

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

“The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction.”

– Rachel Carson

Rambunctious Gardening

A recent book by Emma Marris entitled *Rambunctious Gardening: Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World* goes a long way in explaining much of what Audubon of Kansas does. Her philosophy is based on what has been lost and what is now being regained or reclaimed. She explains, “We have lost a lot of nature in the past three hundred years – in both senses of the word lost.”

We have lost nature in the sense that much of nature has been destroyed: where there was a forest or prairie, there is a subdivision; where there was a creek, there is now a pipe and a parking lot; where there were enormous flocks of Passenger Pigeons and abundant Stellar Sea Cows in the north Pacific, they were hunted to extinction and there are now only remnant skins and bones in dimly lit museum galleries.

But we have lost nature in another sense. We have misplaced it; we have hidden nature from ourselves.

Our mistake has been thinking that nature is something “out there” far away. We imagine a place somewhere distant, wild and free, a place with no people, no roads, no fences and no power lines, untouched by humanity’s careless hands, unchanging except for the seasons’ turn. This dream of pristine wilderness haunts us.

For Emma Marris, wilderness is slipping away like slivers of soap in the hand that shrink and disappear. But nature is also the adaptive birds in your backyard, the blackberry and butterfly bushes that grow along the urban river, the brushy draws between farm fields, the carefully designed landscape garden, the avocado tree that sprouts in your compost pile. Nature is almost everywhere. But where it is, there is one thing that nature is not: it is not pristine in most places.

Audubon of Kansas agrees with her views: “We are already running the whole Earth, whether we admit or not. To run it consciously and effectively, we must admit our role and even embrace it.” In most (but not all) landscapes, we have to temper our romantic notion of untrammelled wilderness and find room next to it for the more nuanced notion of a “global, half-wild rambunctious garden, tended by us.”

For Audubon of Kansas’ diverse role in collective policy and stewardship, a few examples of our Rambunctious Garden include:

- Promoting an ecological and economical approach to naturalistic stewardship of the tens of thousands of miles of vegetated rights-of-way and their ecological values along highways and country roads
- Working with ranch landowners who have hosted the successful reintroduction of the once-considered-extinct Black-footed Ferret on private land in western Kansas



Fon Klatske photos

Upland Sandpiper on a fence post at the Niobrara Sanctuary.

- Restoring an incredibly beautiful property as a sanctuary for “wildlife and people” in the Nebraska Sandhills to demonstrate the merit of optimizing wildlife habitat, especially for declining grassland birds, as a complementary part of a working cattle ranch
- Encouraging the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism Commission to reinstate hunting regulations that do not needlessly threaten endangered Whooping Cranes when they migrate through our state
- Advocating to the EPA that prairie-dog poisons that threaten the existence of raptors (Ferruginous Hawks and Golden Eagles) and other at-risk predators (Swift Foxes) should not be approved when other toxicants without the risk of secondary poisoning are already available; and
 - Working with many others to retain conservation titles (programs & practices) in the Farm Bill, retain grasslands and wetlands within the landscape--and species such as Lesser Prairie-chickens and Swift Foxes.

But this “Gardening,” which we often refer to as conservation advocacy and education, promotion of nature appreciation and stewardship is not possible without the involvement, partnership and support of a substantial number of people who share these values. If you haven’t already, please join us and become a part of Audubon of Kansas.

Robert McElroy, MD
Chairman of the
Board of Trustees

Bob McElroy riding with Eli, his grand nephew, on the Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary.

