

AOK IS HELPING KANSANS

TURN HIKES INTO ADVENTURES

WITH NATURE ADVENTUREPACKS

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When COVID closed many concerts, theaters, and sporting events, people turned to nature for recreation. The popularity of bird watching grew, getting the attention of national media outlets.

Even though the popularity of bird watching is growing, there are still barriers for people experiencing poverty. Access to binoculars and field guides may be limiting. Second, people may not know the best bird watching sites locally, especially when most of Kansas is privately owned. Third, they might not know where to reach out for assistance identifying the birds they see.

This project seeks to help eliminate many of these barriers, not only to promote nature appreciation as a method for improving health, but also to connect disadvantaged groups with physical and social resources. Nature Adventurepacks will be distributed to libraries so patrons have access to both equipment and information in a location where they are already accustomed to finding information. Libraries were chosen because that is where communities gather, but especially people who need the various resources offered by libraries (a safe

place, free access to computers to those who cannot afford their own, after school programs, and other social programs.)

Audubon of Kansas' Nature Adventurepack Program seeks to make nature appreciation more accessible so Kansans can "check out" animals and insects close to home. The program consists of three main components: a binocular backpack to be available for check-out through libraries, in-person programming about how to use the backpack to identify birds and butterflies, and a social media/marketing campaign to foster a community of bird and butterfly watchers in Kansas. **Our Nature Adventurepacks include a backpack with one adult pair of binoculars, two children's pairs of binoculars, guides for identifying birds and butterflies, and a map showing where to find wildlife in the library's county.** But it's not just a backpack!

Libraries will also get advertising materials and in-person programming to promote the Adventurepack and nature appreciation. Patrons will get links to AOK-created YouTube videos on topics such as how to use binoculars, identifying birds by song, information about species



Executive Director Dr. Jackie Augustine promoting the Adventurepack program at the Kansas State Libraries Conference in October.

in need of conservation in Kansas, using free online apps to identify birds and butterflies and report their sightings, introducing people to places to see birds and butterflies, helpful hints about common identification challenges, and other topics. Patrons can also join an Adventurepack Facebook group to connect with experts and other library patrons enjoying the packs. Marketing campaigns will not only direct patrons to the birding backpack resource, but also increase the visibility of bird and butterfly watching generally as a hobby to improve mental and physical health.

Through in-person programming and social media platforms, this program will work toward developing bird-friendly communities throughout the state.

Libraries are excited to partner with us! Jackie Augustine, AOK's Executive Director, attended the Kansas Library Association Conference in Wichita in October. At a table in the vendor's area, she had an Adventurepack available and described the program to attendees. They enthusiastically signed up for more information and told others to come visit our table. When Jackie gave a presentation, the room was full and we had a great discussion about how to promote the Adventurepack, how to prevent theft, check out policies and procedures,

and other strategies for a successful kickoff.

Fund-raising is off to a great start! A \$10,000 grant from Chickadee Checkoff supports the dissemination of backpacks in southwest Kansas (Barber, Clark, Comanche, Finney, Grant, Gray, Greeley, Hamilton, Haskell, Kearney, Lane, Meade, Morton, Scott, Seward, Stanton, Stevens, and Wichita Counties). **Audubon Chapters throughout the state are teaming up with AOK to bring backpacks to their areas.** An additional \$10,000 has been raised or pledged to roll out the program in the greater Kansas City area. Each Adventurepack costs about \$250 to purchase and distribute, as well as to provide in-person programming and other support materials. With 328 libraries throughout Kansas, we need to raise an additional \$62,000 before every library will have access to an Adventurepack. Go to <https://www.audubonofkansas.org/aok-nature-adventurepacks.cfm> to add your support to this program.

We could also use help with preparing and distributing backpacks, and in-person programming associated with the kick-off of an Adventurepack becoming available in a particular library. Contact Jackie (jackie@audubonofkansas.org) if you are interested in sharing your passion for watching birds or butterflies and other ways you can make this project a success.