KANSAS WILDLIFE EDUCATION SERVICE PROGRAMS

Roland Stein¹, Erika Nighswonger², Alaine Neelly Hudlin³, and Pat Silovsky⁴
¹Wildlife Education Coordinator
Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks
Pratt, Kansas
²Education Resource Library
Pratt, Kansas
³Area Manager, Prairie Center
Olathe, KS
⁴Information/Education Representative, Milford Nature Center
Junction City, KS

Editor’s Note: To obtain additional information about programs, materials, or possible fieldtrips described in this feature, contact Roland Stein at 620-672-0708. For additional information about the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, readers can visit the KDWP web site at http://www.kdwp.state.ks.us/.

Introduction
In 1981, as part of the continuous commitment to the wise use and stewardship of our natural resources, the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks created the Wildlife Education Service sector (WES). The following briefly describes some of the programs WES offers.

Project WILD and Project Aquatic
Project WILD is a nationally acclaimed in-service program emphasizing an understanding and appreciation of wildlife. The program was initiated in Kansas in 1990. Its sister program, Project Aquatic, serves as an invitation to explore and better appreciate the fascinating world of water. Both projects motivate individuals to maintain and improve the quality of our natural resources. Since 1990 Project Wild and Project Aquatic facilitators have provided 155 Project Aquatic workshops to 2,704 participants and 343 Project WILD workshops to 6,380 participants.

Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sites (OWLS)
Over 206 Outdoor Wildlife Learning Sites are living testimonies that school sites can provide hands-on, environmental learning experiences for children of all ages. These sites are providing fantastic opportunities for learning about nature and ecology through activities such as the planting of native trees and grasses, establishing butterfly and hummingbird gardens, and creating wetlands and ponds for aquatic life. Any school or youth organization can apply for a $2,000 OWLS grant to initiate the development of their out-of-doors learning site.

Pratt Education Center
The emphasis of the Pratt Education Center is to discover the wildlife of Kansas. Numerous displays, dioramas, and living exhibits provide close encounters with the native birds, fish, mammals, and reptiles of Kansas. The exhibits also include a working
bee colony, a fantastic egg collection, and aquariums displaying fish native to Kansas. The Education Center is open 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM Monday through Friday (except holidays). Admission is free. The Pratt Education Center is located on Highway spur 64 just off Highway 54, two miles east and one mile south of Pratt.

**Wildlife Education Service Materials**

The WES provides resource materials for developing a greater appreciation and awareness for Kansas wildlife, wetlands, and other natural resources. The goal of these resources is to develop an environmentally responsible citizenry who will be involved in the decision making processes necessary for the preservation of wildlife and humankind. Resources available, with a brief description, include:

1. "ON T.R.A.C.K.S" - is the most recognized resource. This newsletter has been providing educators and interested individuals with information, activities, and insights into wildlife topics since 1990.
2. "Nature's Notebook” - is a collection of articles from the "Wild Currents" section of the Kansas Wildlife and Parks magazine. It provides information sheets and activities on all forms of Kansas' wildlife and related topics. Copies are available as either hard copy or on CDs.
3. "Something WILD" - is our newest resource. It provides interesting insights into many of the common mammals of Kansas.
4. "Lower Primary Guide" - Topics introduced in this resource are: What is Wildlife, Introduction to Habitat, and Food Chains and Food Webs. These areas of inquiry are connected to one another by using the organizational themes of models, systems and their interactions, energy (matter) flow and exchange, and patterns of change. These theme organizers are similar to those utilized in the Kansas State Board of Education Curricular Standards for Science.
5. "Upper Primary Guide" - The inquiry areas within this guide are classification, adaptation, and threatened and endangered species. Through the investigation of structural "adaptations," students will be better suited to identify why some species of wildlife are more prone to be listed as threatened or endangered than others.

**Education Resource Library**

The Education Resource Library, formerly referred to as the Reference Center, is located on the second floor of the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks Education Center in Pratt. This free-loan library has thousands of items covering a variety of topics relating to Kansas wildlife and other natural resources. Birds, insects, mammals, plants, and environmental concerns are just a few of the areas covered. Several different media formats are available, such as videos, learning kits, books, and posters. You can even check out a learning kit containing the skins and skulls of native mammals. The only cost you have to utilize these items is the return postage. To request a free catalog, call 620-672-5911 ext. 151 or email shelbys@wp.state.ks.us. Catalogs are available in CD format or hard copy. You may also access the library via the internet at www.kansaswildlife.org/ref. For additional information, please contact Erika Nighswonger at 620-672-0776 or email to refcenter@wp.state.ks.us.
The Prairie Center

The Prairie Center covers 300 acres of richly diverse biomes, composed of virgin tallgrass prairie, riparian woodlands, and wetlands. This natural resource provides educators and visitors with a unique opportunity to explore these ecological communities, especially the prairie, in their natural setting. The Center's five acre lake supports fishing for such species as bluegill, catfish, largemouth bass, and hybrid sunfish. Any special fishing regulations are posted at the lake. Six miles of hiking trails which meander through prairie, woodlands, and along wetland can be utilized.

The Prairie Center is located at 26325 W. 135th Street in Olathe, Kansas. Workshops for teachers are given throughout the year. School groups are welcome on a reservation basis. Limited interpretive programming is also available. For additional information please contact the Prairie Center at 913-856-7669 ext. 1. The area manager is Alaine Neelly Hudlin.

Milford Nature Center

The Milford Nature Center is designed to give visitors a better understanding and appreciation for natural communities in Kansas. Visitors can see and touch many native animal furs, print their own animal tracks, and discover mystery items using the sense of touch. In addition, visitors can hike the nature trail, view the butterfly house, and visit a habitat demonstration area.

Native animals including snakes, lizards, birds of prey, prairie dogs, and a bobcat are included in the live animal exhibits. The Milford Fish Hatchery is located next to the Nature Center and provides the opportunity for visitors to observe hatchery operations.

Both an aquatic diorama and a terrestrial diorama are available for viewing. The spectacular aquatic diorama has over 300 life-like models of fish, turtles, insects, and more. The terrestrial diorama features the wildlife of prairies, marshes, and woodlands.

Naturalist programs are available to interested groups. Program titles include: Thunder in the Sky (Birds of Prey); Nighttime Diners (Owls); Snakes, The Unhuggables; Prairie Animals; Peepers, Leapers, and Creepers (Reptiles and Amphibians); Inspector Insector (for K-2); Environmental Forensics; Jurassic Rocks (Fossils); Sensory Hike; Habitat Hike; Adventure Challenge; Orienteering; Animal Babies; and, Fill the Bill (Bird Adaptations). Other programs are available.

The Milford Nature Center is located near Milford Lake in the Flint Hills region of Kansas west of Junction City. From Interstate-70, take exit 295 and head north on Highway 77 for five miles. Go west on Highway 57 for two miles and follow the signs. The Milford Nature Center is in the Outlet Park area below the dam at Milford Lake. Year around hours are 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM Monday through Friday and 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM Saturdays and Sundays from April through September. If you have questions or need more information, call 785-238-5323.