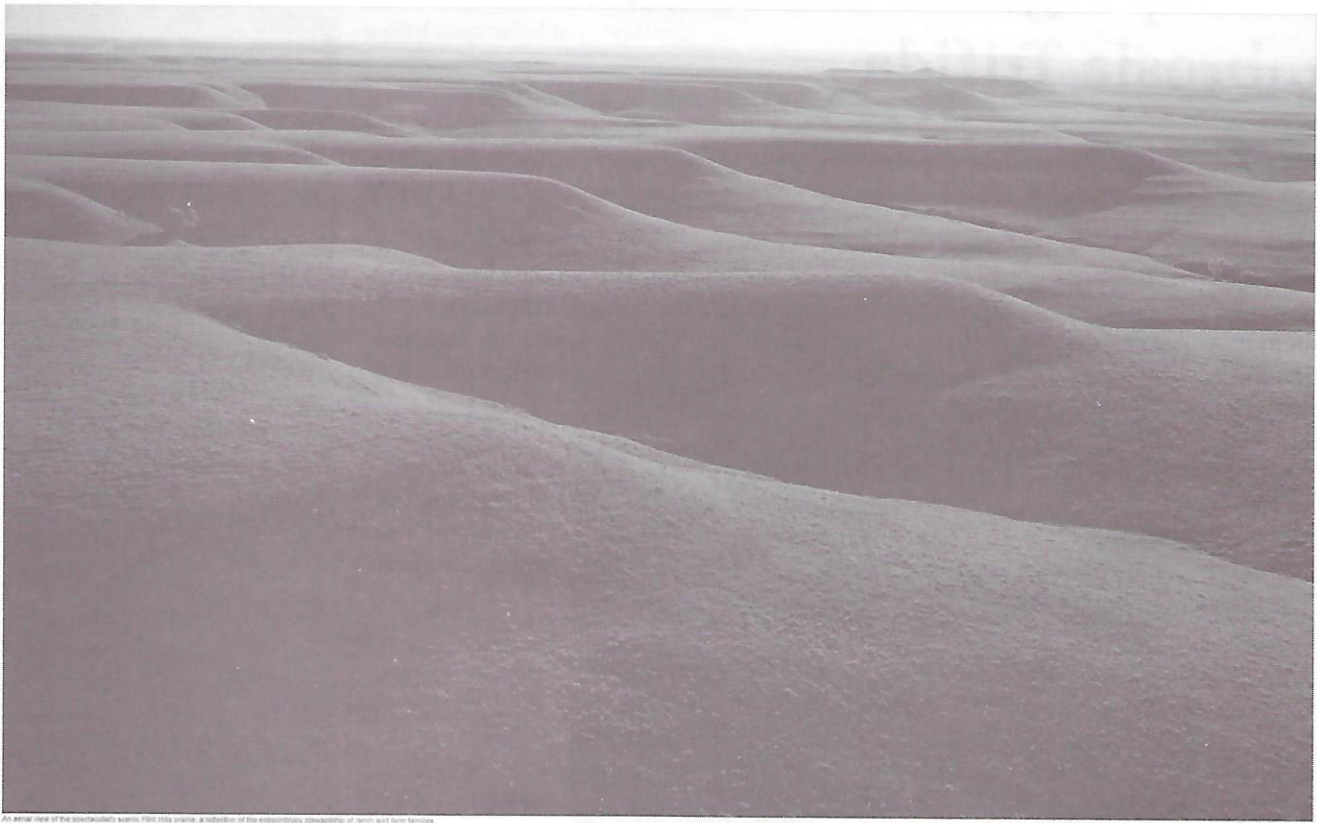
The Next Issue

The next edition of *Prairie Wings* will include a list of all 2001/2002 supporters of Audubon of Kansas; an in-depth article on the exciting 4,500 acre Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary; an update on the Kansas Birding and Prairie Flora Trails project; an insightful article on Prairie Chickens in Kansas; an article outlining things that rural landowners can do (and are doing) to improve habitat for Bobwhite Quail and other grassland/shrub bird species; and much more. Please submit ideas, letters or articles for consideration.

Audubon of Kansas

"The black prairie soil was built by the prairie plants, a hundred distinctive species of grasses, herbs, and shrubs; by the prairie fungi, insects, and bacteria; by the prairie mammals and birds; all interlocked in one humming community of cooperation."

Aldo Leopold, 1953



An aerial view of the spectacularly scenic Flint Hills prairie, a reflection of the extraordinary stewardship of ranch and farm families.

Photo by Pam Karaman

Please Help

PROTECT THE FLINT HILLS



Protected by generations of ranch and farm families dedicated to a way of life and stewardship for a unique place of life, the Flint Hills represents the last stand of tallgrass prairie on a landscape scale in North America, and one of the last strongholds of the Greater Prairie Chicken. Please express support to landowners who preserve the natural and pastoral character of this serene land. We applaud ranchers and farmers who manage native rangelands with sustainable grazing and appropriate burning

practices, protect the prairie from invasive trees and noxious weeds, avoid broadcast applications of herbicides that compromise diverse prairie plant communities, and avoid plowing of prairie hay meadows. We also commend all who preserve historic limestone barns, houses and irreplaceable rock fences. We are greatly indebted to landowners who are willing to forgo the financial lure of destructive leases for industrial wind turbine complex developments and speculative coal methane gas

extraction. Industrial wind turbine complexes threaten to tower over the landscape of neighbors and impair the beauty of vast areas with 350 foot (35 stories) and taller turbines by day and mar the skies by night with intrusive strobe lights. In combination with maintenance roads, the turbines would severely fragment this unique prairie ecosystem in ways that may render areas uninhabitable for prairie chickens, hazardous for many other birds, and uninviting to people. Wind energy development is a commendable objective when

"wind farms" are appropriately sited within industrial areas or large expanses of cultivated land. However, the State of Kansas needs planning protocols for siting of industrial wind turbine complexes. We also need proactive programs to enhance opportunities for landowners to sell or donate conservation easements on native grasslands as an alternative to industrial developments and subdivisions. As Walt Whitman observed in 1873 the "Prairies and Plains...make North America's characteristic landscape"

"PROTECT THE FLINT HILLS" (PH: 1 Box 11, Cedar Point KS 66043, 820-274-4327) is a grassroots organization of ranch and farm families dedicated to stewardship.

Poster produced by Audubon of Kansas, Inc. (PO: Box 105, Manhattan KS 66505-0105, 785-537-4385, www.audubonofkansas.org) in partnership with Flint Hills landowners.

Flint Hills Poster Available

As part of AOK's campaign to protect the Flint Hills from potentially destructive industrial wind turbine developments, we have produced the spectacular poster shown above, featuring a beautiful view of the Flint Hills prairie. If you are interested in receiving a copy please contact your local Audubon chapter or Audubon of Kansas.

We are making the posters available gratis to supporters of the cause, but a donation of \$1.00 per poster is greatly appreciated and very helpful to cover the cost of production. In order for one or more posters to be mailed to you, please send AOK \$5.00 to cover the cost of postage and packaging. The maximum number of posters fitting in a mailing tube is ten. Thanks for your support!

Kansas Wildflower Poster

Audubon of Kansas and local Audubon chapters throughout the state will also soon have available the new color posters produced by KDOT and KTA featuring Kansas Wildflowers, Native Grasses & Shrubs. It is the poster side of the "Returning to Prairie by Design" brochure.



A Visit to the Hutton Ranch, continued from page 1

The road leads north through the remnant of the Smoky Hills and the broken prairie of north central Kansas. We cross into Nebraska north of Washington County and soon the cornfields stretch to the horizon with little between the fields but a few ditches and roads at the mile marker. Both dry land corn and irrigated corn are present for long miles without a break of trees, pasture, river or prairie. A corn desert, as described by Ron, a tribute to government subsidies and deep well irrigation. We cross the Platte River with its braided channels. At Ansley we leave Route 2 and begin to enter the Sand Hills of Nebraska. The cornfields are less frequent, all irrigated, and with enlarging scenes of open prairie. By three pm we are in Basset, just south of the Niobrara River and about 30 miles from the South Dakota border.

Basset is a small Nebraska cow and farming town that has seen better times, but clings to its cowboy past and hopes things will improve. For us, the two important sites are the Bassett Hotel and the sale barn where we can leave our horses at night. The hotel is of 1920's vintage with small clean rooms and amenities that have not changed since the hotel was built. Richard Lackaff is owner and proprietor. Although he owns a twenty thousand acre ranch south of town, he frequently runs the hotel desk. The main feature of the hotel is his collection of cowboy art, including copies of early Remington bronzes and a long hall of western prints. I spent a half hour one evening admiring this collection. The restaurant occupies the north rooms where the locals gather every morning to discuss cattle, the current status of naturally subirrigated prairie hay, and irrigated corn.

After checking in, and learning the local news from Richard, we leave my mare at the sale barn and head north for the Hutton ranch. A few miles north of town the blacktop ends and I have my first experience with sand roads. On any kind of grade I must go to four wheel drive because the truck will not pull the heavy trailer in the loose sand. Ron assures me that with rain the roads improve much as a wave washed beach. Across the road from the Hutton farm home we unload and saddle the horses.



The Hutton ranch consists of several miles of open Sand Hill country traversed by deep creeks that descend into steep walled canyons thickly lined with red cedar and some oak. The canyons open up into streamside meadows that are bordered on the north by the Niobrara River. Across the river can be seen bluffs rising to the plain beyond. The Niobrara is a classic high plains stream, about three or four hundred yards wide in that area and only inches deep. Riding across the Sand Hill prairie one enters the realm of the Upland Sandpiper whose call and fluttering flight is almost everywhere. Resident Western Meadowlarks also protest our passage. Eastern Kingbirds and Dickcissels are seen from time to time. The Long-billed Curlew nests on the ranch but was not seen until the next day when we visited a neighboring ranch. Ron, whose birding skills far exceed my novice level, kept calling out the names of birds he could hear singing but chose to always remain invisible. The Grasshopper Sparrow was one of his unseen favorites.

For me the most interesting and immediately observed were the prairie flowers. In bloom were wide stretches of pale purple coneflower and patches of gray-headed coneflower, which *Audubon of Kansas*

*"If I had influence
with the good
fairy who is
supposed to
preside over the
christening of all
children I should
ask that her gift
to each child in
the world be a
sense of wonder
so indestructable
that it would last
throughout life,
as an unfailing
antidote against
the boredom and
disenchantments
of later year,
the sterile
preoccupation
with things that
are artificial, the
alienation from
the sources of our
strength."*

Rachel Carson

Audubon of Kansas plans to establish a visitor center at the Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary. One concept being considered is to build it in the form of a country schoolhouse, which would complement the cultural heritage of the area, and also recognize that Lucille Hutton taught school in the Sandhills near Rose. Educational exhibits will include the natural and cultural history of the Great Plains prairie, and feature exhibitions of Lucille's art.

were bright yellow despite their name. The purple columns of the leadplant were common in the upland pastures, with an occasional wild rose. With his ever present camera at hand, Ron was always stopping to take pictures which gave me a chance to dig a prairie flower field guide out of the saddle bag and try to identify the flower my horse was interested in eating. It was quite dark by the time we arrived back at the trailer and had delivered the horses to the sale yard. Hamburgers at the Bronco Bar, the only place still open, were eaten in the local ambience of a card game combined with table shuffle board and a world class collection of old beer signs on the wall.

The next morning is bright and hot and despite our best efforts it is 10 a.m. before we are in the saddle again. The Hutton ranch is almost five thousand acres, which is nearly eight square miles of prairie, canyons and river meadow. Ron is riding Strider and I am on my little Walker mare. Strider's gate is so smooth that Ron is never inclined to return to his Appaloosa.

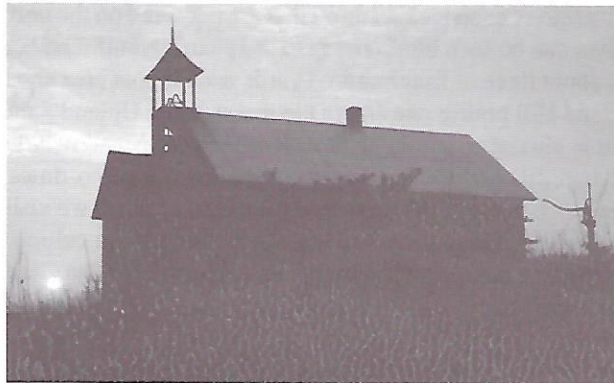
After a mile or two of prairie pasture we descend into Willow Creek, one of the major waterways crossing the ranch. Red cedar is so thick we are forced out of the saddle and are scrambling down the steep banks leading the horses. Fortunately, the creeks are easily crossed and then the struggle is repeated climbing up the other side. After reaching the far end of the property we descend again through thick cedars and oaks, a place where Ovenbirds were singing, to the wet prairie meadows that lie in the floodplain next to the river.

The grass is belly high to the horses and they are frequently splashing water because the water table is inches below the ground surface. Male Bobolinks are on station about every hundred yards with their distinctive black bodies, flashes of yellow and white on their heads and wings. Red-winged Blackbirds, a rare Yellow-headed Blackbird and Wood Ducks are seen in the bordering marsh.

By noon the sun is quite hot, we jump the fence at a gap in the trees and, after kicking off our boots, fall into the river fully clothed. Unfortunately, the water is almost warm and barely a foot deep in channels. Only a few holes are deep enough to allow us to cool off. Ron tells me that the broad shallow character of the river with its many sandbars serves as a resting area for Whooping Cranes and Sandhill Cranes in migration, as a nesting area for Least Terns, and as a source of fish for wintering and migratory Bald Eagles.

Later we eat lunch under a gnarled burr oak and dream about how Audubon of Kansas can use this beauty to teach environmental stewardship and fulfill the dreams of Harold and Lucille Hutton. Harold and Ron were close friends since October of 1980. Ron worked with landowners to defeat the Norden Dam, and then to protect a 76-mile stretch of the river as a national scenic river--enacted by Congress in 1991. Coincidentally, Bill Browning of Madison, Kansas, the first chairman of Audubon of Kansas, was with Ron the day that he met with Harold and Lucille to seek support for the scenic river proposal.

Lucille has given the property to Audubon of Kansas and we will operate it with Harold's high standards of stewardship as a combination working ranch and wildlife sanctuary. Education with a focus on both natural history and the Sand Hills culture, and accommodation of visitors to this spectacular part of the Great Plains and the Bassett community, will be a major goal. A visitor center will be built and it will include Lucille's paintings and Harold's artifacts.



*A visitor center will be built and it will include Lucille's paintings and Harold's artifacts.
Audubon of Kansas*



Long-billed Curlews nest on the Hutton Ranch.

That evening we are joined for dinner by Ernie and Betty Hasch, Jody and Christy Leonard and their three delightful children, Logan, Chelsea and Kaylee. Logan, the oldest, has just returned from a range management camp and he is eagerly telling what he learned, including the use of fire to control the red cedar encroaching into the grassland. Controlled burning, very common in the Flint Hills of Kansas, is rarely used in the Sand Hills because of the concern of exposing the sandy surface to wind erosion. The Leonards and Haschs represent long time ranching families in the area and have known Ron for twenty years. The talk soon turns to the Huttons, who were friends of both families.

Lucille Hutton is a resident in assisted long-term care at the hospital. Although naturally frail at 90, she is often bright and alert. Harold and Lucille were both raised in this area and after working in construction in Washington during and after the war they returned to Bassett and bought their ranch and then slowly expanded it over the years to its current size. Harold was interested in conservation and instituted practices that were to bring him praise from conservation groups. He was an avid collector of fossils and of Indian artifacts, especially arrowheads found locally. Perhaps he was best known as a historian, writing several books on local individuals and incidents during the frontier era such as Doc Middleton: Life and Legends of the Notorious Plains Outlaw, and Vigilante Days: Frontier Justice Along the Niobrara. His last book, The River That Runs, features the Niobrara River Valley.

Lucille is an artist of considerable talent who has exhibited in a number of regional and statewide shows. They had no children and both Harold and Lucille were concerned about an appropriate final disposition for the ranch. This disposition was not finalized before Harold died suddenly, but Lucille was eager to complete what he had started and arranged for the ranch to be given to Audubon of Kansas. Why the ranch was given to AOK and not other qualified national and Nebraska-based organizations is a story beyond this simple tale. Nevertheless, I believe it all resolves around the integrity and sincerity of one man who had worked with them for years and who they trusted implicitly, Ron Klataske.

Audubon of Kansas has also clearly established its dedication to prairie preservation and the conservation of prairie wildlife, in partnership with others, and beyond state boundaries. Harold's vision was that the native prairie pasturelands should be preserved as part of a wildlife sanctuary, and most other organizations failed to make a commitment to that goal.

The next day while Ron visited Lucille, I rode with Wes Sandall on a portion of the 15,000-acre Sandall Ranch. He was a friend and neighbor of the Huttons. Again I was impressed with his knowledge and concern for the land. The three days were a good introduction to a beautiful countryside and a group of families who care about the land.

"Audubon of Kansas has clearly established its dedication to prairie preservation and the conservation of prairie wildlife, in partnership with others, and beyond state boundaries."

"I was particularly interested in why people moved to the plains, the difficulties they encountered, their attitudes toward the land, and why many eventually left."



View From the Prairie

Second and last of the Aunt Ella series

by Bob McElroy,

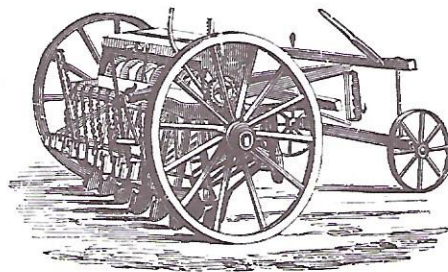
Audubon of Kansas Trustee

In the last issue of *Prairie Wings* I reported on a conversation I had with my ninety five year old aunt Ella McElroy who had grown up and lived much of her life in Gove county and Quinter west of Hays on the high plains. I was particularly interested in why people moved to the plains, the difficulties they encountered, their attitudes toward the land, and why many eventually left.

Ella was two years old when her father left Olathe and moved to Quinter where he bought a farm with a mortgage. He brought with him his family and horses. The horses consisted of a gray mare buggy horse and two teams of heavy draft animals. Shortly after moving to Quinter several years of drought and dust storms occurred and there was no harvest. About the same time a horse plague (probably equine encephalitis) swept through the countryside and horses died like flies. Ella's father lost four of the horses and soon the farm to foreclosure. Her father then farmed on rented land again and had horses but "they were never as good."

In the early years there were few roads and much of the land was not fenced. People would drive across the prairie intent to arrive in the shortest way possible.

Despite the hardships few talked of leaving. They had come to start a new life and they stayed despite the hardships. She recalls one family, arriving at church in a lumber wagon with the boys in the family barefoot. After the horse plague another family drove a horse and mule as a team despite the biblical injunction against the practice. On reflection, she remembered one man who traded his farm for a pocketknife because he could not make a go of it. A family during hard times received a box of dried apples from relatives in Iowa. "They got three meals a day from those apples," observed Lloyd, her husband, with sardonic humor, "apples in the morning, water at noon for lunch, and they swell for supper."



In the 1910s & 1920s wheat harvest involved a header and header barge. The header was fifteen to twenty feet wide, consisting of a sickle bar to cut the wheat and a header reel. The reel, as it revolved over the bar, pushed the wheat stocks into the sickle and onto a canvas conveyer belt up a ramp, where they fell into a large horse drawn wagon called a header barge. The header was pushed from behind by a large pole attached to a team of six horses, three on each side, connected by single and doubletrees. Driving the six horse team took special skill as frequently the three on one side of the pole had to be driven in a slightly different direction than the opposite team in order to control or turn the large awkward header. Despite her modesty, Ella spoke of pride in how well Lloyd could handle the header team. The header barge was a large wagon with one side elevated opposite the header ramp to keep the wheat from falling off. The barge carried a driver for the horses and a stacker who kept the enlarging load centered in the wagon. Once the barge was full it left the side of the header, to be replaced by another barge. The header barge or wagon carried the load to where it would be threshed. Since threshing might not occur for several days or even weeks the wheat head had to be stacked in such a manner that it would shed water in case of rain. This was another

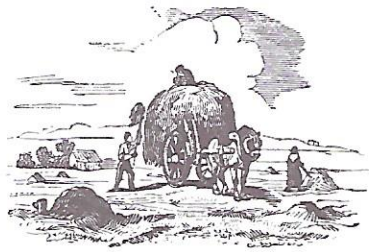
Audubon of Kansas

dollars a day but a good stacker could earn nine dollars.

Some of the wheat and all of the oats were harvested with a binder. The wheat could be harvested earlier with a binder before it was completely ripe and it would ripen in the stock.

At harvest time two or three families, rarely four, would go together to get in the crop. Speed was important because if the wheat got too ripe it would shell out in the header barge. Few homes had enough bedrooms for all the crew and the men slept in the hayloft with a blanket. The women would work the entire day cooking and the kids spent the day shooing the flies off the table. As the crews traveled from farm to farm there was frequently an implied contest among the women as to who could provide the best table.

Once the wheat had been harvested and stacked it needed to be threshed. Usually it was a neighbor who had a steam tractor and a threshing machine. The thrashing crew consisted of an engineer or engine man for the steam tractor, an elevator man who kept the threshing machine working, a water man who hauled water for the steam engine, occasionally an oiler and of course a cook who was usually one of the men's wives. They traveled farm to farm but it would be the farmer and his crew who forked the wheat into the thresher and stored the grain after it came out of the thresher into a wagon. Needless to say this was all very labor intensive and gave incentive to young men, such as my father, to leave the farm and obtain an education that could provide a better life.



Ella married Lloyd McElroy in 1926 and moved to a farm north of Quinter. In the 1930s the high plains suffered six years of drought. Dust storms would come during periods of high winds. Visibility would drop to near zero with severe storms, especially at night. She recalled the incident of a small girl lost while near home in a severe storm. The men of Quinter held hands and walked across a field next to the house searching for the child most of the night. She was found sleeping in one corner of the field, unharmed when dawn came. Ella also became lost or disorientated while in her uncle's farmyard accompanied by her uncle. She vividly remembers the static electricity given off during storm. The phones became useless and the windmill glowed with sparks from the electrical discharge. During storms plates were placed upside down on the table until food was ready to be served. After dinner the plates would be dark except where the food had been.

One summer the grasshoppers came during the wheat harvest. They were able to get the wheat harvested but all the corn and cane disappeared with the grasshoppers. The grasshoppers even ate the clothes on the line and gnawed on the wooden handles of the tools. They appeared in great clouds, ate everything in sight and then moved on.

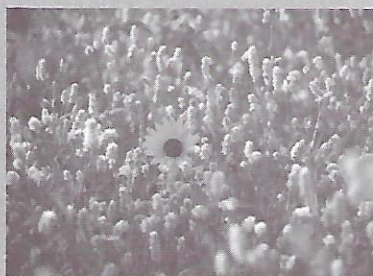
Despite the return of the rains in 1936 Lloyd eventually lost the farm when it was foreclosed by the Federal Land Bank. During the thirties a general feeling developed that perhaps too much of the prairie had been plowed and that a new way of farming would need to be developed. Lloyd planted many trees, mostly fruit trees and some cottonwood that he got from the river bank. Most died. It was not until after the war that the shelterbelts began to be planted which changed the landscape. The new techniques of dry land farming and deep irrigation wells provided a living. But for the smaller operator it became apparent there was little chance of success.

Life on the prairie for Ella, as it was for many others, was challenging, rewarding but ultimately defeating economically. She and Lloyd successfully raised a family who have done well, but they do not farm.

"One summer grasshoppers came during the wheat harvest. The grasshoppers even ate the clothes on the line and gnawed on the wooden handles of the tools. They appeared in great clouds, ate everything in sight and then moved on."

*"This grand
show is eternal.
It is always
sunrise
somewhere; the
dew is never all
dried at once; a
shower is
forever falling;
vapor is ever
rising. Eternal
sunrise, eternal
sunset, eternal
dawn and
gloaming, on sea
and continents
and islands,
each in its turn,
as the round
earth rolls."*

John Muir



Kansas Birding & Prairie Flora Trails will:



- ◆ *Utilize Existing Highways and Scenic Byways*
- ◆ *Connect Attractions Like a "String of Pearls"*
- ◆ *Build Pride in Kansas Prairies, Wildlife and Scenic Landscapes*
- ◆ *Bring Economic Benefits to Rural Communities*

The Kansas Birding and Prairie Flora Trails system is intended to connect existing and potential birding, wildlife viewing and prairie/forest plant community sites into a series of exciting nature-based visitation trail routes extending across Kansas. The trails will serve residents and visitors by greatly enhancing travel and wildlife viewing opportunities. Birders and other wildlife watchers are already visiting many of the sites along the proposed trails or in associated counties. However, most of these sites function independently and many other potential sites or byways are only known to a few people. Sharing your insight on good birding spots and places to see "natural Kansas at its best" will help to build appreciation for birds and birding, for the diversity of wildlife including amphibians, for Kansas prairies and other important habitats, and for wildflowers and scenic landscapes.

Audubon of Kansas is striving to make the Kansas Birding and Prairie Flora Trails system a success, and unique to trail systems of this nature. Success depends on your enthusiasm and the assistance of a wide network of people throughout the state with various perspectives and insight. Our greatest need is for folks to nominate sites that should be considered for inclusion in a field guide and web site devoted specifically to the trail system.

Please become a partner in this extraordinary opportunity to build pride in our natural environment and support for good stewardship. Please help us by nominating any sites within or near your community that have potential for wildlife watching, birding, nature photography or as a place to view native prairie (or woodland) wildflowers. A potential site can be a small area of a few acres, or a larger place that may be overlooked without your nomination. A country road that has scenic vistas or offers a good route to view birds and other wildlife or wildflowers will also be considered for inclusion as part of a spur or loop. If you enjoy these areas, chances are others will also.

We are in the process of planning a series of four promising birding and prairie flora trails to extend north-south across the state in different physiographic provinces. The primary trail routes will follow designated highways, and each will be complemented with additional loops and spurs to areas or sites of special interest. We want to explore opportunities in every county in Kansas. Thus, if you know of sites in other counties or parts of the state that you enjoy and may contribute to a nature-based experience, please include those as well.

All areas of the state will benefit from strategic placement of the four distinct birding trails envisioned.

A "Tallgrass Prairie Birding & Flora Trail" will extend through the Flint Hills and Chautauqua Hills and include flagship preserves such as the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve and Konza Prairie.

A "Central Flyway Wetlands Birding and Prairie Flora Trail" will extend through central Kansas from the Red Hills to the Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge—with Cheyenne Bottoms and Quiviria National Wildlife Refuge as signature attractions along the way.

A "Forest-Grassland Ecotone Birding and Flora Trail" will parallel the eastern edge of Kansas from the Missouri River breaks and adjacent riverbottom forests and wetlands to the Ozark Plateau in extreme southeastern Kansas. Baker Wetlands and the Marais des Cygnes state/national wildlife areas will be included.

A "Sandsage and Shortgrass Prairie Birding and Flora Trail" in western Kansas will guide Kansas residents and visitors from the Cimarron National Grassland to "The Arikaree Breaks" north of St. Francis.

However, we need your involvement to identify less prominent sites in all parts of the state. Please take a few minutes to nominate one or more sites with the form provided below. Your recommendations, and those of others, will greatly improve the trails and enhance our work by focusing our attention to areas that have greatest promise.

Most sites will be publicly owned land operated by an agency, municipality, county, university, utility, conservation organization or nature center. However, some private landowners are receptive to sharing their land in various ways with visitors who want to see native prairie wildflowers and grasses, and/or observe birds like Greater and Lesser Prairie Chickens.

You can also provide local outreach and leadership. Folks who are interested in any aspect of natural history or are involved in promotion of travel and tourism to the community may welcome opportunities to be involved. Please extend an invitation to anyone who is interested. Several leaders near Pittsburg have formed a planning committee to systematically describe sites in the vicinity. It would be wonderful if this could be duplicated for every county.

Collectively, we will develop descriptive materials and highlight the bird species that are most likely to be found at various times of the year, and the periods when featured wildflowers are most likely to be in bloom. Opportunities to see rare or special sought-after bird species will be listed for locations where most appropriate.

We will also include "night sounds" of nature for some areas that are open at night. Many families with kids and other visitors would be delighted to hear Coyotes, Barred Owls, Poorwills, Chuck-will's-widows or Whip-poor-wills. The courtship calls made by twenty-two different species of frogs and toads in the state are equally intriguing.

Inclusion of information on wildflowers, geology, night sounds and amphibians are among several features that will make Kansas' "Birding Trails" unique. The web site will also underscore the excellent stewardship of many of the sites featured, and include information on other cultural or historical subjects of interest in the area.

Additional information and a much longer nomination form, for folks who want to provide lots of detail, can be found on the Audubon of Kansas website: <www.audubonofkansas.org>.

Nomination Form

Site Name: _____

Potential Attributes of the Site:

County & General Location: _____

Your Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ E-Mail: _____

Please send completed forms and other information to Audubon of Kansas, 210 Southwind Place, Manhattan, KS 66503; e-mail: <aok@audubonofkansas.org>, call (785) 537-4385 or fax (785) 537-4395.

Audubon of Kansas



"While we are born with curiosity and wonder and our early years full of the adventure they bring, I know such inherent joys are often lost. I also know that, deep within us, their latent glow can be fanned to flame again by awareness and an open mind."

Sigurd Olson

"Many people in the Flint Hills and throughout Kansas are concerned about the potential destruction of intact prairie landscapes by the intrusion of large-scale industrial wind turbine complexes."



The High Stakes Game for the Future of the Flint Hills

We are All Stakeholders and We Can Participate.

Many people in the Flint Hills and throughout Kansas are concerned about the potential destruction of intact prairie landscapes by the intrusion of large-scale industrial wind turbine complexes. We have been asked to provide our thoughts on what can be done to help. Here are a few ideas:

☒ Share your views with candidates for elected offices during election campaigns and after they are elected. Please keep in mind that the governor, state representatives and state senators, and county commissioners in counties that are targeted by developers will all be participating in decisions that will determine if the state or counties will have any planning protocols and any requirements that protect the interests of Kansas and give residents a voice. The State of Kansas should reserve tax incentives for facilities that are sited in places that do not substantially diminish ecological, aesthetic, cultural and economic values of public importance.

☒ Express your appreciation to ranch and farm landowners who are dedicated to a way of life and stewardship of a unique place of life. This is the theme of our poster. This state and this nation need a "Marshal Plan" to develop proactive programs to enhance opportunities for landowners to sell (or donate) conservation easements on native grasslands (in this case the last of the tallgrass prairie) as a viable alternative to industrial developments and subdivisions. Easements would not interfere with ongoing ranching operations or ownership.

☒ Volunteer, assist and/or support organizations like Audubon of Kansas and the Kansas Chapter of The Nature Conservancy that are working in many capacities to "Protect the Flint Hills", and also the grassroots organization of that name (Protect The Flint Hills, Rt. 1, Box 11, Cedar Point, KS 66843, protecttheflinthills@yahoo.com) which was recently founded by leaders in the ranching community and other area residents. Display and distribute the "Protect The Flint Hills" poster and other information available from these organizations.

☒ Write Letters-To-The-Editor.

☒ Work within other organizations to develop position statements and participate in decision-making processes. Remind everyone that we can have windpower developments in Kansas without destroying the last landscape-scale stand of the tallgrass prairie or other pristine prairie areas. Properly sited, and with public involvement, we strongly support windpower development. Approximately 30 million acres—60 percent of Kansas—is cultivated. Only three to five percent of the tallgrass prairie on the North American continent remains, and the Flint Hills encompass approximately two-thirds of that.

Wind is a renewable, virtually inexhaustible, source of energy and it is available in many areas. However, native prairie and prairie landscapes are not renewable, and certainly not inexhaustible. Once plowed or destroyed, they may never be experienced in that place again.

☒ Write to Westar Energy, David Wittig, CEO, 818 S. Kansas Ave., Topeka KS 66612. Email: david_wittig@wr.com and phone 785-575-6300. Urge Westar (an established Kansas corporation with a recent legacy of support for the natural environment) to set siting standards for any developer who wants to take advantage of the transmission grid owned by Westar. The transmission lines crossing eastern Kansas were financed by 640,000 Kansas ratepayers. In the absence of corporate leadership, "run and gun" companies can target facilities in areas that would be avoided by conscientious companies. We welcome and need good corporate citizens and partners in protection of the state's remaining pristine prairie landscapes.

Do not be deterred by the overwhelming financial resources of venture capitalists and multinational companies who are determined to **INDUSTRIALIZE** the Flint Hills and transform the natural and cultural character of the land for the prospects of great profits that will largely be transported elsewhere, with few exceptions, like the electrons generated. The profits are

magnified because the Kansas Legislature appropriately gave Westar a free ride on two demonstration turbines at the Jeffrey Energy Center, but an unfortunate oversight (?) opened the floodgates so that even massive developments are now free from state and local property taxes. Everyone with property should be so lucky! Windpower companies are looking for additional legislative actions at the state and federal levels to get additional incentives and subsidies.

Keep in mind that most resident proponents who are blindly promoting development of the Flint Hills are simply hoping to “cash in.” The competition and quest among at least ten developers seeking sites in the Flint Hills is enriching a few residents and they are doing everything they can to make this into the 21st Century equivalent of the Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889 fame. Some are working on as many as ten sites.

Lobbyists for the developers and consultants for manufacturers of turbines are being promised tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars to try to persuade legislators, county commissioners and everyone else that “windpower should be the number one export” from Kansas—their designated “Saudi Arabia of Wind”. The company that purchased Enron’s enterprise in the industry reportedly financed the establishment of the Kansas Renewable Energy Working Group, and now their consultant has set up a political action committee (PAC) to funnel funds to receptive elected officials who promise to promote windpower developments. The Workgroup was launched to *promote* wind development, and the interests of some to include subcommittees to focus on *conservation* were decisively discouraged.

Conservation! How much electric energy would be saved if utilities allowed “on-off” switches on hundreds of thousands of yardlights installed on most farms, ranches and rural residences in the state?

The first development complex proposal to go before a county planning commission in the Flint Hills is a 10,000 acre site near the small town of Rosalia in Butler County. Only two absentee landowners would benefit from lucrative leases. A number of area residents signed petitions in opposition and that forced the prospect of requiring “super majority” approval by the county commission. Faced with this, the company has offered petitioning neighbors as much as \$4,000 for each year to withdraw their signatures. Key organizations have been offered as much as \$50,000 a year to silence their concerns and endorse the project. As many as six sites by three developers are being proposed in Butler County alone, from Burns to Beaumont.

Some counties, including Chase County, do not have planning and zoning. Thus, developers can totally disregard county officials, neighbors and the public. We know of landowners near the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve who have declined offers from developers.

Most Flint Hills ranch and farm families want to preserve the land. However, they cannot do it alone. If they become surrounded by a maze of industrial turbines that extend 350 to 560 feet into the sky, developers know that their determination may be broken.

☑ It will also be helpful for citizens to contact state agency officials to request that they provide leadership. As a matter of policy, the State of Kansas should have some sort of planning protocols and criteria that will protect other resources. Map overlays of wind resources have been produced as part of the Kansas Corporation Commission’s promotion campaign, and now other state agencies (KDWP and the Kansas Biological Survey) should produce map overlays that identify other resources of great value.

☑ Visit the Audubon of Kansas website and other sources of information on the subject. We will post our detailed position statement, reports and other information that may be helpful. We will also include letters and columns written by ranch landowners and other Flint Hills residents. Their incredible dedication is extraordinarily encouraging. It is important to know that a great number of people share a commitment to preserving the natural and cultural character of the Flint Hills.

If no one knows the importance of preserving a beautiful place, that place is not likely to be preserved, but instead transformed to something else and probably something less. The measure of enlightenment will be man’s ability in the special places to recognize that the natural things which are there already are good things. These we inherit. —Ansel Adams



“Most Flint Hills ranch and farm families want to preserve the land. However, they cannot do it alone.”

*Will Wind
Turbines the Size
of Redwoods
Replace Prairie
Chickens as a
Symbol of
Tallgrass
Prairie?*



Wind Turbines and Prairie Chickens

We commend Zilkha Renewable Energy of Houston, Texas for investing in an objective scientific evaluation on the “EXPECTED IMPACTS ON GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKENS OF ESTABLISHING A WIND TURBINE FACILITY NEAR ROSALIA, KANSAS” and for making the report available. Several Kansas biologists criticized an earlier “Phase I Avian Report” conducted by an east coast consultant who spent a few hours driving across various sites within the state to prepare lucrative reports for several companies. He discounted any significant impact on birds and specifically downgraded the value of this area, and the Flint Hills generally, for prairie chickens.

Based on extensive research conducted by KSU biologists, the author of the new report predicted that the entire proposed wind-turbine site and the tallgrass prairie habitat within one mile of the site for the proposed wind turbine complex near Rosalia will become unsuitable for nesting and brood-rearing by Greater Prairie Chickens once the wind turbines are erected and operational. He concluded that the establishment of that one wind turbine facility will adversely effect approximately 15,000 to 18,000 acres of very good to excellent Greater Prairie Chicken habitat—even though much of the tallgrass prairie itself is not destroyed in the process of construction for roads, turbines, and trenches for electrical cables.

We urge this company—and all other developers—to acknowledge the concerns of Kansas residents by seeking sites throughout the state that will not degrade the Flint Hills and other pristine prairies or destroy wildlife populations. The Greater Prairie Chicken should be spared the plight of the now endangered Attwater’s Prairie Chicken in Texas.

If permitted, we will provide the full text of the report on the audubonofkansas.org website.

AOK Is On the Way, continued from page 24

Along this line, we are also exploring the possibility of a partnership with an automobile dealership that would like to provide a gratis lease on a vehicle that would allow us (AOK staff, student interns, and dedicated volunteers) to take the Kansas Birding and Prairie Flora Trails project on the road to community workshops, nature-based tourism meetings, conservation and natural history conferences, and for on-site descriptions and evaluations, as well as for promotional presentations throughout Kansas in the next year.

As expressed by the AOK goals brochure, we are committed to “forging partnerships with business leaders and others committed to enhancing the quality of life by providing opportunities for involvement in development of local and state-wide nature-based activities.” A vehicle with an Audubon of Kansas logo and the name of the sponsoring dealership or other business would be an appropriate way to project a mutually beneficial partnership designed to enhance appreciation of nature—travel and tourism—in Kansas.

If you have or want to purchase any of the equipment detailed above to contribute to our growing office, we’d love to hear from you.

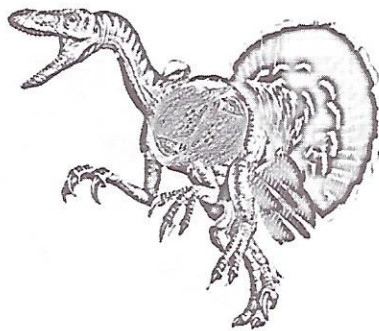
To donate equipment or make a contribution please contact:
Ferdouz Vuilliomenet
AOK Office and Communications Coordinator
(785) 537-4385 or ferdouz@audubonofkansas.org

Wild Turkeys, continued from Page 1

In terms of wildlife, the theory is becoming a widespread "Nature Myth" throughout the Midwest, greater in magnitude than any "Urban Myth."

When looking at the possibilities, there is no way to credibly blame Wild Turkeys. Although quail, pheasants, prairie chickens and cottontail rabbits have all dramatically declined in recent decades, it is not because they have been devoured by wild turkeys, or even eaten out of house and home through competition.

During the past four decades, most farmland and grassland wildlife species (game and nongame alike) have declined. However, Wild Turkeys have become well established throughout most of Kansas during this same period. Turkeys are obvious as they parade across open fields and meadows in search of grasshoppers in summer and wasted grain throughout the year.



Because of the coincidence, Wild Turkeys are portrayed as the culprit. Even without sickle claws, Wild Turkeys are not the feathered predatory equivalent of the Velociraptors of Jurassic Park fame. Yet, the myth has cast a veil over rural appreciation for the Wild Turkey restoration success story.

It is tragic that Wild Turkeys have become the scapegoats for the decline of Bobwhite Quail. This often repeated myth allows the real reasons for wildlife declines to be overlooked in discussions and in the decisions of landowners and others involved in conservation programs. Combined with disparaging remarks against state wildlife agencies for their role in reestablishing wild turkeys, the myth even diminishes the support of sportsmen for other programs.

I may never convince the two barbers who tag-team me on this subject. They once hunted quail in places where there are few today. But I did as well, and I can recall flushing as many as 14 large coveys in a day within a mile or two of our farmhouse. With scissors in hand, one told me not to give him "any story about habitat." A customer told them that he killed a turkey with three quail in its gullet. Our follow-up inquiry for confirmation came to a dead end.

A turkey could eat newly hatched "popcorn sized" quail for a brief period when they are vulnerable. Aside from grasshoppers and other insects, turkeys are largely vegetarian, feeding on greens, grains, acorns, wild seeds and berries, and it would be a rare case of incidental take. By contrast, there are many predatory species in the landscape that actively seek and kill ground nesting birds on nests, eat eggs and newly hatched young. Before we attribute any significant influence to turkeys, we need to consider the presence and abundance of bobcats, coyotes, foxes, raccoons, skunks, opossums, badgers, domestic cats, woodrats, ground squirrels, black rat snakes, armadillos, Cooper's Hawks, Great-horned Owls, and Crows. Note that I did not mention the abundant Red-tailed Hawk because they do not have the fast flying skills to readily capture healthy, therefore alert and fast flying, quail.

More importantly than predation, consider year-round habitat quality and needs as the predominate limiting factors. Consider the impact of farm machinery and pesticides and

How much is biodiversity really worth? On average less than 32 cents of your taxes go to endangered species conservation in the U.S. each year. Each year we spend less than \$300 million on conservation for more than 1,100 endangered and threatened species.

And yet, according to U.S. News and World Report, nature provides us with a staggering \$33 TRILLION in services each year, including crop pollination from insects, bats and birds; recreational fishing, wildlife and bird-watching; commercial uses of plants and animals; animals and insects controlling crop pests; medicines; and wetland filtration, purifying water.

--Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund

Full Moon Indian Names

January
- Wolf Moon

February
- Snow Moon

March
- Sap Moon

April
- Pink Moon

May
- Flower Moon

June
- Strawberry
Moon

July
- Thunder Moon

August
- Corn Moon

September
- Harvest Moon

October
- Hunters Moon

November
- Beaver Moon

December
- Long Night's
Moon

from Sister Mary Southard, CSJ
submitted by Sister Marie
Coleman, CSJ, Salina

herbicides sprayed on fields and pastures, and the influence of weather, and it is obvious that the appetite of an occasional wild turkey pales by comparison. There is no scientific data to suggest, or compelling reason to believe, that wild turkeys have any widespread influence on Bobwhite Quail populations. Kansas quail populations have dramatically declined in many areas that have few or no Wild Turkeys.

As a year round grassland/shrub resident, Bobwhite Quail serve as an indicator of the quality of our landscape for a variety of other bird species that are annual residents, migrate here in the summer or arrive to spend the winter. When brushy/weedy fence rows, stands of protective native grass and waste areas are eliminated from most farms, and when grain fields are tilled in the fall, the landscape ceases to exist as a place where resident Bobwhite Quail and Loggerhead Shrikes, or seasonal Harris' Sparrows and Spotted Towhees can consistently survive the winter.

By the same token, the absence of these same habitats in the summer translates into a place where quail cannot safely nest or where young broods of quail cannot find a variety of insects as a required source of nutrients and moisture. Most cultivated fields of fall grains or frequently mowed stands of alfalfa or introduced grasses do not produce broods of Bobwhite Quail, Meadowlarks, or Dickcissels. Likewise, most wheat fields are disked soon after harvest, others are burned, or sprayed with herbicides, essentially eliminating potential brood habitat.

When I was a farm boy in Washington County, virtually every 160 acre farm had a hay meadow of native prairie, a pasture, hedgerows, woody draws, fence rows or odd areas with thickets of shrubs, native grasses, forbs, and annual seed producing weeds. All of these diverse habitats were interconnected. Many species of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians that were common in the farm landscape are now rare or absent from many farms.

Most of the native prairie hay meadows and farm pastures of value for draft horses and for resident dairy and beef cow herds have been plowed. Most of the brushy draws, woodlands, plum thickets and hedgerows on the farms have been bulldozed, eradicated with herbicides, leveled, plowed or planted to brome. Township, county and state road departments--with additional help of rural electric districts--eliminated prairie, shrub and forest plant communities along most rural roads and replaced it with brome or fescue.

When these diverse habitats are dramatically diminished and fragmented, the adverse impact of other limiting factors on quail populations, especially weather, farming practices, and predation, become more pronounced. Extended cold, heavy snow or ice results in death from exposure, starvation and predation. Heavy rains and chilly weather during the nesting season and when chicks are young, and extreme summer heat and drought take an additional toll. The impact of all forms of mortality, even hunting, can be more adverse in a setting with fragmented habitat and small isolated populations. Quail depend upon others in a covey structure for winter survival, and research indicates that an optimum covey size for survival is ten to twelve birds. Small isolated coveys are more likely to perish. As a result, and in the absence of nearby source populations, local populations are slow to rebound from events like the floods of 93 and 95.

Our Washington County farm is managed for wildlife. Although and most of it has been restored to a rich variety of native grass and forbs, and ten acres are devoted to wildlife food plots adjacent to an expanse of shrubs and woody cover, quail find it difficult to survive on a



A roosting turkey under a full moon.

160 acre island. The surrounding landscape is increasingly becoming a sea of intensively cultivated cropland. Predators and prey alike are crowded into that same habitat. A severe winter virtually extirpated the quail population and the past two springs have been absent of the distinctive "Bob White" call. This occurred before the arrival of Wild Turkeys on this part of Camp Creek, an addition to our fauna in just the past few months.

One could never hope to estimate the number of nests and broods of quail and other ground nesting birds that are destroyed by 30-foot-wide disks in wheat stubble, by other equipment during haying operations and normal farming operations. More significantly, conventional agriculture practices have resulted in large field sizes and elimination of idle areas. They are designed to produce crops without any weeds or wild grasses. Most of the annual expenditures of \$20 billion plus in annual farm payment subsidies are designed to reward maximum commodity production and maximize the acreage under cultivation--not conservation of biodiversity found in remnants of prairie or woody draws.

The war on weeds and brush within fields and fence rows has been won. However, species like quail that depend upon these wild plants have lost. Many of the annual plants provide cover, an array of insects vital to chicks, and highly nutritious seeds throughout the year. The seeds of sunflowers and ragweed are among the best, but most landowners eliminate them from croplands, uncultivated areas and pastures.



Fence rows and waterways planted to brome grass are relatively sterile and provide only low quality brood or winter cover. Conversion of diverse habitats to brome grass and fescue has been a plague on the landscape throughout the range of the Northern Bobwhite Quail. These introduced grasses are only slightly better than Astro turf! Waterways planted with these grasses may even become death traps for birds that locate nests there only to have those nests inundated by runoff, destroyed by early hay cutting or machinery traffic.

Adult Wild Turkeys can thrive without all of the complexities of the habitat that quail and similar birds require. Without fear from raptors, turkeys can safely range widely across mowed meadows or large tilled fields looking for wasted grain and insects. Grown birds roost in large trees on limbs that are out of reach of most mammalian predators. They adapt to nesting in a variety of habitats, woodlands and grasslands.

Every time I go to our Riley County farm I celebrate the success of Wild Turkeys in this area. Our stately sycamore trees serve as winter roosts and have held as many as 185 during peak winter concentration. We also always host resident Carolina Wrens, wintering Spotted Towhees and a covey of quail in the same area. Several friends who ranch along the Niobrara River in northern Nebraska proclaimed the value of Wild Turkeys for grasshopper control twenty-five years ago, and I was delighted when these native birds became established on our farm property near Manhattan a decade later.

However, because of the coincidental decline of quail, and theories amplified in barber shops and cafes, the image of Wild Turkeys threatens to eclipse a number of constructive conservation issues and it even discounts the need for habitat preservation. Whether the subject is Bobolinks or Bobwhites, the overarching influence is habitat--and the combination of factors that influence recruitment, survival and mortality within that habitat.

As an organization of wildlife enthusiasts, non-hunters and hunters alike, urban residents and farm/ranch landowners, our goal is to bring folks with various interests together to enhance wildlife conservation. Audubon of Kansas, Quail Unlimited and the National Wild Turkey Foundation all subscribe to the same key point that Bobwhite Quail require quality habitat.

*"Whatever
befalls the
earth befalls
the sons of
the earth.
Man did not
weave the web
of life;
he is merely a
strand in it.
Whatever he
does to the
web, he does
to himself..."*

Chief Seattle

KDOT and Audubon Society Hatch Partnership to Promote Prairie Vegetation and Cut Mowing Costs

by Ira J. Allen



One goal of Audubon of Kansas is to “build pride in prairies.” Kansas has 130,000 acres of state-administered roadsides, and many can be managed to emulate prairie.

What could the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) and the Audubon Society of Kansas possibly have in common? That was the question running through my mind when I learned that these two entities were partners in a roadside project that has possibilities for the entire state. However, as I later learned, KDOT and Audubon have a good deal in common; finding this common ground required only some thought, time, and effort on the part of representatives of both agencies.

One of Audubon of Kansas’s goals is to “build pride in prairies,” and there are roughly 130,000 acres of state-administered roadsides in Kansas—prime potential for prairie vegetation. KDOT, on the other hand, receives some funding from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to participate in the Prairie Passage Program, which partners Kansas with Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas. This program includes plans for protection and establishment of native grasses and wildflowers alongside highways, as well as for education of the public (and members of the DOTs) about their prairie heritage. These two factors make KDOT and Audubon of Kansas natural partners.

To achieve their common goals, KDOT and Audubon have hatched a plan to cooperate in 10 pilot areas throughout the eastern third of the state. These areas are along the sides of such roadways as Highway 177 and I-35. For each pilot area, there is a committee representing local government and business interests, relevant expertise, and residents. This project, recently named the Integrated Roadside Vegetative Management Program, has been underway for about a year, and has received a very positive public response to date.

KDOT and Audubon held a workshop in February 2001 to bring together interested parties throughout the state. The response has been heartening. Local experts in various fields have come forward to offer their assistance, and KDOT has been collecting seeds of wildflowers and grasses that will be used to supplement native stands in these pilot areas.

Roadside Vegetation: Not Just for the Birds

KDOT and Audubon’s partnership is intended to help reinvigorate and preserve prairie vegetation alongside Kansas’s roadways. One of the goals, as mentioned above, is to build pride in prairies. That is to say, this partnership hopes to build public appreciation for managing roadsides in a naturalist manner. One of KDOT’s goals in this project is to increase their efficiency in managing roadsides. Managing tallgrass, a primary component of Kansas prairies, through this initiative will be very energy-efficient because it requires far less frequent mowing. Fred Markham, of KDOT, said, “it takes a tremendous amount of fuel to run all those mowers.”

Mowing is the primary management tool the Department has for roadside areas. This initiative will use that tool more efficiently. Fred Markham, Ron Klataske of Audubon of Kansas, and others advocate revised mowing techniques. Although a 30-foot swath on either side of the road must still be mowed several times a year for safety purposes, areas further from the road can be mowed as infrequently as once every 3-4 years. This maintenance schedule will resemble in some measure the natural burning process Kansas’s prairies historically underwent, sustaining “the vigor of the prairie.”

The part of this equation that should bring smiles to state accountants’ faces is the amount of time and energy the Department will save for each mile of highway mowed. As Markham said, “If we can reduce mowing and provide native vegetation, that’s a win-win situation.” This initiative calls for far less frequent mowing, and that means lower fuel costs.

Audubon of Kansas

...But Partly for the Birds

In 1953, Aldo Leopold said, “The black prairie soil was built by the prairie plants, a hundred distinctive species of grasses, herbs, and shrubs; by the prairie fungi, insects, and bacteria; by the prairie mammals and birds; all interlocked in one humming community of cooperation.” Sadly, the situation has changed dramatically in most prairie landscapes. Ironically, the wonderful soil created by the prairie is perfect for agriculture, which destroys the prairie plant community. What prairie is left in many states is primarily situated along roadsides, by railroad tracks, on rocky hills, and in remote locations. It is this fact that brings KDOT and Audubon into alliance with one another.

Audubon, naturally, is more interested in flora and fauna than roadside cost cutting, but this in no way hampers the partnership’s agenda. The initiative will help to provide a habitat for animals that would otherwise be hard-pressed to find a place to live and nest. Although one might think that the only interaction between birds and highways would be of the head-on collision variety, such is not the case. Klataske says there is “no reason to believe that stands of tallgrass near highways are more dangerous for the birds, but there is a strong reason to believe that more birds can nest and raise broods in unmowed vegetation.” This would include birds like the Bobwhite Quail and the Meadowlark, state bird of Kansas.

Fortunately for Kansas, the native prairie has been resilient along roadsides, and we do not have to reseed most areas completely, as do some states with similar programs. Throughout the state, drivers can see switch-grass, bluestem, Indiangrass, and many other species of native vegetation along the roadside. This initiative will institutionalize naturalistic management of these roadside prairie areas.

...And Ultimately, for the Drivers

The money KDOT currently spends maintaining roadsides goes primarily toward mowing costs. Markham said, “This initiative puts the agency in the driver’s seat—we’re not fighting fire; we’re doing preventative maintenance,” which allows personnel to use the funds saved for other purposes—like making improvements to the roads. And there are several other benefits that will accrue from this initiative to the average Kansas driver. Perhaps chief among these are the benefits that can be expected during the wintertime.

Although Kansas certainly doesn’t get as much snow as, say, Minnesota, anyone who has spent a winter here knows how the wind can create horizontal or ground blizzards. Swaths of tallgrass with the proper setback (30 ft. is recommended) can trap blowing snow, reducing the impact of 30+ mph winds that would otherwise buffet your car with snow and sometimes even dirt. This also can produce a snow fence effect, reducing snowdrifts on the road, and that can save time and money after a big snowfall. As Klataske noted, “if the vegetation holds this snow, you reduce the cost of snow removal and you reduce the amount of salting—and hopefully reduce the human cost of winter accidents.”

There is some evidence from a similar effort—the Iowa Living Roadway Project—to suggest that such initiatives enhance tourism, as well as local appreciation of place. It would certainly be nice to get rid of the stereotype that Kansas is boring driving, and it is logical that more colorful and interesting roadsides could help dispel that. It also stands to reason that more interesting roadsides could help promote driver attentiveness and perhaps play a small role in reducing sleepy driver syndrome.

“When KDOT accepted the challenge that the Audubon Society gave us, a major goal was educating the public,” said Markham. The partnership has already held public workshops to discuss the project, and interested individuals are invited to contact Ron Klataske of Audubon (ron_klataske@audubonofkansas.org) or Fred Markham from KDOT (fred@ksdot.org). This partnership is working so well that both agencies are considering ways to cooperate in the future, and ways to involve more entities in future initiatives. Klataske said, “There are all kinds of opportunities for spin-offs,” and Markham concurred: “We’re working together on the pilot projects, but we’re expanding the partnership to other groups as well.”

So for all those that think interagency partnership is logistically impossible, or who feel their agency is simply too different from another’s for a partnership to work, let KDOT and the Audubon Society of Kansas be an example. The beauty of their partnership is its emphasis on common goals, and its focus on what is possible, rather than on what isn’t.

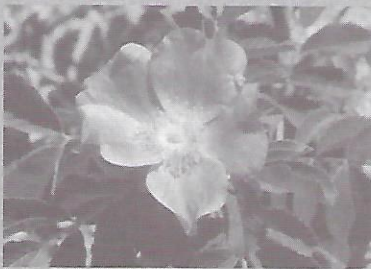
*Reprinted from the KUTC Newsletter, a publication of the Kansas University Transportation Center for local government road departments in Kansas.
Audubon of Kansas*

“This partnership is working so well that both agencies are considering ways to cooperate in the future—and are discussing ways to involve more entities.”



*"The earth
laughs in
flowers."*

Ralph Waldo Emerson



Clyde's Prairie

I walk Clyde's prairie often in morning light and evening glow
and watch the progression of wild flowers from spring to fall
A plow's not touched it this century, they say
A moment's joy can be had there each day
How many different wildflowers bloom there? No one knows
My list of species just grows
Indian paintbrush, obedient plant, prairie blazing star, to name a few
Purple coneflower, browneyed susan, prairie rose glistening in the morning dew
Carl mowed the prairie one late June day
Layed it down in endless rows -- to make hay
Rolled those beauties into big round bales
Standing "tomb-like" across the swale
The prairie now lies smooth like a carpet of green
The stone-like tombs standing as far as can be seen
A haze of dust hangs lazily in the air
As the hot summer sun sets -- it's as if Clyde's prairie was never there
One warm afternoon in early spring
I'll wander there amid islands of snow
Tiny green shoots -- bits of blue and yellow -- a promise will give
That Clyde's prairie lives

*Rick Tucker, Board of Trustees
June 28, 2002*

Birding Kansas, continued from Page 1

Official "Big Days" follow a strict set of rules, sanctioned by the American Birding Association. The attempt must be conducted in a single calendar day; participants must travel in the same vehicle and remain in direct voice contact with all other participants on the team at all times while birding. Participants must also strive to have all team members identify all species recorded and all the birds must be positively identified by either sight and/or sound before being counted towards the team total.

Our team arrived at a prairie site in Shawnee County about 20 minutes before midnight and waited patiently until the clock struck 12! The wind was much brisker than we would have liked, but the low cloud cover and lights of Topeka gave it a dawn-like atmosphere and the Henslow's Sparrows were going strong. Getting out of the car, Mark and Roger heard the nocturnal flight call of a Veery, and all of us heard a singing Grasshopper Sparrow and several Upland Sandpipers. A Greater Prairie Chicken responded a short time later. A short drive down the road to a likely-looking Poorwill spot had a bird calling--along with the gobble of a Wild Turkey by 12:20 am.

We were very fortunate to tally so many different birds, given the less than ideal weather. Common Nighthawks were seen all over in the lights of Topeka on the drive through to the next predawn stop at Baker Wetlands near Lawrence. Even though the wind was still blowing strong, the team added King Rail, Virginia Rail, Sora, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Barred Owl and Barn Owl. The team was energized by hearing a Greater Yellowlegs (a bird missed last year) and totally pumped when a Woodcock "peented" in response to a tape. This was a first for all of us, having Woodcock respond at 1:30 am in a windstorm with no moon.



A Whip-poor-will and Chuck-will's-widow were heard at a brief stop in Bonner Springs, rounding out the rest of the possible nightjars. Being slightly ahead of schedule when we arrived at a site selected for the break of day, we listened to the wind for an hour and hoped that the weather would clear. Once again we were in luck and the dawn chorus arrived on cue with the calls of a Black-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and Yellow-breasted Chat. Strategically located at Leavenworth Bottoms on Fort Leavenworth, our team added a score of other woodland species including some known to be hard to get any further west, including Song and Lincoln's Sparrows.

Just after dawn, we moved to the upland forest of the Fort and were treated to a tremendous flurry of activity, with five species of vireo and 25 species of warblers--including Hooded, Worm-eating, Blackburnian, Canada and Golden-winged Warblers. A Gray-cheeked Thrush called emphatically across from the prisoner's graveyard.

A quick drive was made back down to the river bottoms, where we picked up both

Audubon of Kansas

*"While I know
the standard
claim is that
Yosemite,
Niagara Falls,
the Upper
Yellowstone and
the like afford
the greatest
natural shows, I
am not so sure
but that the
Prairies and
Plains last
longer, fill the
esthetic sense
fuller, precede
all the rest and
make North
America's
characteristic
landscape." --*

Walt Whitman

*"Never look for
birds of this
year in the
nests of the
last."*

*Miguel de Cervantes
Saavedra
(1547-1616)*



Marsh and Sedge Wren, and added a Northern Harrier at a "staked out" nest location. The previously-known Pileated Woodpecker nest tree was blown over in a recent storm, but luckily a bird responded to a tape.

Birds continued to be added at a rapid pace, but we needed to leave the Fort at 10:00 a.m. to maintain our schedule. A quick dash back to Bonner Springs yielded an Olive-sided Flycatcher, Acadian Flycatcher, Blue-winged Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush and White-eyed Vireo. A female Hairy Woodpecker was located on the trip out and a quick glance through some bushes provided the only Belted Kingfisher of the day.



At Clinton Lake, we added the nesting Bald Eagles, color-splashed Painted Buntings, and Blue Grosbeaks in their traditional spots. A Red-shouldered Hawk was seen carrying a snake through the trees. A Prothonotary Warbler made the warbler count 28 total species and a Harris's Sparrow that hadn't left Kansas for its north-country breeding territory was tallied there too. A Red-breasted Merganser, Caspian Terns, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, and several species of shorebirds rounded out the list that was riding at 178 species by noon.

The team jumped on Interstate-70 for the trip west. Stops at the Junction City Cemetery for Red-breasted Nuthatch and to nearby Walla Walla Road for Bewick's Wren were a success, and the team continued en route towards Wilson Lake. The two target species there, Rock Wren and Say's Phoebe, were added in close proximity to Wilson State Park within a few minutes of arrival, clearing the way to start the 45 minute trip from the lake to Cheyenne Bottoms.

Down at the Bottoms--Cheyenne Bottoms--the birding became more difficult. Most of the shorebirds were at the wrong end of the pools to be seen easily because of the wind direction, but the team was able to scope out most species anticipated and needed. We spent an additional 30 minutes looking for a Clark's Grebe, seen a few days before, among all the Western Grebes in the deep-water section of the marsh. The search was abandoned in an effort to save time, with no success in finding one.

Ultimately, the Bottoms' habitat was extremely kind to us, with several previously missing species of water birds added to our list. Ruddy Turnstone, Neotropic Cormorant, Willet, American Golden Plover, Hudsonian Godwits, and a Burrowing Owl were all found. I was able to catch a glimpse of a Least Bittern flying over the marsh while Mark and Roger were scoping for shorebirds. Two Peregrine Falcons were also located, which is always a thrill and a cause for great distress for the other birds in the general area!

Ellinwood was the next location on the way to Quivira to try for some previous misses of "town" species before the light waned too much. Within less than 10 minutes of searching, Mississippi Kite, Pine Siskin, and Eurasian Collared Dove were added to the list, making that stop very important.

Racing towards Quivira National Wildlife Refuge before dusk, we observed numerous White-crowned Sparrows and flushed a Vesper Sparrow off of the road. The habitat of Quivira

Audubon of Kansas

is typically outstanding and didn't disappoint, providing Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Piping Plover (a threatened species), and one Red-necked Phalarope in a gathering of 20,000+ Wilson's Phalaropes. One last loop around the wildlife drive yielded three Greater Scaup, a good species to find anywhere in the state. The call of the rare Black Rail provided a Quivira encore, and then a winnowing Common Snipe made the list 225.

An unsuccessful attempt at getting a nesting Black-billed Magpie in rural Ellsworth County just east of Wilson ended the quest at just after 10:30 p.m. The grueling trip lasted more than 22 hours and covered an arduous 596 miles of driving. An astounding 28 species of warblers, 28 species of shorebirds and 19 species of waterfowl were observed. Weather conditions, after a rough beginning, ended almost perfect.

While the team did exceptionally well on many stops, a number of bird species were not observed. An astonishing 16 additional species not seen on the Big Day were observed by team members separately within 3 days prior to and after May 13, during scouting efforts and return visits to the same places. The potential for an even bigger "Big Day" in Kansas still exists.

The total of 225 species tied Kansas with New Jersey for third place in the nation for most species seen in a particular state during a 24-hour period. Only Texas and California (with considerably more real estate) have higher Big Day records. The 225 species recorded was also a tie for sixth place for the most species ever reported on a Big Day in any state (pending any other new reports for 2002). Pretty impressive, considering Kansas has no ocean coastline or mountains to draw in suites of other species.

As the crow flies, the area covered is only about 250 miles from the river bottoms along the Missouri to Quivira NWR. This clearly demonstrates that Kansas, though not previously touted as such, is one of the premiere places in the nation to see and enjoy birds. When it comes to birding, the prairies, wetlands and woodlands of Kansas are truly outstanding. This trip also doubled as a Bird-A-Thon for the University of Kansas, raising \$2000+ for KU graduate student bird research projects. Money from sponsors for each species seen made this an important venture for that purpose as well. This team strives to continually aid in the goal of funding research projects in many types of bird study.

Footnote -- A complete list of the 225 bird species seen or heard is provided on the Audubon of Kansas website www.audubonofkansas.org.



"The total of 225 species tied Kansas with New Jersey for third place in the nation for most species seen in a particular state during a 24-hour period. Pretty impressive, considering Kansas has no ocean coastline or mountains to draw in suites of other species."

*Audubon of Kansas
is a statewide
non-profit
organization
working in
partnership
with:*



PO Box 156
Manhattan, KS 66505-0156

NON PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
MANHATTAN, KS
PERMIT NO. 580

Burroughs Audubon Society of
Greater Kansas City

Jayhawk Audubon Society of
Lawrence

Kanza Audubon Society of
Emporia

Leavenworth Audubon Society

Northern Flint Hills Audubon
Society of Manhattan

Sand Hills Audubon Society of
Hutchinson

Smoky Hills Audubon Society of
Salina

Sperry-Galligar Audubon
Society of Pittsburg

Southeast Kansas Audubon Society
of Parsons

Topeka Audubon Society

Wichita Audubon Society

AOK Is On the Way

In February, Audubon of Kansas opened a small office with large windows offering morning sunshine and a view of the Flint Hills in a professional office complex in Manhattan. Ron provided office desks, chairs, file cabinets, tables, shelves, a LaserWriter Printer along with other computer equipment, furniture and supplies that he had been storing for the occasion and using in the home-based office for the past three years.

Audubon of Kansas is dedicated to the reuse of resources, including office equipment, whenever possible. With this in mind we are looking to you and other folks who might have specific equipment to contribute.

With a grant from the Kansas Career Work Study Program we now have four KSU students working on a part time basis. We are also recruiting volunteers who are willing to help out with specific projects. With this additional staff in mind, we would like to set up two more "work stations", and for this we could certainly use a couple computer desks and, ideally, additional computers, another printer to serve the student auxiliary office, secretarial chairs, an electric stapler, a couple reliable office phones, and an answering machine that doesn't erase itself when the electricity goes off.

Other more costly items that our office could effectively use include a laptop and a digital projector that would allow Audubon of Kansas to do PowerPoint presentations. There are some occasions when the capacity to make professional PowerPoint presentations will greatly enhance the Audubon of Kansas cause. A digital camera would help complete this potentially "on-the-road" digital recording and display system.

Continued on page 14