

# *Wildlife Viewing from the Kitchen Window*

## – AT THE HUTTON NIOBRARA RANCH WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

"In every walk with nature  
one receives far more than  
he seeks."

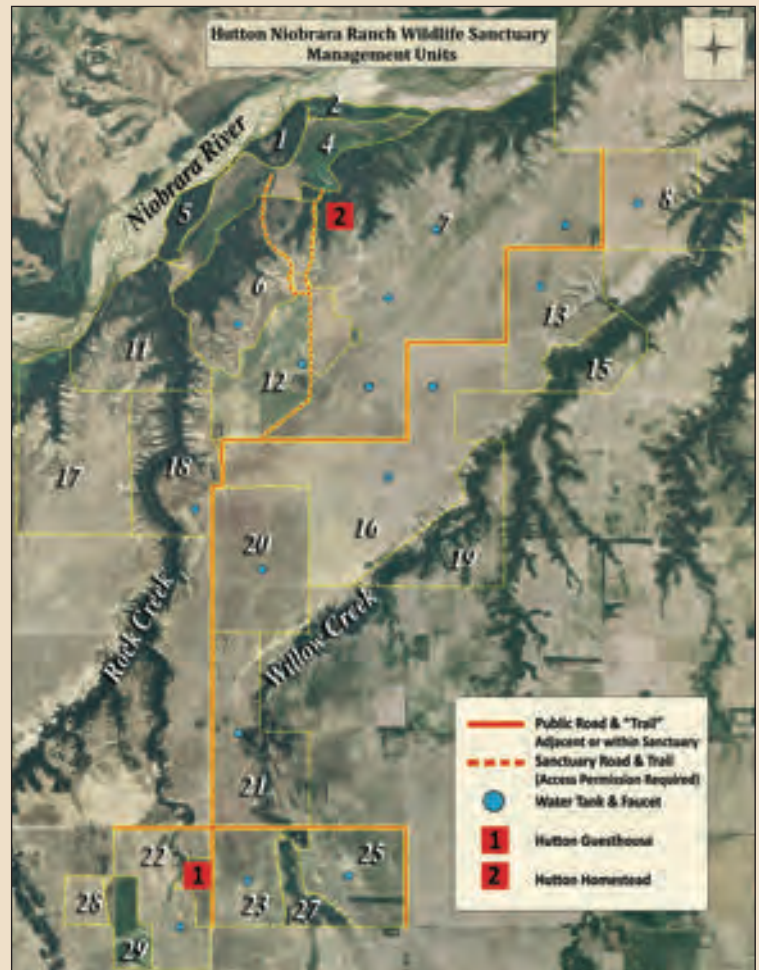
– John Muir





**T**he **Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary** guesthouses are managed to be like homes away from home for guests. The **Hutton Guesthouse** was the home for Harold and Lucille Hutton, and making it available to guests who appreciate wildlife, the prairies of the Sandhills, and the wetlands and forest of this area is consistent with the vision they shared of it becoming a wildlife sanctuary. The guesthouse is surrounded by upland prairie with a view of the sunrise and sunset. It is also situated on the edge of a tributary of Rock Creek and has an oasis of trees surrounding the house – including a cottonwood worthy of monument status for its shade and habitat. These pleasant surroundings provide a place where an array of wildlife can be seen and/or experienced from the front porch, back patio or through the kitchen window.

The photographs included in these pages illustrate just a few of the sights of wildlife enjoyed by guests this past spring, summer and fall. The images of Goldfinches and other birds at the feeder, the Wild Turkeys, Wood Ducks and a Whitetail doe and fawn are scenes viewed and/or photographed from the kitchen window. The hen turkey and her eight poults were photographed from the edge of the house as they settled in for the night on a major branch of the cottonwood just outside the kitchen window. The young birds scooted under her wings until they were all securely tucked away and tightly packed under their mother's outstretched wings. This strategy may at least protect them somewhat from Great Horned Owls, but perhaps not always enough from Bobcats or Raccoons.



*Photos by Ron Klataske*



Birds that came to the feeder included scores of Goldfinches, a pair of Cardinals, a pair of Spotted Towhees and a variety of others including Red Crossbills in late summer. The Towhees had a nest on the ground behind the metal shop building, and the whole family frequented the feeder after the young birds fledged.

The **Lazy Easy Ranch Guesthouse** is located two miles away from the Hutton House on a quarter section of grassland and woodlands that extends within a half mile from the larger part of the 5,000-acre



sanctuary. This guesthouse is an equally delightful place to stay and relax. It is more wooded, and the 160-acre property is subdivided into several pastures and hay meadows by shelterbelts of long-standing cottonwood plantings and undergrowth of red cedars. Essentially, the same suite of birds can be seen on the Lazy Easy Ranch.

The Niobrara Sanctuary website <[www.niobrarasanctuary.org](http://www.niobrarasanctuary.org)> has details on the sanctuary, including the conservation mission and guest opportunities. Reservations for either of the guesthouses are made by contacting the Audubon of Kansas office, or via the email address listed on the website.

Contributions from guests and revenue from lodging helps pay some of the expenses associated with providing these unique accommodations (including upgrading the guesthouses, utilities, property taxes, supplies, etc.) and for stewardship of the sanctuary.

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We are particularly pleased when extended families – including children and multiple generations – schedule a stay at the sanctuary and enjoy their time together in nature with few other distractions. We are reminded of an organization called Healthy Families Play Outside that was organized in Lincoln, Nebraska some years ago. Activities may include hiking the network of trails, exploring creeks and canyons, wading in small streams, or lounging in the warm, shallow currents of the Niobrara River. In winter after a fresh snow it is a delight to search for animal tracks. We encourage guests to go for a drive or bicycle along the “country roads” within sanctuary, watching for wildlife and listening to the sounds within the surrounding landscape. Whether you prefer to keep active or just relax at the guesthouse, we hope you visit soon!

June 2, 2012

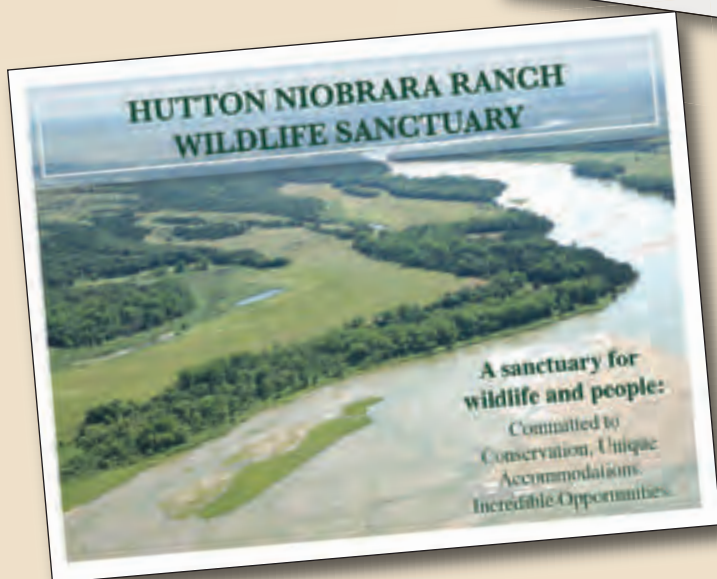
Thank you for the privilege of staying at the Hutton Guesthouse and visiting the Hutton Niobrara Ranch Wildlife Sanctuary last weekend. The weekend was a lot of work, beginning with lying in bed for a while the first morning listening to the quiet light rain. My next job was to sit on the front porch and listen to the Western Meadowlarks alternating with Grasshopper Sparrows. Listening to meadowlarks is like eating potato chips—it is hard to stop—but I eventually tore myself away to get a second cup of coffee from the kitchen, where just outside was a female Bobwhite and a male not far behind.

The whole visit was like that, just one enchanting encounter after another with Nature. My six hour walk around was restorative, and the only interruption in looking at one bird was that there was another one to look at too, or an interesting plant, or a dung beetle, and so on. Thank you very much for the written suggestions about where to go. The flagging on the trails helped me especially when I got to the woods in the northeast part of the sanctuary. By the way, I like the “monuments” to the beavers (the bases of tree trunks they had cut) you left behind when cutting other trees and trimming limbs for the trails.

In sum I enjoyed the trip immensely. Lana Micheel was so helpful and professional. I so appreciated her coming out on a Saturday and giving me a personal tour. I am grateful to Audubon of Kansas for providing some space for wildlife near and along the Niobrara and grateful for your continued conservation efforts.

Best,

Rachel Simpson



**Volunteer Opportunities.** A series of trails are being developed on the sanctuary. Some sections are complete, but several extensions have not been. Volunteers (individuals or organized groups) interested in helping clear a pathway through timber along the river, along and overlooking the wet meadows, and across creeks and canyons are welcome. With sufficient assistance and planning, this activity may be scheduled for winter, “spring break,” summer or fall. We are open to various possibilities. Send an email to [aok@audubonofkansas](mailto:aok@audubonofkansas) or call 785-537-4387 if interested.