

"Silent Spring 2016: Threats to Birds, Bees and Other Wildlife."

--Joyce Wolf

Buyer Beware!" Those words from Mary Powell's article in a previous issue of *Prairie Wings* struck a nerve with me. Before that, I had been purchasing bedding plants without first checking to see if they had been treated with neonicotinoids – a group of chemicals that is now thought to be a leading cause of Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) in bees. And only later, when I found out about the toxic effect of neonics on pollinators and began checking labels on bedding plants, did I realize that American consumers are being misled. When a plant is labeled it has been treated with neonics – the back side of that label says "approved by the EPA!" Uninformed with no knowledge to the contrary, I assume that most buyers would see these labels and make their purchase, thinking that such an "approval" must mean that the plants are safe to use, and thus mistakenly believe they were helping bees and other pollinators.

Meanwhile, I had the opportunity to hear a presentation by Douglas W. Tallamy, the author of "Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants," in which he describes the absolute dependence on the availability of caterpillars for nesting success of most songbird species. Tallamy had actually documented that a single clutch of nestlings were fed 7,000 caterpillars from the time of hatching to when they were able to feed on their own. So I have come to say: "If you like birds, you also need to like caterpillars!" For it is the high-protein and fat content of these bugs-to-be that provides the essential building blocks for early growth. And I no longer groan when I see leaves with lots of holes in my gardens – for I have come to learn that this means the birds are being well fed.

Then I had the pleasure of hearing Ann Birney's historical performance of Rachel Carson for Jayhawk Audubon Society's 45th anniversary celebration in the spring of 2015. That led me

to read a comprehensive biography of Carson by Linda Lear, which I highly recommend to anyone wanting to know more about this amazing lady of science-based environmentalism. I believe Ms. Carson would be disappointed that the Environmental Protection Agency, which came into being after her research, analysis and advocacy on the dangers of pesticides (which she correctly called biocides) now seems to have been silenced as the agency designated to protect the environment from harm.

A big part of AOK's mission has been education. In 2015, we decided to address this need in 2016. I volunteered to

head a committee to organize this day-long conference, which was held on April 9 this year. Because of what I had learned about neonics and their toxic effects, not only on bees and other pollinators, but on birds as well, I suggested that we call the conference "Silent Spring 2016: Threats to Birds, Bees and Other Wildlife." Cathy Lucas, an AOK board and conference planning-team member, thought that it was an attention-getting title that would

attract more people, which I believe was a correct assessment. Although registrations lagged at first, we had 130 persons from across Kansas attend. Cathy also offered examples of evaluation forms from other conferences that she had attended that we could adapt for our own purposes.

But the underlying theme of the conference was to offer solutions: "what each of us can do to offset those threats to wildlife in our yards, gardens and farms." Try as she might, Evelyn Davis, another conference planner, was unable to find an appropriate venue in Topeka – more than a year in advance! Lawrence became the next choice, and although the convention center was being renovated, it turned out to be an acceptable location.





Ed and Sil Pembleton leading an education session

Monica Goss, AOK's Director of Development, tapped into a very helpful resource – Johnson County Community College students who put their graphic-design skills into practice by providing fantastic designs for website and printed materials, while gaining class credit for their efforts. We are very grateful to Nancy Schneider for allowing her students to participate in this venture. Mary Powell, also on the planning team, graciously arranged to underwrite the charges of another graphic designer, Janet Faust, who had also created materials for the Kansas Children's Discovery Center. She furnished AOK with layouts for the conference's program and other materials for inclusion in attendee's packets. Team members also benefited from the significant expertise and advice of Lucia Johnson, who had planned several conferences for the American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science.

Beth Schultz, another team member, put her University of Kansas contacts in gear and soon we had several of the conference programs: the video: "When the Well Runs Dry" by Stephen Lerner, with commentary by Tom Averill and Matt Sanderson; and our keynote speaker, Dr. Leonard Krishtalka. They along with Jennifer Hopwood from the Xerces Society, educators Sil and Ed Pembleton, and prairie restoration practitioners, Jeff Hansen, Peggy Schultz, and Jim Weaver, provided hints on making our yards and farms more wildlife friendly, thereby imparting a sense of hope for the future of pollinators. Paul Johnson gave legislative updates regarding conservation issues. Kathy Roccaforte Denning shared results of her research on native bees at several prairies. AOK's own Ron Klataske and Randy Rathbun, along with John Hughes and Matt Bergles, offered a summary of the final outcome of the prairie-dog wars. Kansas courts decided that poisoning Prairie-Dogs under the Kansas Prairie-Dog eradication statute conflicted with issues of protection of the Black-footed Ferret under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The ESA was found to preempt the state statute and ultimately the Board of

County Commissioners of Logan County was permanently enjoined from eradicating prairie dogs on the ranchland.

The committee is most grateful to our co-sponsors who provided informational materials for each of the attendee's registration packets. A majority of evaluation responses were very positive except about time keeping. We got behind early in the day and found it hard to catch up. One reason was the enthusiastic Q-and-A sessions after presentations. All comments will be considered carefully when planning for the next conference. The overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic responses were appreciated and will provide ample incentives for the next planning team.

This article was written in collaboration with conference planners: Evelyn Davis, Cathy Lucas, Mary Powell, and Beth Schultz, with editorial assistance from Craig Yorke. Photographer, Mark Neubrand.



About the contributor: Joyce Wolf served as Audubon's lobbyist during the Cheyenne Bottoms lawsuit. She served on the National Audubon Society board of directors for six years; active in water issues, she currently is secretary of AOK and program chair for the Jayhawk Audubon Society in Lawrence, Kansas. In her spare time she enjoys gardening and quilting.