Birds of the Woods and Prairie

Biodiversity in the Heartland

Eastern and Western Meadowlarks, Eastern and Western Kingbirds. Only along a narrow sliver of the Great Plains, including here along the Byway, can you see these closely related "sibling species" shoulder-to-shoulder in the wilds. And that's just one of this region's birding bonanzas. Many of the birds you'll see along the Byway only live here on the Great Plains. Upland sandpiper, lark bunting, greater prairie-chicken, scissor-tailed flycatcher, Mississippi kite, and Harris's sparrow are just a few of the species that rarely wander east or west of the Heartland.

Some prairie birds—like the northern bobwhite (quail), ring-necked pheasant, and wild turkey—draw hunters to this region. Pheasants, native to Asia, were first introduced in Kansas in 1906 with the release of 3,000 birds in 84 counties. Look for them in croplands and prairies virtually anywhere along the Byway.

Wetlands & Wildlife
NATIONAL SCENIC BYWAY

Scissor-tailed flycatcher
Ted Lee Eubanks

Mississippi Kite

Watch for this knife-winged hawk slicing over the cottonwoods. You may see it swoop to grab a dragonfly and eat its prey as it flies. One of the most spectacular raptors of the Great Plains, the Mississippi kite nests in "urban forests" and mature cottonwoods along the Byway.

Mississippi kite/Ted Lee Eubanks

Wild Turkey

By the 1950s, the wild turkey had been virtually eliminated from Kansas, largely due to habitat loss. Through conservation efforts by the state and its partners, turkeys now prosper across Kansas and along the Byway. For information on turkey hunting, contact the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks.

Wild turkey/Ted Lee Eubanks

Motion and Change

Before Euro-American settlement, trees here were limited to scattered clumps along the Arkansas River and local creeks. As communities grew, residents planted trees and shrubs, creating "urban forests." These mature forests now attract breeding birds that were absent only a century ago, like the Baltimore oriole.

Baltimore Oriole/Ted Lee Eubanks

KANSAS
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

AMERICA'S BYWAYS