



Traveling the Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma

By Melynda Hickman, Wildlife Diversity Biologist

From prairie chickens to “horny” toads, scissortail flycatchers to prairie dogs, the Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma links travelers on an auto-driving trail to sites that offer a wealth of unique and interesting wildlife species while taking advantage of western Oklahoma’s small-town hospitality. The Trail includes 13 loops, each designed to provide the traveler with three days of accessible wildlife species, unique geologic features, large-scale prairies, and gorgeous sunsets and sunrises.

For more information, log on to greatplainstrail.com. To request a road map detailing the Great Plains Trail, contact Melynda Hickman, wildlife diversity biologist for the Wildlife Department, at mhickman@zoo.odwc.state.ok.us or call 405-424-0099.

Upcoming issues of *Outdoor Oklahoma* will continue to feature timely, seasonal details on various loops of the Great Plains Trail to help tourists plan a drive across the captivating landscapes of western Oklahoma.

What’s Happening on the Loops this Early Summer

For wildlife, this is the season of breeding and of endless efforts to defend territories and protect the young. For the wildlife enthusiast, this is the season to enjoy observing the breeding behaviors of wildlife as well as enjoying both the daytime and nighttime concerts provided by birds, toads and frogs. Any of the rivers, creeks, wetlands and farm ponds on any of the loops in western Oklahoma will provide evening symphonies of the Great Plains toad, Blanchard’s cricket frog and plains leopard frog, to name a few. Those interested in birds will want to take advantage of the birding routes suggested on each loop. These birding routes are designed to place the birder in the best place for early morning bird singing and will continue to guide the birder to other destinations until placing the traveler again at the best place for early evening bird vocalizations. Unique early summer wildlife species are highlighted below with the loops that offer the best opportunities for encountering and experiencing these outdoor sightings in western Oklahoma. Be sure to have sunscreen and insect repellent on hand for your Trail adventure.

Flycatchers and Swallows: Western Kingbird, Eastern Kingbird, Cliff Swallow and the impressive Scissor-tailed Flycatcher

Perched on fence and utility lines, these flycatchers are easy to see as you drive all of the loops on the Great Plains Trail. Cliff swallows are the birds you will see swirling in flocks around highway and county road bridges. All of these birds are consuming vast quantities of flying insects!

Nesting Shorebirds: Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets, Snowy Plovers and Least Terns

Salt Plains Loop
Destination: Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge
Hackberry Flat Loop
Destination: Hackberry Flat WMA



DAVE AND STEVE MASLOWSKI

Sand Hills Loop

Destination: Packsaddle WMA

Playa Lakes Loop

Destination: Optima Lake (also a great place to see yellow-headed blackbirds and ruddy ducks)

Nesting Raptors: Red-tailed Hawk, Ferruginous Hawk and Swainson's Hawk**Black Mesa Loop**

Destination: Rita Blanca National Grasslands (also a great place to see Chihuahua Ravens)

**Nesting Grassland Sparrows: Grasshopper Sparrow and Cassin's Sparrow****Black Mesa Loop****Playa Lakes Loop**

Destination: Optima Lake and Beaver River WMA

Black Kettle Loop

Destination: Black Kettle National Grasslands

Quartz Mountain Loop

Destination: Sandy Sanders WMA

Bats & Bluffs Loop

Destination: Cimarron Bluff WMA

Gloss Mountain Loop

Destination: Gloss Mountain State Park

Ruby-throated and Black-chinned Hummingbirds:**Sand Hills Loop**

Destination: Boiling Springs State Park office

Quartz Mountain Loop

Destination: Quartz Mountain Nature Center

Hackberry Flat Loop

Destination: Wichita Mountains NWR and back patio at Hackberry Flat Center

Prairie Dog Towns

Prairie dog pups will be above ground at this time of year. Be sure to look for Burrowing Owls on the towns.

Cimarron Loop

Destination: Waynoka Prairie Dog Town

Playa Lakes Loop

Destination: Sunset Lake & Game Reserve and Beaver River WMA

Hackberry Flat Loop

Destination: Wichita Mountains NWR

Black Mesa Loop

Destination: Rita Blanca National Grasslands

South Canadian Loop

Destination: Canton Lake

Watchable Wildlife Events

Hackberry Flat Day - birding tours, wetland tours, archery, shotgun, and more offer fun for the entire family! For more information: www.wildlifedepartment.com/hackberry_flat.htm or call 405-990-4977 during normal office hours.

Pre-Registration for the Selman Bat Watch 2011 Program

Now in its 15th year, the Selman Bat Watch Program continues to be a popular wildlife viewing event for the family. This year the registration form will be available to print off on Tuesday, May 31 at wildlifedepartment.com. Please complete the registration form, include a check or money order and mail to the address provided. Registration forms that are postmarked no later than June 7 will be entered for the random drawing to be held June 9. For more information, log on to watchbats.com. --x

—Melynda Hickman is a wildlife diversity biologist for the Wildlife Department. Hickman plays an active role in conserving wildlife in Oklahoma as well as in educating Oklahomans on the value of wildlife to our quality of life.