

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



"I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in."

– John Muir

To Know the Name and Nature of the Diversity of Life is an Inspiring Beginning

The mission of Audubon of Kansas includes promoting the enjoyment and understanding of our natural ecosystems. Let us stop for a minute and consider how that enjoyment works. To enjoy something gives us pleasure that can be described as sensual, subjective, holistic, or perhaps even simplistic. I have observed that to name a bird or flower gives me an almost Adamic sense of possession or empowerment when I can put a label on a new find. It is the subjective pleasure of a child learning to speak when he or she sees the family pet and can say "dog." For the child the naming is totally subjective; he cannot name the breed or the fine points of its anatomy, but he knows what a dog is and it is the beginning of understanding. The sensation was the same when I first walked across a native prairie in the spring and became aware of the color and variety of the flowers, almost none of which I could name. But as I learned the names of more and more flowers and a little bit about them, the subjective pleasure of this new knowledge deepened both my understanding and the sheer enjoyment of now possessing their names. I believe it is this subjective sensual pleasure that motivates the birder to be able to identify a dozen different native sparrows or warblers, count the number of hawks perched on the highway telephone poles, or the naturalist gaze out on the sublime beauty of a tallgrass prairie in late fall.

It follows that when we enjoy a species, we want to know and understand the facts of its life and how it exists. What are the factors that make the existence of a bird, a flower, a collection of flowers, or whole biome possible? This study of natural ecosystems soon leads to the understanding that there are many factors that can cause an ecosystem to flourish or wither, whether in the particular or as a whole. To intervene in an ecosystem, to promote its flourishing, is to become an advocate for change – especially if we are changing patterns of neglect and destruction to patterns of stewardship and protection. Advocacy is what AOK is about. We have chosen to be directly involved in those wildlife issues where we can make a difference. We believe we have made a difference in promoting the reintroduction of the Black-footed Ferret to western Kansas, encouraging the KDOT to limit mowing on its 10,000 miles of vegetative rights-of-way, and other issues discussed in this newsletter. The ultimate goal of our advocacy is to make it possible for nature in all its beauty, diversity, and wildness to be enjoyed.

Robert McElroy, MD
Chairman of the Board of Trustees



Brilliant Prairie Blazingstar, *Liatris pycnostachya*, Rattlesnake Master, *Eryngium yuccifolium*, and many other perennial wildflowers highlight three native prairie meadows on property owned by Bob McElroy south of Topeka. AOK advocates protection of pristine prairie remnants as a priority for the Grassland Reserve Program.