

In this booklet you'll find:

A Bird's-eye View...page 3

Did You Know...pages 3-5

About Specific Birds
pages 5-9

Hey, This is My Territory!
page 9

Do Birds have Relationships?
pages 10-11

Migration Facts...page 11

Kansas Wildlife...page 12-15

A Game to Play
pages 16-17

Scenic Byways Map
Inside Back Cover

Fun Facts about Birds & Wildlife





This booklet is designed to help you see the miles of Kansas scenic byways with new eyes.

Included are photos and brief descriptions of common sights. It is a booklet that young and old will enjoy whether you are a visitor to the state or a life-long Kansan.

There are many available identification booklets about the birds and wildlife in this region. However, this booklet will feature fun facts about the birds and wildlife that you see often on these byway miles.

Two other booklets also are available. One describes farm and ranch features in Kansas; the other features grasses, trees, and wildflowers. Each booklet has a map of the scenic byways of Kansas and a game for kids.

We hope that this little booklet will put a smile on your face as you drive around our scenic byways.

A bird's-eye view

Birds are so ever-present that we sometime don't notice them! What do they say to each other, why do some sit on power lines, what does the color of a beak tell you, and why do birds have feathers anyway? After you read this fun booklet we hope you'll see all birds differently as you drive Kansas Scenic Byways!

Eagle eye!

On average, a bird's eyesight is two to three times sharper than a human's. In fact, of all the animals with backbones, birds have the best eyesight! Some raptors can even sight small prey more than a mile away. Eagles have an elongated eye shape that increases the sharpness of the images they see. From a mile up, migrating birds can see a radius of 39 miles!



They aren't color blind!

Birds have color vision, even though most mammals (excluding primates) see the world in black and white. It's not surprising that birds tend to be colorful whereas most mammals are not!



Red-tailed hawks have a 48" to 53" wingspan and are one of the larger hawks in Kansas. They soar high in the air watching for prey. They are the large hawks you usually see on telephone poles.

Listen for their two to three second scream when they are soaring.

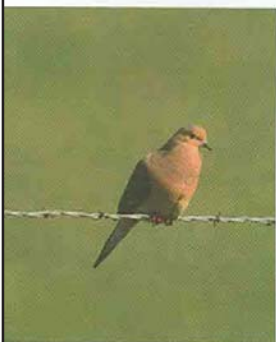
Birds of a feather...

Of everything living, only birds have feathers. The top three uses for feathers are 1) for flying, 2) for temperature control, and 3) the color patterns are used for display and camouflage. The number of feathers on a bird's body can vary from less than 1,000 on hummingbirds to more than 25,000 on **swans**. A bird's feathers may weigh two to three times as much as its skeleton!



Where they sit...

It's not by random choice that birds are wire sitters, ground squatters, or flockers. Many songbirds love to perch on either fences or power lines. Examples of ground squatters are quails, pheasants, and turkeys. Flockers include those in the blackbird family.



Beaks can tell much about a bird including its age and what it eats! A young **cardinal** has a blackish bill. Adults have bright orange or red bills.



Singing!

Did you know that a sparrow may have only one song in its repertoire although a **brown thrasher** might have thousands? In some species, a male bird with a large repertoire of songs is more attractive to a female!

Why are birds most active in the morning?

Aren't you hungry in the morning? Birds are ravenous in the morning and get busy right away trying to find food. *They can't just go to the refrigerator!*



About specific birds...

Our state bird! The **western meadowlark's** flutelike voice and beautiful markings and coloration make it a popular choice for state bird. It is the state bird for Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, and Wyoming. **Kansas meadowlarks love our prairie grasslands!**



About the blackbird family...

In the spring or winter you might see the

awesome sight of thousands of **red-winged blackbirds** flocked together. Food isn't always easy to find so feeding flocks gather because many eyes are better than a few in locating food! As a big group they also have more strength against predators. Even people who study bird behavior aren't sure how large flocks of birds move in synchronized fashion when in flight!



More about red-winged blackbirds...

They weigh two and a half ounces! They can fly 17-28 miles per hour. The red patch on the male's wing is most conspicuous during courtship. It takes baby red-wings just as long to hatch (11-12 days) as it does to learn to fly!



Turkeys...

In late summer turkey hens and their broods often band together to form large flocks. However, they flock together even more during the winter -- as many as 30-100 turkeys can be seen at a time.

Wild turkeys aren't territorial and travel as far as four to five square miles during the day looking for grain or insects. Look for these flocks in pasture or hayfield openings.



Turkey vultures...

Some people say that when they see the first **turkey vulture** (buzzard) of the season, then spring has arrived. The small red head on the big black body looks sinister, and the birds are most often seen eating road kill or circling overhead.



The turkey vulture has been called the greatest glider on earth. The wings are two-toned, and if you look closely you'll see that they spread their feathers at the very end of the wing like fingers to get the most use from the wind currents.

Crows...

Crows and **bluejays** are of the same bird family and are two of the most intelligent birds in the world. For example, crows have learned to drop nuts onto pavement to break them open.

Crows are noisy and bold. They sometimes travel in small groups with the purpose of mobbing predators (like a great horned owl) and driving them crazy with irritating calls and aggressive actions. This racket lets other crows know that the owl is around. To their credit, *crows use a much softer tone with their family members.*





Bald eagles...

Bald eagles nest in large trees near lakes in spring. They usually keep adding to one nest year after year. A nest may eventually weigh more than a ton! It takes a bald eagle about four to five years to get their white head and tail feathers.

The number of bald eagles breeding in Kansas is increasing after nearly a century of absence.

Great Blue Herons...

If you see a big bird flying alone that looks rather pre-historic, it's probably a **great blue heron**.

Drive slowly by shallow marshes and, if lucky, you'll see the long-legged herons standing quietly in the water waiting to nab a fish, frog, snake, or insect.



Look for the nesting heronries of the great blue heron. It's not hard to notice the colonies of huge stick nests located in tall sycamore or cottonwood trees near or in standing water during the leafless days of winter.



Canada Geese...

Canada geese are characterized by large flocks, as well as their loud honk. It's quite a sight to see the vast numbers of Canada geese flying in their V shape. The leader of that V is usually encouraging everyone by bobbing its head and honking affirmations.

Hey, This Is My Territory!

Have you ever noticed small birds chasing or irritating bigger birds?

If you see this unusual sight, you might think that smaller birds are just wanting to pick on somebody. But, in fact, small birds see bigger birds as predators and are chasing them out of their territory to protect their nests. They pick on the bigger, clumsy birds like crows, red-tailed hawks, and owls because those birds can't maneuver as well!

If you watch carefully as you drive down the road, you'll notice that hawks are spaced fairly evenly on fence posts, power lines, or in trees. This usually happens during the breeding season when they are very possessive of their feeding and nesting territories.



Do you ever wonder what birds are saying to each other?

One of the main themes is a male or female telling a same-sex counterpart to get out of its territory and go build a nest elsewhere!

Do birds have relationships?

Look for white birds standing beside cattle; sometime there will be quite a few!

These white cattle egrets eat insects on or near cattle, so they get along very well. *Cattle appreciate this!* Sometimes you'll see egrets standing on the cattle's backs.



Do birds fall in love?

It's doubtful whether birds have emotions, but there is strong evidence that some birds, such as Canada geese, swans, and eagles, mate for life. If one mate dies, the remaining one might find another. They also work together to raise their young.

Hawks will maintain the same mate for more than one year. Some groups, such as waterfowl, are social groups and like to eat and migrate together.



How do birds know if another bird is interested?

All the cackling or singing in the morning is often males singing to females. The males strut their stuff and use the power of their "voice" to get noticed by females. *Turkeys gobble and are very dramatic with their plumage displays.*



The songs of birds have been studied, and it's pretty clear that birds say things like, "Hi, sweetie!"

Mating dance...

When you're near a body of water or wetlands, note the physical movements of waterfowl. If it looks like they're doing some bizarre dance as they swim around, *they are probably performing a mating display.* This might be head-bobbing, bowing, sky-pointing, or all sorts of wing displays.

MIGRATION FACTS

- There are around 650 nesting bird species in North America, and 456 come through Kansas. Seventy-five percent migrate!
- Some of the most long-distance migrants fly several thousand miles between stops - *this can be two to six days of nonstop flying!* Scientists estimate that an equivalent feat of physical endurance for a human would be to run four-minute miles for 80 hours straight.
- Prior to migration some birds store up 10-50 percent of their weight in fat to use as a fuel source in flight. All that flapping really eats up the calories! During migration, birds will often forage longer to make up for energy lost during long flights.

KANSAS WILDLIFE

There are 87 different mammal species in Kansas ranging from tiny mice to buffalo! Some of the more common mammals in the scenic byway areas include **cottontails**, **coyotes**, **white-tailed deer**, **skunks**, and **squirrels**. Most of these animals like to hide during the day when humans are up and about, but sharp eyes will be able to detect their presence.

Squirrels...

If you see a big leafy nest in a tree, it likely belongs to a squirrel. Kansas has two kinds of tree squirrels: *gray* and *fox squirrels*.

Fox squirrels usually have reddish fur, but sometimes an all-black one is seen. If you see a tree growing in an odd place it might be because a squirrel forgot where it buried its nuts, giving the nut a chance to grow to be a tree!



Skunks...

The Latin name "Mephitis mephitis" for the **striped skunk** means "bad odor!" Most skunks stamp the ground with their front feet, growl, stand on their hind legs, and spit trying to scare a potential attacker before they resort to spraying. *But when they do spray they can spray 10-15 feet, and it can be smelled a mile away!* And isn't it interesting that skunks prefer foods with a strong odor!



Raccoons...

The thing you notice about a **raccoon** is the cute masked face and the rings on its tail. The most functional part of a raccoon is its feet! Each foot has five long and slender digits that help the animal climb trees well and open everything from garbage cans to shellfish, but the sensitive forepaws also help the raccoon decide what to eat!

The species name of a raccoon means "*the washer*," but they aren't really washing their food or hands. They likely have their front paws in the water looking for something to eat or are dunking food to soften it.

Opossums...

Have you ever "played possum" and acted as if you were asleep? That's what an opossum does to keep predators away if hissing, growling, biting, or expelling a smelly greenish fluid doesn't work. Even though they have 50 sharp teeth, the most of any Kansas mammal, opossums are very slow moving and are preyed upon by every carnivore in their territory.

By the way, *they are the only mammal in Kansas to carry their young in a pouch.*





Coyotes...

If you think you're looking at a medium-sized but scraggly dog with a bushy tail and pointed nose and it's constantly in a trot, you're probably looking at a coyote!

Coyotes can be helpful to farmers and ranchers because they kill destructive rodents and eat bothersome insects, but they can also kill or maim livestock.

Coyotes mate for life and are very good buddies to other coyotes. They've been known to take care of mates or buddies in traps by bringing them food or warding off predators. They are famous for their piercing "howl," but that's how they communicate with each other!

White-tailed Deer...



White-tailed Deer...

Bucks are solitary while doe and young deer travel together. Bucks mark their mating territory by rubbing their antlers against small saplings.

When frightened, a white-tailed deer will make a loud, snorting sound and then raise its tail upward like a flag, exposing the white underneath, to alert other deer.

The deers' thin legs help them run up to 35 miles per hour, jump 9-foot fences, and swim!

Cottontails...

Cottontails breed constantly from February to September and only take off an hour or two after giving birth before mating!

If all the young of each litter survived, *the descendants of one female could give birth to 350,000 rabbits in five years!* It's a good thing rabbits can reproduce so rapidly because they are food for hawks, owls, eagles, skunks, foxes, coyotes, snakes, opossums, and raccoons. The lifespan is only one to two years.

These two-to-four pound herbivores protect themselves with their speed, and their ability to leap and change direction abruptly while running.



Did you see it?

Place a check beside the items that you find and note the date and location.

- 1. Birds on a power line
DATE _____
LOCATION _____
- 2. Birds flying in a flock
DATE _____
LOCATION _____
- 3. Birds soaring
DATE _____
LOCATION _____
- 4. Birds on a fence post
DATE _____
LOCATION _____
- 5. Birds in the water
DATE _____
LOCATION _____
- 6. Little birds chasing big birds
DATE _____
LOCATION _____

A game for
the kids!

Did you see it?

Wildlife chart

(It's rare to see most of these animals during the day, but it could happen!)

- 1. Cottontail DATE _____
LOCATION _____
- 2. Coyote DATE _____
LOCATION _____
- 3. Opossum DATE _____
LOCATION _____
- 4. Raccoon DATE _____
LOCATION _____
- 5. Skunk DATE _____
LOCATION _____
- 6. Squirrel DATE _____
LOCATION _____
- 7. White-tailed deer DATE _____
LOCATION _____

SCENIC BYWAYS Etiquette

Kansas scenic byways are to be enjoyed by everyone.

Please help us preserve this beautiful land by not picking the flowers and native grasses, and by not straying onto private land.

Of course, please do not litter.

This magnificent scenic land is home to many Kansas residents who welcome you to their communities, shops, and restaurants.

Please respect their privacy by not photographing cowboys or their families.

Stay out of the way of cattle drives.

Do not climb fences or gates.

And please, help keep everyone safe by obeying posted speed limits.

This booklet is one of a series produced for your enjoyment by the Kansas Scenic Byways Program. Authors of the booklets are: Marci Penner and Debbie Divine. Photographs are by Mike Blair, Kyle Gerstner, Ken Highfill, and Mil Penner. Other contributors to the project are William Busby, Jim Mason, Ken Brunson, George Potts, and Bobbie Pray. Graphic design consultants are Catalyst Creative Services, Inc. of Hutchinson, Kansas. Printing is by Mennonite Press, Newton, Kansas. Thanks to the Kansas Scenic Byway Committee for its encouragement and assistance in completing these booklets. *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life & Behavior* by the National Audubon Society and *Kansas Wildlife* by Joseph T. Collins, et al, were used as resources. The website, <http://www.naturalkansas.org>, is a good reference.

The booklets are funded by the Kansas Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration through the National Scenic Byways Program. If you would like additional information, contact the Kansas Scenic Byways Program, c/o Bucher, Willis & Ratliff Corporation, 609 West North Street, Salina, Kansas 67401. Call 1-800/684-6966. Published 2003

Enjoy Kansas Scenic Byways!

