The Nature Conservancy’s Mission

Founded in 1951, The Nature Conservancy is the largest private conservation organization in the world with approximately one million members. The Conservancy’s mission is to preserve the plants, animals, and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. We have protected more than 117 million acres of land and 5,000 miles of rivers worldwide, and we operate more than 100 marine conservation projects globally. We work in all 50 states and more than 30 countries using a science-based approach — aided by more than 700 staff scientists. We pursue non-confrontational, pragmatic solutions to conservation challenges and value partnerships with indigenous communities, businesses, governments, multilateral institutions, and other non-profits.

The Kansas Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, established in 1989, has made great strides in two decades. With more than 6,500 members and active supporters, it is considered the largest conservation organization in the state of Kansas. Thus far, we have protected nearly 90,000 acres across the state. To learn more about the Conservancy’s work in Kansas, please visit nature.org/kansas.

You can support The Nature Conservancy Kansas Chapter’s work by becoming a member. Donations are tax deductible.

For more information call (888) 233-4400 or email kansas@tnc.org.
The wetlands system

Adjacent to the Conservancy's preserve is the Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area, managed by the Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks. The State Wildlife Area, containing nearly 20,000 acres that were established primarily for waterfowl, is characterized by deeper pools and managed water levels. On the Conservancy's preserve, the goal is to restore the wetlands to their original state. These two programs represent different wildlife management techniques that not only complement each other, but also preserve more of the Bottoms' wetland habitat.

Grazing at Cheyenne Bottoms Preserve

Migratory shorebirds use habitats of different water depth, vegetation height, and density. Habitats for foraging shorebirds range from dry mud to seven inches of water. Shorebirds prefer short vegetation, generally less than half of the bird’s height. Some species, such as yellowlegs and snipe, will forage in taller vegetation. A range of wetland habitat conditions, from sparsely vegetated mud flats to moderately vegetated open shallow water, provides shorebirds with the required habitats they need during their stay at Cheyenne Bottoms. Shorebirds also use upland habitats associated with the wetlands by foraging in shallow flooded pastures with short, sparse vegetation maintained by grazing. Controlled livestock grazing can be an effective and inexpensive management tool for altering the plants and soils of wetlands. Livestock can be used to decrease undesirable dense stands of vegetation, compact and seal wetland soils, disturb the soil for shorebird use, accelerate nutrient recycling, and increase interspersion and vegetation diversity.

Grazing management at Cheyenne Bottoms uses a random rotational grazing system in which some pastures are grazed fairly heavily for short periods, other pastures may be grazed lightly for long periods, and some pastures may not be grazed at all during the year. This system provides the various ranges of vegetation height and density that are required by the shorebirds and waterfowl that visit Cheyenne Bottoms.

What to see

Grassland species
- Hobby
- Lark Sparrow
- Lark Bunting
- Grasshopper Sparrow
- Upland Sandpiper
- Dickcissel
- Western Meadowlark

Shorebirds
- American Avocet
- Lesser Yellowlegs
- Pectoral Sandpiper
- Semipalmated Sandpiper
- White-rumped Sandpiper
- Long-billed Dowitcher
- Wilson's Phalarope

Other Species
- Blue-winged Teal
- Northern Pintail
- Northern Shoveler
- Green-winged Teal
- Northern Harrier
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Short-eared Owl

Whooping cranes occasionally visit the Bottoms. They are more frequently seen in the fall, but occasionally in the spring.

When to visit

Migrating ducks and cranes reach their peak numbers in late March and early April. The peak for migrating shorebirds is late April to late May, although some start arriving in late March. Some of the waterfowl and shorebirds stay at the Bottoms throughout the summer.

The autumn migration is less dramatic. The autumn movement of birds is not as concentrated in time or route. A visit to Cheyenne Bottoms can be interesting any time of the year. As long as there is water in the marshes, many birds can be seen at the Bottoms.

Public access

The public is welcome at The Nature Conservancy’s preserve at Cheyenne Bottoms. Information about the Bottoms, driving directions, and the location of a public observation area are available at two information kiosks. From the intersection of U.S. Highways 56 and 281 in Great Bend, travel 8 miles north on U.S. 281; the kiosk is located at the intersection of Highway 281 and NE 80 Road. The other kiosk is located 2 miles east of Hesston on Kansas Highway 4. Please stay on the public roads; off-road hiking is prohibited. No dogs or other pets are allowed outside of your vehicle.

Facilities

There are no facilities on The Nature Conservancy’s property. The adjacent Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks headquarters has printed information about their facilities. To learn more about Cheyenne Bottoms and other Kansas wetlands, please visit the Kansas Wetlands Education Center located at 692 NE K-156 Highway. Or visit their website at http://wetlandscenter.fhsu.edu/