



The Wild Side!

March 2016

This ten-petal anemone (*Anemone berlandieri*) was found blooming during a recent trip to McCurtain County. See additional photos from the trip, including rare orchids, in the below story.

Upcoming Events

Hackberry Flat Day

Hackberry Flat WMA
Frederick
April 16, 2016

Take a guided bird tour, fling an arrow, or shoot a shotgun at this family-friendly wildlife event. Join biologists at the [Hackberry Flat Center](#) from 9 am-2 pm.

Red Slough Birding Convention

Idabel
May 7-10, 2016

Registration is now open for the 8th Annual Red Slough Birding Convention. Sign up for bird-watching tours of three conservation areas for your chance to see unique birds and their habitats. Last year 155 species of birds were spotted during the convention!

Bring Butterflies to Your Backyard with a Spiral Garden

With the official arrival of spring, many wildlife enthusiasts are rolling up their sleeves, digging in the dirt, and maintaining their backyard wildscape. These natural landscapes can attract a variety of wildlife to your neighborhood, including butterflies and other pollinating insects. Whether you're in the planning stage of your first wildscape, or ready to add on to an existing project, consider installing a spiral butterfly garden and filling it with nectar-producing plants.

Traditionally used to grow herbs, the spiral garden design is a perfect match for a butterfly garden. When well-draining soils are used, the sloped bed allows the top tiers to dry faster as the water seeps to the lower layers. This combination allows for a greater diversity of plants and in turn, a greater diversity of butterflies and other pollinators. When complete, the below design can provide 18 square feet of planting area (12 linear feet in the spiral, 1.5 feet wide).

Just as your kitchen garden can be customized to the taste buds of your family, your spiral garden can be tailored to the seasonal needs of your favorite butterflies. We've provided a list of spring and summer plants that are often used as host plants (plants butterflies lay their eggs on) as well as summer and fall plants that provide plenty of nectar.

Once your spiral butterfly garden is installed, it may be certified as a Monarch Waystation. Visit MonarchWatch.org/waystations for more information about this initiative. Learn more about the milkweeds monarchs lay their eggs on in this online [field guide](#).

The following design was presented to attendees of the [Oklahoma Wildlife and Prairie Heritage Alliance's](#) 10th annual meeting in January, 2016.



Monarchs and many other species of butterflies and insects are attracted to the bright blooms of backyard gardens.

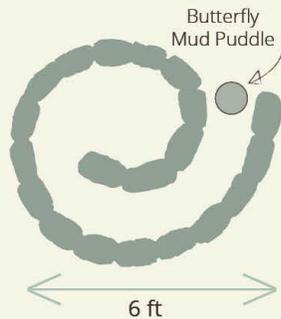
How to Build a:

Butterfly Garden

Side View



Top View



 Select a sunny area of your backyard that receives at least 6 hours of sunlight.

 If building in an area with bermudagrass, first put down landscape paper, cardboard or old carpet to keep grass at bay.

 Fill the garden frame with well-draining soil or potting soil. The slope of the garden will allow water to drain, leaving a drier zone at the top and a moist area at the bottom.

 Place a glazed ceramic saucer at the entrance of the garden. Fill the saucer with sand and compost. Mix in 2 tablespoons of iodine salt. Add small stones for the butterflies to land on. Keep sand/compost mix moist.

What to Plant in Your

Butterfly Garden

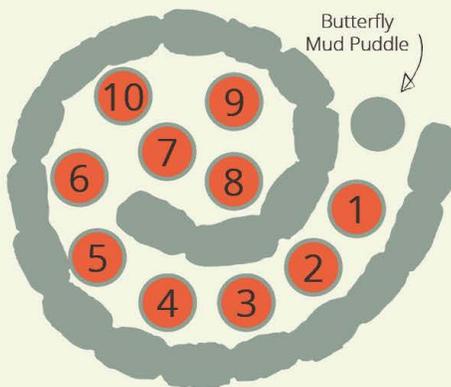
Plant List for Spring to Mid-Summer

Swamp Milkweed
Verbena
Green Antelopehorn
Spider Milkweed (*A. asperula*)
Stokes Aster
Indian Blanket
Scarlet Sage (*Salvia*)
Lantana
Goldenrod
Tropical Milkweed*

*Must be cut to 6" above ground by mid-September.

Plant List for Mid-Summer through Fall

New England Aster
Purple Coneflower
Verbena
Blue Mistflower
Black-eyed Susan
Blazing Star (*Liatris*)
Dwarf Butterfly Bush
Lantana
Goldenrod
Sedum



Species Profile: Orangethroat Darter



Brandon Brown/ODWC

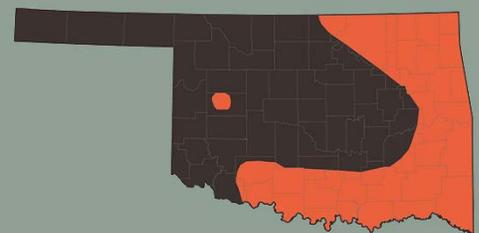
Hidden among the rubble of eastern and south central Oklahoma streams lies perhaps one of the most common and most eye-catching of our small fishes, the orangethroat darter. With brilliant blue and orange bars, the 2.5-inch males flash as they “dart” under small rocks and deadfall. Males are more colorful than females and are most striking during the breeding season.

This vibrant darter is similar to two other darters, the mud darter and creole darter. The orangethroat darter can be distinguished from the mud darter by having fewer scales on the cheek and fewer rays in the tail fin. It can be identified from the creole darter in having equally colorful “saddles” or bands along the sides. The creole darter has four darker blue bands near the tail.

Diet: Like other darters, the orangethroat feeds mostly on insect larvae and fish eggs. They seem especially fond of caddisfly larvae.

Reproduction: In Oklahoma, orangethroat darter breeding season can last from February to May, depending on stream location.

Where to find Orangethroat Darters



The orangethroat darter is found in both the Red River and Arkansas River drainages of Oklahoma.

They prefer riffles in small, gravel-bottomed streams.

Large Northern Harrier Roost Documented at Hackberry Flat WMA

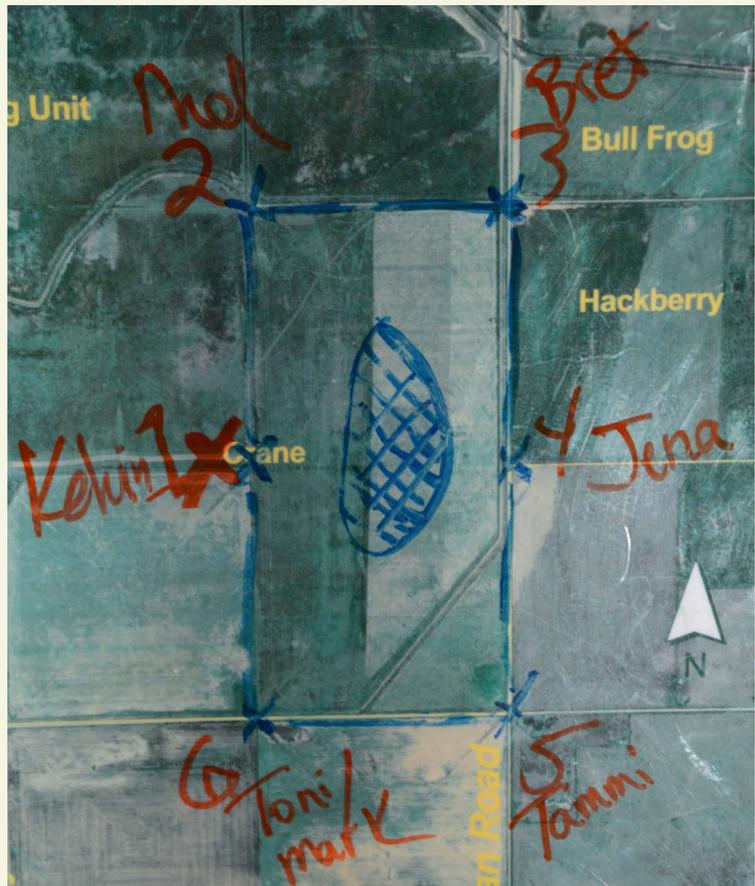
The darkness was surrendering to a new day when a call came over the handheld radio, "Okay gang, let's do this." At the signal, the group of biologists surrounding the survey area picked up their clipboards and began their hour-long watch.

Within minutes of the call, shadowy figures began rising from [Hackberry Flat WMA's](#) grassy Crane Unit. As the sun continued to rise, the shadows slowly transformed into [northern harriers](#). These raptors, winter migrants to Oklahoma, had formed a large evening roost in a 320-acre field and were emerging for their daily pursuit of rodents and small birds.

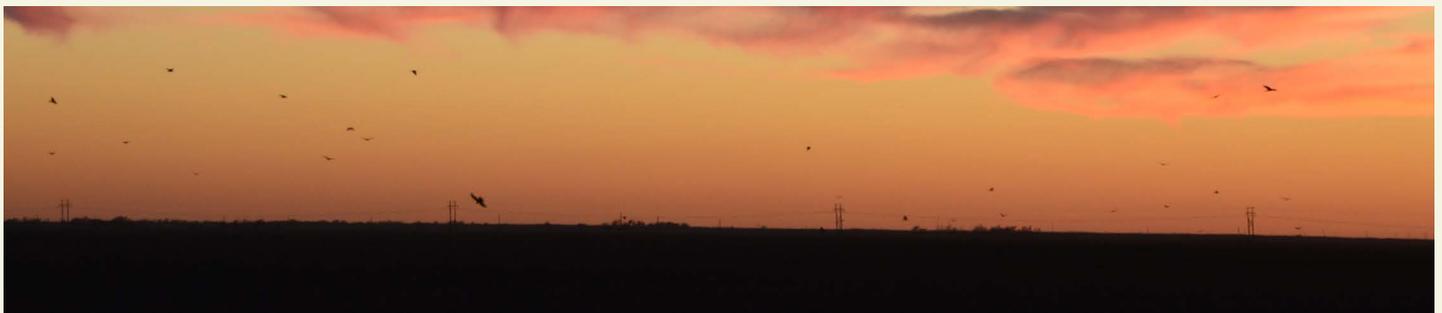
To get an estimate of how many birds had settled in the field, a group of seven biologists and volunteers encircled the roost in mid-February and counted each bird as it left the management unit. The six survey stations were separated by one-quarter mile, and the surveyors only counted birds that exited the roost area between them and the person to their right. The birds were tallied on a data sheet as either "brown" for females and juveniles, "gray" for adult males, or "unknown." Occasionally, a harrier would re-enter the field and was recorded in another column. These returning birds would later be deducted from the total count.

By 8 a.m. the harriers had dispersed to their hunting grounds, and the observers' individual counts were totaled. A surprising 291 northern harriers were documented that morning; 222 were females or juveniles, and 17 were adult males. The remaining 52 birds were silhouetted in the rising sun and were marked as "unknown."

The day after the survey, 30 northern harriers were spotted during Hackberry Flat's annual raptor program. Participants also saw six [barn owls](#), five [short-eared owls](#), four [red-tailed hawks](#) and four [American kestrels](#). Biologists attribute the impressive number of raptors to this winter's abundant rodent population.



The Hackberry Flat northern harrier roost survey design was based on an [earlier study at Fort Sill's Tallgrass Prairie Preserve](#).



Hundreds of Northern Harriers circled the Crane Unit of Hackberry Flat WMA before roosting the evening before the survey.

Rare Plants Spring Up In McCurtain County

Well-known as a biodiversity hotspot, McCurtain County, Oklahoma offers a variety of nature-related experiences. Along with the potential for new and unusual bird, reptile and amphibian sightings, the county's visitors are presented with the chance to see a number of colorful and fascinating wildflowers, especially in early spring.

Quick to bloom, many of these wildflowers (referred to as "spring ephemerals") open before the season's new tree leaves shade the forest floor. Open for only a short while, plants can emerge, flower, and produce seed in just over a month's time. An early source of nectar, these flowers are especially important to pollinators.



Spring Ephemeral Blooms



In addition to common spring ephemerals, many of which can be spotted from the roadway, McCurtain County also grows a few rare plant species. Species like the golden gladecress (*Leavenworthia aurea* var. *aurea*) are only found in Oklahoma. Other species, like the southern twayblade orchid, were once thought to be extirpated from the state but have since been rediscovered in a few localized areas.

Though McCurtain County's botanic diversity is impressive, you don't have to drive to Oklahoma's southeasternmost county to appreciate spring's blossoms. A trip to your local park, nature center, or even your own backyard may do the trick. Splashes of pink can be found on the branches of eastern redbud trees and

even in the tiny springbeauties sprinkled across many yards. Sand plums and flowering dogwoods will soon be shining white against the landscape and roadsides will be covered in bright orange butterfly weed and blanket flower. As you journey across your neighborhood this spring, watch as the wildflowers change colors, shapes and sizes with the progressing seasons.

Resources like the [Noble Foundation's plant image gallery](#), the [Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center](#) and [Pat Folley's "The Guide to Oklahoma Wildflowers"](#) can help you identify your newly discovered blooms and learn more about Oklahoma's diverse plant life.

Rare Orchids of McCurtain County



Wister's Coralroot
(*Corallorhiza wisteriana*)

Southern Twayblade
(*Listera australis*)

The Wild Side e-newsletter is a project of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation Wildlife Diversity Program. The Wildlife Diversity Program monitors, manages and promotes rare, declining and endangered wildlife as well as common wildlife not fished or hunted. It is primarily funded by the sales of Department of Wildlife license plates, publication sales and private donors. Visit wildlifedepartment.com for more wildlife diversity information and events.

For questions or comments, please email jena.donnell@odwc.ok.gov



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