

Jayhawk Audubon Society: 40 Years of Conservation and Education



Rex Powell teaching a group of students from Wakarusa Valley Elementary School during the Wetlands Learners Program in October 2010 at the Baker Wetlands.

Jayhawks share common traits

According to a Lawrence sports commentator, the Jayhawk basketball team is successful not just because they are talented, but because “they like each other and they play well together.” In thinking about doing this article about the Jayhawk Audubon Society (JAS), it occurred to me that our members reflect similar traits. JAS has been very successful in attracting wonderfully talented people of all ages and from all walks of life – novices and experts, students and teachers, adventurers, volunteers and activists – who work well together, share a passion for and curiosity about the natural world, and enjoy each other’s company as they go about volunteering to do the work of an Audubon chapter in Kansas.

Kaw Valley Eagles Day: A Gift to the Lawrence Community

Jayhawk Audubon, founded by Ron Klataske in 1970, is fortunate to have some charter members not only still active, but in the case of Cynthia Shaw, and her husband Ed, as the mainstays of the Kaw Valley Eagles Day. From its beginning in 1997, JAS members have worked closely with other co-sponsors: the Chickadee Check-off program of KDWP; Westar Energy’s Green Team; ICL Performance Products, Inc.;

Bowersock Mills and Power Company; American Eagle Outfitters Foundation; the City of Lawrence Waste Reduction and Recycling Division; and the US Army Corps of Engineers. Indoor educational activities of Eagles Day provide kids the chance to see Lawrence Prairie Park Nature Center’s eagles and other critters up close, as well as other birds from Operation WildLife. Kids also get to dissect owl pellets, assemble bird feeders, craft eagle headbands, touch skins and skulls of prairie animals, inspect preserved specimens of insects and spiders, take part in AOK’s bird-oriented scavenger hunt, and in general have fun while learning about Kansas’ wildlife.



Margaret Wolf dissecting an owl pellet at Eagles Day.

Altogether there were nineteen exhibits in 2011 set up by JAS, co-sponsors, and other non-profits including: Audubon of Kansas; Bees 4 Us; Bowersock Mills and Power Company; Camp Wood YMCA; City of Lawrence Recycling; Friends of Hidden Valley; Friends of the Kaw; Grassland Heritage Foundation; ICL Performance Products, Inc.; Kansas Biological Survey; Kansas Wildlife Federation; Operation WildLife; Prairie Park Nature Center; Save the Wakarusa Wetlands; Topeka Zoo Education Division; US Army Corps of Engineers; US Coast Guard Auxiliary; and Westar Energy’s Green Team.

Perhaps the most exciting feature of this year’s Eagles Day for JAS was the

debut of the new video about the chapter, produced by professional videographer and board member, Elizabeth Stevens. It beautifully illustrates the varied activities the chapter undertakes to fulfill its mission of promoting greater understanding, enjoyment, appreciation and protection of our natural world.

Eagles Day is a massive undertaking for a chapter the size of Jayhawk Audubon. We are very fortunate to continue to have the overwhelming support of so many dedicated members, partners and friends to bring such a day of environmental education and productive fun to the community.

Raising Funds for Education and Conservation Efforts

Other efforts that rely on our volunteers are the three bird-seed sales throughout the fall and winter months. Linda Lips has been the overall coordinator of these events for several years, ably assisted by Dana Adkins Heljeson (who received special recognition for more than two decades of volunteering). The bird seed, along with a selection of natural history books/field guides and feeder sales, have become a significant source of funding for chapter educational and conservation activities. The other major source of funds has been the annual Birdathon, which was headed for many years by Margaret Wedge and her son, Phil. Richard Bean has been in charge for several years and probably has single handedly raised more funds for the chapter than anyone else.

Recently JAS has been fortunate to be awarded several grants to help fund its education and conservation programs and projects: Kaw Valley Eagles Day in January; kids' scholarships to the Museum of Natural History summer camps; the Wetlands Learners Project; brochure printing for the Baker Wetlands; Earth Day activities; the joint JAS/Monarch Watch public butterfly tagging event in September; paying registration fees for the Lawrence Christmas Bird Count participants; monthly newsletters, programs, and field trips; and support for Audubon of Kansas' efforts to protect and preserve birds, other wildlife and their habitat.



Marty Birrell, Director of Lawrence's Prairie Park Nature Center showing a Barred Owl to visitors at Eagles Day.

Providing Services for Members

JAS is most fortunate to have Susan Iversen as its newsletter editor. She manages to include a monthly "kids' page" that is related to the public meeting's program topic. During its 40 year history, JAS has presented over 400 programs on topics ranging from birds, other wildlife and plants to geology, paleontology, avian evolution, prairie ecology, marine biology, backpacking, bee keeping, archaeology, the Prairie Dog Wars of western Kansas, bird banding, green building, Kansas River morphology, and nuclear and wind energy. These programs have also provided wonderful travelogues from Antarctica to the high Arctic and from South America to Australia. In addition to the myriad public programs and field trips that JAS has provided for its members and the general public, there have been workshops on bird feeding and classes in bird identification and ornithology. Of course many of JAS's programs have been on environmental topics like pesticides, wildlife conservation, alternative energy, sustainable agriculture, air pollution, and local environmental activism.



Linda Lips, Cynthia Shaw and Ron Wolf at the JAS Eagles Day exhibit.

JAS's Service to the Community: Baker Wetlands Field Days Morphs to Wetlands Learners

From 1992 until 2002, each spring JAS participated in an annual educational Wetlands Field Days with Baker University. After these educational open houses were discontinued, and budget cuts eliminated field trips for Lawrence students, the JAS board voted to initiate a program that would enable kids to continue to experience the wetlands first hand. In the fall of 2005, Rex Powell and teachers Sandy Sanders and Anna Busby gathered a group of educators, biologists, and other scientists to form the core group of volunteer facilitators willing to share their knowledge with students from local elementary schools in what has become the Wetlands Learners Program. Literally hundreds of students from dozens of classes have had the opportunity to visit and learn what the wetlands are all about and which critters call the wetlands home. This program continues today and has been expanded to include trips organized by the Lied Center.

Providing a Voice for the Environment

JAS weighed in on issues such as protection of wildlife habitat at Lawrence's Riverfront Park; closure of the pedestrian walk at the Lawrence Riverfront Mall to protect Bald Eagles' roosting area at the Kansas River; attempts to preserve the Elkins Prairie; establishing some pesticide-free parks in Lawrence, and establishment of household hazardous waste facilities. Our members have been active in the Douglas County ECO2 initiative and Open Space Plan, as well as voicing our concerns about preserving prime farmland for local food production. Our interests go beyond our own backyard. We spoke out about the Kansas

Department of Transportation's Adopt-a-Highway program, constructing an Education Center at Cheyenne Bottoms, protecting Whooping Cranes and Sandhill Cranes, opposing the legalization of falconry, and creating the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve. Recently some of our members met with Douglas County supervisors to encourage their adoption of management practices for county roadside rights-of-way similar to those of KDOT.

Jayhawk Audubon believes that by making its programs and field trips free and open to the general public, it provides them the opportunity for greater understanding and appreciation of our natural world. We feel that, in turn, leads to greater participation in activities that promote protection and preservation of birds, other wildlife and their habitat. JAS is indebted to all the many volunteers who stepped forward to assist the chapter in countless ways. Without the ongoing leadership of current president, Chuck Herman, previous presidents, all board members and the assistance of all our other volunteers, we would not have been able to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the founding of the chapter in April 2010.



In closing, I also would like to express my gratitude for editorial assistance to my husband, Ron, to Susan Iversen our newsletter editor, and Liz Stevens for sharing the text of the new video.

— *Joyce Wolf
Lawrence*

Joyce Wolf and her husband, Ron, have been part of the Audubon family since 1974. She formerly served as Audubon's legislative liaison, and also represented the West Central Region on the Nation Audubon board from 1994 to 2000. Joyce currently is program chair for Jayhawk Audubon Society and recording secretary for AOK.

GIVE A FRIEND A GIFT MEMBERSHIP, OR JOIN AOK TO SUPPORT CONSERVATION AND NATURE APPRECIATION



Audubon of Kansas is proud of its logo, picturing a Greater Prairie-chicken in full display at sunrise in a prairie setting. It helps to project that AOK members and leaders take pride in prairie landscapes, wildlife, other resources – and everyone who plays a role in stewardship of the land.

Audubon of Kansas does not normally sell merchandise, but we have great ball caps and make them available at cost, or at no additional costs with \$20 gift memberships or greater donations. A cap can be mailed if requested. Wild ducks have different colored beaks! So it is only natural that AOK caps come with a choice of bill colors: green, black or khaki!

A logo featuring a Sharp-tailed Grouse is planned for the Niobrara Sanctuary.