

# Outdoor Oklahoma

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2026 — ONLY \$10 A YEAR



A PUBLICATION OF THE OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION



# PANORAMAS



Tell Judkins

As we're in the midst of the 2025-26 quail season in Oklahoma, it seems like a good moment to share a few thoughts – how we got here, how the birds are doing, and what we can all do to help them continue their upward trend.

This year's ODWC Quail Season Outlook showed a 68% boost in the statewide average number of quail per route compared to 2024, marking our fifth consecutive year of population growth. Naturally, I've heard a lot of folks wondering how and why quail have seemed to bounce back.

Those of you who have read my words over the years can probably guess the words coming next: habitat and weather. From county to county across Oklahoma, each pocket of land has its own strengths and weaknesses when weighed as "good habitat" for Mr. Bobwhite.

Survey results like these are encouraging for upland enthusiasts. But now isn't the time to rest and "let nature take its course." Habitat improvement projects such as reducing eastern redcedar density across the state don't just make the good years better; it also helps soften the negative impact in those drought-driven years.

Managing quail across such an ecologically diverse state is no small task. I often hear folks pointing their finger at all kinds of other culprits: parasites, cattle egrets, roadrunners, fire ants, swamp gas, radiation, the ozone layer – the list seems endless. But the truth is, people have created most of the negative impacts.

Changes in agriculture, lack of prescribed fire, land management, urban sprawl, paving, and mowing – each of these have taken a toll

on quail and their habitat, whether we like it or not. And it's easy to forget that when you're pointing a finger, three are pointing back!

Each year, people ask, "Why doesn't ODWC lower the bag limit or just close the season for a few years and let them recover?" I wish it were that simple! In reality, most hunters don't harvest a limit, and it's often tough to get from four birds to the full 10. Reducing the limit could actually have unintended consequences. For example, if the limit were six instead of 10, a hunter with four birds in the bag might choose to keep hunting/harvesting longer in order to limit-out.

Quail hunting isn't something people get passionate about for just a season or two. Training bird dogs, practicing wing-shooting and staying in shape to walk miles and miles of Oklahoma's upland prairies are long-term commitments. The quail hunting tradition is about far more than harvesting birds. And if those dedicated individuals didn't invest their time and money into the future of bobwhites in Oklahoma, who would?

If you haven't been quail hunting in a while, the season is still open until Feb. 15. I encourage you to get out there, work some ground, trust your dogs, and make a memory or two enjoying Outdoor Oklahoma! ♡

A handwritten signature in brown ink that reads "Tell Judkins".

Tell Judkins,  
Wildlife Biologist



# Outdoor Oklahoma

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### ON THE COVER:

Congratulations to Caleb Metrich of Lake Tomahawk, Wis., whose painting of a canvasback drake and hen sitting on the water won the 2026-27 Oklahoma Waterfowl Stamp Design Contest. For more, see page 4.

-  [facebook.com/OkWildlifeDept](https://facebook.com/OkWildlifeDept)
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**OKLAHOMA**



# OFF THE BEATEN PATH

NOTES ON WILDLIFE • OUTDOOR TIPS • READERS' LETTERS • ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS  
COMPILED BY DON P. BROWN

## TRAPPING'S PART OF YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

BY CRAIG SPRINGER, USFWS OFFICE OF CONSERVATION INVESTMENT

You descend from a long line of trappers. Virtually all your ancestors at some point down the line have snared or trapped animals for food, clothing, tools or trade. Furbearing animals, a category of wildlife under state and federal law, still provide many opportunities and products. Moreover, trapping is a useful service to wildlife management and public health.

Trapping is highly regulated by the state fish and wildlife agencies; biologists set harvest rates, trapping seasons, bag limits and trap type restrictions. Pittman-Robertson dollars, the federal excise taxes paid by firearms, ammunition and archery manufacturers on select goods, fund furbearer management. That, coupled with state license fees, give the state agencies the reliable and consistent funding to scientifically manage the health and wellbeing of furbearer populations.

"Trapping is essential to the North American model of wildlife management," said Bryant White, furbearer program manager for the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. "Wildlife species sought by trappers are abundant and not imperiled. What's more, trapping is useful in establishing or expanding furbearer populations, or reducing predators that affect the status of threatened or endangered species."

Regulated trapping is a management tool that ensures the sustainable harvest of a wildlife resources.

"Licensed trappers also perform a public service by addressing property damage and public health situations," said Dr. Nathan Roberts, professor of conservation and wildlife management at the College of the Ozarks. "Regulated harvest of beaver and bobcat, muskrat and mink, coyote, raccoon, and skunk and others — it is trappers who keep furbearer populations in check. That dampens the damaging impact of disease outbreaks in wildlife populations."

AFWA convened a workgroup of wildlife professionals that developed best management practices to improve trapping techniques, ensuring they are humane, efficient and safe. The practices guide trappers, wildlife biologists, and management agen-



Trapping remains a viable source for consumer goods while also playing an important role in wildlife management.

cies to promote better wildlife management, public support for trapping, and ensuring animal welfare.

Funded by federal and state agencies, trap testing has taken place during regulated trapping seasons since 1997. The best management practices are informed by a large body of scientific research:

- More than 600 trap types have been field-tested in the United States.
- Forty-one states have been directly involved in the project; all 50 states support it.
- Data has been collected for 23 furbearer species including badger, beaver, bobcat, coyote, fox, mink, muskrat, nutria, opossum, raccoon, river otter, striped skunk, and weasels.
- More than 5,000 wildlife professionals attended continuing education courses providing in-depth information about the role of regulated trapping in wildlife conservation and best practices.

Dr. Matthew Lovallo, a division chief with the Pennsylvania Game Commission, said, "Trapping is a craft and a skill set honed through time spent afield. It's physically demanding and sharpens your mental acuity. To be successful, a trapper must have intimate knowledge of the habits and habitats of nature's elusive creatures."

Furbearer populations are managed by wildlife professionals, and laws are enforced by state game wardens. Trapping is safe, selective, well-managed and available to the anyone who wants to participate. ♡

*"Trapping is essential to the North American model of wildlife management." — Bryant White, furbearer program manager for the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.*



An instructor demonstrates how to set a trap.

DON P. BROWN/ODWC

## LEARN TO TRAP AT FREE ODWC WORKSHOPS

"There's still an interest in trapping if people are given an opportunity to learn about it," said JD Ridge, a Senior Wildlife Biologist with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. He and other biologists will provide that opportunity by offering four free trapping workshops this winter.

"This training is a viable program, and it's proven popular and successful," Ridge said. Past workshop attendance numbers and the geographic variety of attendees speak to an interest in returning to the wilderness. "Folks from 29 (of Oklahoma's 77) counties have attended these workshops," Ridge said. And these hands-on sessions are a first-time experience for many participants.

Workshops cover everything from scouting to putting up the fur. Attendees will have a chance to set a few traps and catch some fur of your own! All equipment is provided, and the events are free, but space is limited.

Workshop dates and locations are:

- Feb. 7-8: Spavinaw Wildlife Management Area.
- Feb. 7-8: Packsaddle WMA.
- Feb. 21-22: Atoka WMA.
- Feb. 21-22: Beaver River WMA.

To learn more about the workshops, contact Ridge at (918) 617-1113 or Wildlife Biologist Colby Farquhar at (918) 316-2281. To register or join a waitlist, go online to [goutdoorsoklahoma.com](http://goutdoorsoklahoma.com). ♡

# WISCONSIN ARTIST NABS TOP SPOT IN DUCK STAMP CONTEST



waterfowl stamp art contest annually for 45 years. The program was designed to fund activities to ensure quality habitat for the hundreds of thousands of ducks and geese that migrate through the state each year. Oklahoma's design contest features portraits of the diverse waterfowl species that migrate through the state by some of the best wildlife artists from Oklahoma and across the nation.

The program generates funding for waterfowl conservation projects through the sale of waterfowl licenses, required of most waterfowl hunters, and the sale of stamps, many of which are purchased by collectors. The state duck stamp formerly served as Oklahoma's waterfowl hunting license.

The program has helped the Wildlife Department acquire almost 12,000 wetland acres and to enhance, create, restore and maintain critical waterfowl habitat. Wetland development units such as Hackberry Flat Wildlife Management Area in southwestern Oklahoma and the Red Slough Wildlife Management Area in McCurtain County have benefited from state duck stamp funding.

To support waterfowl habitat conservation in Oklahoma, buy an Oklahoma duck stamp in the Outdoor Store at <https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Shop/Inventory>.

The next duck stamp art contest will kick off April 1, 2026, when online registration will open for artists. The subject is the white-fronted goose, and artwork will be due at Wildlife Department headquarters by Aug. 31, 2026 (or postmarked that date or earlier). For more information, scan the code. 📄



A pair of canvasbacks floating on undulating water, painted by Caleb Metrich of Lake Tomahawk, Wis., will grace the 2026-27 Oklahoma Waterfowl Stamp. The artwork was voted the winner of the Wildlife Department's annual duck stamp design contest in September.

A portion of Metrich's painting appears on this magazine's cover. The win earned him a \$1,200 purchase award.

Metrich's artwork was among a record 43 entries submitted this year by hopeful artists from across the nation.

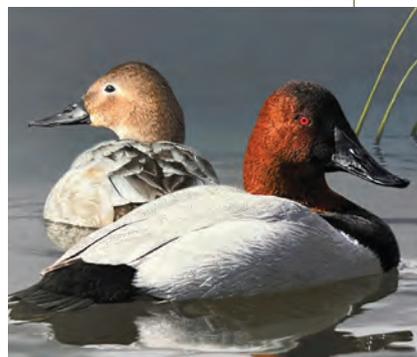
Honorable mention selections in random order went to John Brennan of Lutz, Fla.; Mikel Donahue of Broken Arrow, Okla.; and Garrett Jacobs of Deland, Fla.

A "public favorite" online poll was held as part of the contest, and the winner of the online voting was Donahue's entry.

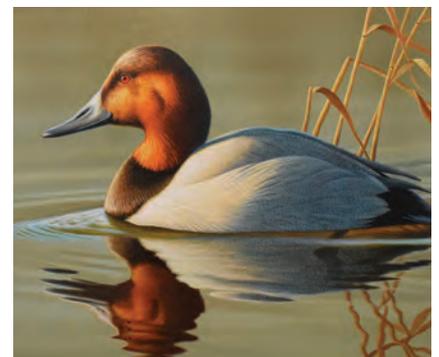
The Wildlife Department has held the Oklahoma



Honorable mention: Garrett Jacobs of Deland, Fla.



Honorable mention: Mikel Donahue of Broken Arrow, Okla.



Honorable mention: John Brennan of Lutz, Fla.

# ANNUAL GALA BENEFITS STATE WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Tickets are on sale for the 2026 Call of the Wild Gala, 6 to 9:30 p.m. March 6 at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City. This annual event celebrates the vital work of the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation in preserving and promoting our state's rich outdoor heritage.

Guests will enjoy an unforgettable night filled with live music as they mingle and bid on an array of exciting items in both the live and silent auctions. Featured performer is the renowned country music group The Swon Brothers.

Attendees can win fantastic auction items, all while supporting crucial conservation efforts that empower the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation to maximize federal funding for vital projects at a match ratio of 3:1 and sometimes an incredible 9:1.

We will honor the contributions of outstanding conservationists, enjoy a delicious meal, and make a lasting impact on the wildlife we cherish. Don't miss this chance to leave your mark on Oklahoma's natural legacy! For tickets or more information, go to <https://onecau.se/owcfgala2026> or text owcfgala2026 to 44834. 📱



## GAME BAG

### A COLLECTION OF LETTERS TO THE WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

We'd like to hear from you! Send your letters to **Outdoor Oklahoma Letters**, P.O. Box 53465, Oklahoma City, OK 73152-3465, or send e-mail to [donald.brown@odwc.ok.gov](mailto:donald.brown@odwc.ok.gov).

Dear Wildlife Department,

I just wanted to pass along my thoughts and gratitude for Wildlife Biologist **Marcus Thibodeau**, who helped me out this weekend. I came from New Mexico to hunt at Pack-saddle Wildlife Management Area.

I had a chance encounter with Marcus on Saturday morning in the field. He answered a ton of questions, helped steer me in the right direction, and was extremely helpful and professional. I was successful on my hunt with a great deal owed to the information and assistance Marcus was willing to pass along to me, just a member of the public whom he didn't have to go out of his way to talk to.

I've hunted other states and had long ago become skeptical of the old notion to "call the biologist, they'll help you out" because of the generic, vague or inaccurate information I seemed to get. Not so with Marcus. He is an outstanding reflection on your Department.



Marcus Thibodeau

Orlando Valles

Dear Daisy Creager, Communication and Education Specialist,  
Thank you so much for taking the time to come to Canadi-

an Valley Technology Center and talk with our students about your work as a Social Media Manager for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife. They loved hearing real-world examples of how you create content, engage with the public and represent the Department online. Your stories about managing comments, choosing what to post, and balancing education with entertainment were especially helpful and really opened their eyes to what this career actually looks like day-to-day. Thank you again for investing your time and energy into our students.

Afton Jameson, M.Ed., instructor



Daisy Creager

Dear Wildlife Department,

I am an agent with the Council on Law Enforcement Education and Training. I had some questions over some permits we had been issued for hunting so I called Pontotoc County game warden **Clayton Johnson**. He promptly answered my questions on the phone and sent me an email explaining my questions so I could forward to my command staff. As a hunter myself, I know this is a very busy time for him, but he was willing to take the time to explain things to me and meet me for some paperwork if need be. I appreciate him taking the time to do that, and I would like to give credit where it is due for a job well done.



Clayton Johnson

Brooke Christian

# GAME WARDEN'S JOURNAL

ACCOUNTS FROM THE FIELD BY THE PUBLIC SERVANTS WHO ENFORCE THE FISH AND WILDLIFE LAWS OF OKLAHOMA.



On Sept. 21, 2025, Oklahoma game wardens were called to Rest Haven Memorial Park cemetery in Ponca City. Witnesses said a vehicle had stopped on the road and someone in the vehicle shot at geese on the cemetery lawn. Two men retrieved two dead geese and left. Game wardens arrived and collected evidence. Thanks to key witnesses, one of the suspects was identified as a guide for a local guide service.



Game wardens interviewed two suspects a short time later. The game wardens determined the geese were targeted solely because one goose carried a leg band. The band had been removed, and both geese were tossed from the vehicle uncleaned a few miles away. Probable cause affidavits were presented to the Kay County District Attorney's Office. Charges were filed, including hunting with the aid of a motor-driven conveyance, shooting from a public roadway, shooting within 440 yards of a public building, wanton waste of wildlife, and obstructing an officer.

investigation spanned multiple years. During this time, several deer were illegally killed by nonresidents and checked in under a resident senior citizen lifetime license holder's name.

Oklahoma game wardens are actively looking for fraudulent cases like this. This is a reminder to simply buy the correct licenses and required permits. That's much cheaper in the long run than trying to use someone else's license and taking the immediate risk of getting caught.

*(Reports from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's Director's Report to the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission.)*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Please help make a difference! When violators break the law, they steal fish and wildlife from you! Report violations anonymously by calling Operation Game Thief at (800) 522-8039. You could earn a cash reward.

## IT'S THE LAW:

On privately owned land, feral hogs may be taken during daylight with permission from the private property owner, lessee, or occupant. Method of take isn't restricted. No hunting license is required EXCEPT when pursuing feral hogs during any big game firearms or archery season, when the feral hog hunter must possess licenses appropriate to the open season.

Feral hog hunters must wear either a hunter orange head covering or outer garment above the waist on both public and private property whenever any firearms season for deer, elk, bear or pronghorn is open. 🦔

Game Wardens **Clayton Johnson**, based in Pontotoc County, and **Trae Taylor**, based in Hughes County, along with the ODWC Special Investigation Team worked a notably large hunting license fraud case. This



# WELCOME TO THE DOCK!

Are the fish biting? You bet! Step onto The Dock and take a gander at some great catches made recently by Oklahoma anglers. Here's a few we thought you would enjoy! To see more or submit a photo of your catch, go to [www.wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/the\\_dock](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/fishing/the_dock) or scan the code:



Esteban Perez, rainbow trout, Nov. 15, 2025, Texas County.



Tucker Maddux, black bass, Oct. 12, 2025, Heritage Park-Harrah.



Zane Garrett, longnose gar, Oct. 11, 2025, Tom Steed Reservoir.

## GET SCORED AT RACK MADNESS EVENT MARCH 4

Mark your calendar for March 4 to attend the annual Rack Madness scoring event at the John D. Groendyke Wildlife Conservation Building, 1801 N. Lincoln Blvd. in Oklahoma City.

This family-friendly event welcomes anyone to bring their deer/elk antlers, antelope horns or bear skulls for professional scoring by ODWC personnel.

Participants should pre-register online at [GoOutdoorsOklahoma](http://GoOutdoorsOklahoma). Scoring will be on a first-come, first-served basis. There is a two-item scoring limit per participant. Antlers must both be attached to the skull plate, whether mounted or unmounted. Harvest must have occurred in Oklahoma.

Anyone who registers and brings in an item to be scored will be entered into a drawing for a lifetime combination hunting and fishing license donated by

the Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Foundation. Only those who bring an item to be scored will be eligible for this prize.

The Oklahoma State Game Warden Association will hold a separate drawing to award a lifetime license to one person who harvested a doe during the 2025-26 season. To enter, visit the Game Thief Trailer and check in with the game wardens in front of the building.

Lifetime drawing winners must be eligible to hold a lifetime license but can transfer it to an eligible recipient. Drawings will be held at 5:45 p.m., and participants don't need to be present to win. Check-ins after 5:30 p.m. are ineligible.

Hourly prize drawings will also take place, and the winners must be present. ♻️

# WILD ABOUT COOKING

## VENISON CABBAGE ROLLS

Many Oklahoma freezers are now full of venison, and there are many ways to prepare and enjoy nature's bounty. One way to use your deer meat is to make Venison Cabbage Rolls, a savory item that can be a main course or a side dish. This recipe makes six servings.



PLANET.MOVE.COM

These savory cabbage rolls are filled with venison and can be served as a main course or a delicious side.

### INGREDIENTS

- 12 large cabbage leaves
- 1 1/2 pounds ground venison (may substitute elk or beef)
- 1/4 cup grated onion
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons Italian seasoning
- 1 1/2 cups cooked rice
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- 2 cans (15 ounces each) low-sodium tomato sauce
- Toothpicks

### INSTRUCTIONS

- Place cabbage leaves in a pot of boiling water until tender, then drain and dry.
- Brown venison and onion in butter. Mix in the Italian seasoning, rice, salt and pepper.
- Spoon about 2 tablespoons of venison mixture into the center of a leaf and fold the leaf over, tucking in the ends and securing with a toothpick. Repeat for all cabbage leaves.
- Place filled cabbage leaves in a 9-by-13-inch casserole dish and pour tomato sauce on top. Cover with a lid or aluminum foil and bake at 325 degrees F for 45 minutes.
- Remove from oven and allow to cool before serving.

Source: Adapted from "Fish & Game Cookbook" by Bonnie Scott, 2013.

Serving size: two rolls. Nutrition facts per serving: 490 calories, 10g total fat, 6g saturated fat, 0g trans-fat, 120mg cholesterol, 180mg sodium, 64g total carbohydrate, 3g dietary fiber, 12g total sugar, 35g protein, 10% DV calcium, 45% DV iron, 15% DV potassium.

# 2025 CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION

## "WHAT THEY HANDED DOWN WAS A WAY OF LIFE"

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and Oklahoma Station Chapter Safari Club International sponsor a creative writing competition for middle and high school students. A boy and a girl from two age divisions are selected winners. Students write essays using the theme "Hunting: Sharing the Heritage" or "Archery: What I Like About Archery in the Schools and Bowhunting." Winners in the age 15-17 category receive a guided oryx hunt at Rockin S Ranch in Texas, and winners in the 11-14 age category receive a hunting trip with Rack Attack Outfitters of Fairview (or similar) and a scholarship to the Outdoor Texas Camp. In this issue, Outdoor Oklahoma honors senior male winner Cooper Davidson, 16, from Elgin High School.



### By Cooper Davidson

Fred Bear said it best: "A hunt based only on trophies taken falls far short of what the ultimate goal should be ... time to commune with your inner soul as you share the outdoors with the birds, animals and fish that live there." For many of us, hunting is not simply an activity, it is part of who we are. It is a tradition carried through generations, preserved with the same pride my great-grandfather showed when he passed his .54-caliber Thompson center sidelock black-powder rifle down to me.

My great-grandfather, Pawpaw Bill, lived for the outdoors. His best days were spent taking my grandfather, Pawpaw Reggie, and my Uncle Benny hunting at his uncle's place in Antlers, Okla. They traveled as far as New Mexico in pursuit of deer and bear. Often, the hunt itself was not his main focus; he was the man behind the scenes, setting up camp, fixing what broke, and keeping the whole trip running smoothly.

Pawpaw Reggie loves to tell the story of one New Mexico trip when they were towing a trailer made from an old pickup bed. Partway down the highway, a wheel came off and rolled right past them. Without panicking, Pawpaw Bill pulled over, figured out the problem, and had them back on the road. That was who he was: steady, resourceful, and always ready to solve whatever challenge came his way.

When he grew too old to hunt, he passed his black-powder rifle to Pawpaw Reggie, who has

always shared his father's love for the outdoors. He is the first to suggest a hunting trip and the last to complain about early mornings or long days. He helps us prepare for deer season, checks stands and tunes rifles. He enjoys the planning as much as the hunt itself. With that old muzzleloader, he is especially careful. He makes sure we have the right patch and ball, the right powder, and the right caps, and he never lets us forget to clean the bore or clear the nipple after every shot. To him, this is more than maintenance; it is respect for the rifle and for the men who carried it before us.

Reggie eventually passed the rifle to my dad, and with it came more than wood and steel. What they handed down was a way of life: a love for the land, early mornings in the woods, and the bond that grows through time spent outdoors together. My dad taught me how to hunt, but he also taught me how to appreciate the quiet beauty of the outdoors and to feel connected to something larger than myself.

Now, when I carry that rifle, its stock worn smooth by generations, I feel the weight of its history. Every hunt becomes part of a story that began long before me. Those memories and traditions will always hold a place in my heart, and one day, I hope to pass them on as well. Fred Bear said it best: "I come home with an honestly earned feeling that something good has taken place. It makes no difference whether I got anything; it has to do with how the day was spent." ♡



# WELCOME TO THE TAILGATE!



Is the hunting good? You bet! Step up to **The Tailgate** and check out some great harvests during recent seasons by hunters in Oklahoma. Here's a few we thought you would enjoy! To submit your photo of a successful hunting trip, or to see what others have harvested, go to [wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/tailgate](http://wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/tailgate) or scan the code:



Caydence B., white-tailed deer, Dec. 1, 2025, Washington County.



Rory Andrews, mule deer, Nov. 23, 2025, Harper County.



Kara L., black bear, Oct. 1, 2025, Pushmataha County.

# OUTDOOR CALENDAR

FOR THE LATEST UPDATES, GO ONLINE TO LICENSE. [GOOUTDOORSOKLAHOMA.COM/EVENT/EVENTS.ASPX](http://GOOUTDOORSOKLAHOMA.COM/EVENT/EVENTS.ASPX)

NOTICE: Events were scheduled at press time; they are subject to change.

## JANUARY 2026

- 1 New Year's Day (state offices closed).

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- 2-4 Arcadia Lake Eagle Watch, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., park office, \$5 per vehicle. Register: [license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/ViewEvent.aspx](http://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/ViewEvent.aspx).

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- 3 OKC Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.

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- 4 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Fishing With Okla. School for the Blind, 8 a.m., OETA.

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- 11 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Smallmouth Float Trip, 8 a.m., OETA.

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- 12 Okla. Wildlife Conservation Commission meets, 9 a.m., Enid. Livestream: [YouTube.com/@Okwildlfeddept](http://YouTube.com/@Okwildlfeddept).

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- 18 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Streams Savant, 8 a.m., OETA.

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- 19 Martin Luther King Jr. Day (state offices closed).

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- 24 SE Okla. Prescribed Burn interest meeting, 3-5 p.m., Sobol Community Center. Register: [goranch@myyahoo.com](mailto:goranch@myyahoo.com).

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- 25 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Veliger Sampling, Reel Talk Real Tips, 8 a.m., OETA.

- **Ducks Unlimited** events (date) in Chandler (10), Ponca City (17), Weatherford (24), Stillwater (29), Chickasha (30), Kingfisher (31). Info: [ducks.org/events](http://ducks.org/events).
- **National Wild Turkey Federation** event (date) in Hulbert (23). Info: [your.nwtf.org/members/events](http://your.nwtf.org/members/events).

## FEBRUARY 2026

- 1 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Tick Diseases, 8 a.m., OETA.

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- 7 OKC Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.

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- 8 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Bird-calling Kid, 8 a.m., OETA.

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- 9 Okla. Wildlife Conservation Commission meets, 9 a.m., Oklahoma City. Livestream: [YouTube.com/@Okwildlfeddept](http://YouTube.com/@Okwildlfeddept).

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- 15 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Microfishing, Reel Talk Reel Tips, 8 a.m., OETA.

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- 16 Presidents Day (state offices closed).

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- 21 Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation-Tulsa Chapter banquet, 5-8 p.m., Broken Arrow. Tickets: [rmef.org/events](http://rmef.org/events).

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- 22 "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Noodling With Jacob, 8 a.m., OETA.

- **Ducks Unlimited** events (date) in Edmond (7), Lawton (13), Tahlequah (19). Info: [ducks.org/events](http://ducks.org/events).
- **National Wild Turkey Federation** event (date) in McAlester (21), Miami (21). Info: [your.nwtf.org/members/events](http://your.nwtf.org/members/events).
- **Delta Waterfowl** event (date) in Durant (7). Info: [deltawaterfowl.org/events/](http://deltawaterfowl.org/events/).

\*\* FOR HUNTING SEASON DATES, GO TO [www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/seasons](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/seasons) \*\*

# ODWC OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

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**5 Connection to Nature & Food Sources**  
Learning habitats and tracking animals deepens ecological awareness and appreciation for where food comes from.



**6 Social Well-Being**  
Many hunters enjoy strong community bonds through mentoring, shared trips, and conservation projects.



For more information on hunting scan the QR code and let your adventures begin!



# YOUNG BIRDER'S AMAZING TALENT COULD BECOME HIS LIFE'S CALLING

BY DON P. BROWN, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST



*Birding builds a bond for biologist Mark Howery and bird-calling extraordinaire Samuel Henderson.*

Samuel Henderson, 11, is autistic and takes special education classes at Nicoma Park Elementary. "He's labeled, but he can excel," his mother, Lori, said. "Nothing holds him back."

So when the school's annual talent show rolled around last year, Samuel wanted to demonstrate his unusual talent. But his mom was concerned. Samuel had never been in front of the whole student body, and Lori was worried that Samuel could end up being the object of ridicule for his talent.

Samuel sounds like a bird. Actually, he is able to sound like about 60 different types of birds.

The students were amazed, and Samuel quickly became the school's celebrity. And it wasn't long before he was a national celebrity as well.

Lori posted her cellphone video of Samuel's performance on social media, and it soon went viral and inquiries started coming in. Audubon magazine was the first national outlet to feature Samuel. Then there were the Oklahoma City news channels, "CBS Evening News," National Public Radio, "The Jennifer Hudson Show," and others.

Lori said even Cornell University has reached out, inviting Samuel to take a tour of the campus for his future consideration.

"I've been involved with birds for six years," he said. "When I was 4, and I was at my local zoo. And there was this great-tailed grackle on this trash can. And I started mimicking it." At this point, Samuel starts emitting a sound that a listener would swear is coming from a bird.

The sound isn't made with the lips, like a whistle. It comes from inside Samuel's mouth, and from his throat and vocal chords. Asked how he learned to perform birds calls, he said, "Well, yeah, I don't know really."

His mom had always been the birder of the family. But as Samuel grew, his interest in birds grew. He began studying different bird calls using the Merlin app, and bird watching. "My favorite place to bird watch is Grandma's house; she has painted buntings!"

Samuel's avian imitations range from geese to crows, cardinals to chickadees, and many more. He said birds make differing calls for various reasons.



GREG LASLEVIN/NATURALIST/CC-BY-NC

## "My favorite place to bird watch is Grandma's house; she has painted buntings!"



JENNIFER HUDSON SHOW/YOUTUBE

Leave a line for a caption.

To watch Samuel Henderson's appearance on "The Jennifer Hudson Show," scan the QR code.





Samuel and Mark enjoy the afternoon talking about and looking for birds.



Mark and Samuel peeking at the birds.



Samuel performs at his school's talent show.

"Well, so, there's different meanings, like to keep in touch, to warn ... and also to display, to get a mate. I'm easily distracted by birds — and also I'm pretty much distracted by those chickadees," he said, looking over into a nearby tree.

Samuel said he's interested in having a career in ornithology or conservation. So, Outdoor Oklahoma invited Samuel and his mom to take a short birding trip with Mark Howery, a Senior Wildlife Biologist with the Oklahoma Department of Conservation. Howery likely is the greatest bird expert with ODWC.

"I've been birding, goodness, I started around fifth grade. So I was around 9 or 10 years old. Though I've never learned the bird calls like Samuel has, he's learned a tremendous number of bird calls.

"I really was all about the appearance of birds for the first 10 years or so. And then about the time I got into college, I started learning the bird songs. I had to pick those up gradually because to me, the bird songs are the hard part.

"I can't even imagine trying to imitate them. There might be three birds I could imitate, and none of them as well as he can."

With that, the biologist and the boy headed off along a forested path, binoculars in hand, to do some bird watching — and calling. A few seconds later, and Samuel got excited upon hearing a certain pattern of chirps. "There's a tufted titmouse!" He turned to Howery.

"OK, I want to see if you know this sound. Mom, you probably know this sound, but don't tell him."

After Samuel was done, Howery guessed, "Are you doing the greater roadrunner?"

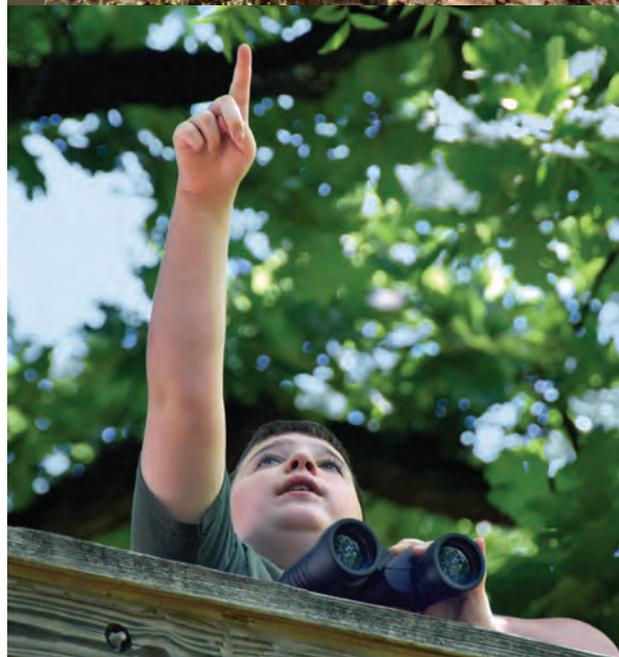
"Yes," Samuel said. "So what do you think about that?"

"I'm impressed. Greater roadrunners have a couple of dif-

Scan the QR code to watch the "CBS Evening News" story about Samuel Henderson.



JERRY EHLESKIRP/READERS' PHOTO SHOWCASE 2022

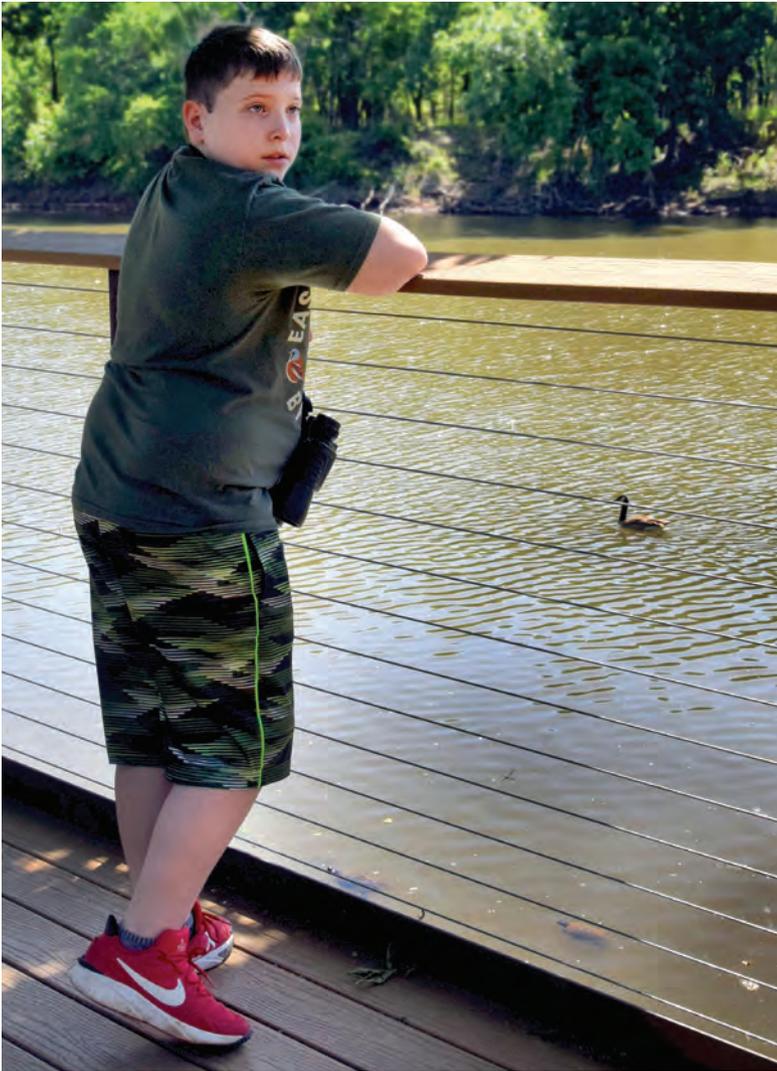


DON P. BROWN/ODWC



Carolina wren

A few seconds later, and Samuel got excited upon hearing a certain pattern of chirps. "There's a tufted titmouse!"



ferent calls. But he was doing the main call. It's this 'coo' that goes on for like 9 or 11 beats."

The pair continued walking, sighting various birds, and Samuel kept producing various bird songs.

"I didn't have the skill for bird songs," Howery recalled. "Samuel did an excellent robin and an excellent summer tanager. And those are hard, very hard.

"With all the bird calls that you've made, I mean, I have no doubt that you've seen — I'm sure you haven't added them all up — but I bet you've seen well over 150 species because it sounds like, just from the diversity of calls that you know, from collared dove to eastern meadowlark, that's a reflector."

Then something caught Samuel's attention, and Howery said, "That's a Carolina wren. There's also a blue-gray gnatcatcher up here that's real quiet. That little skinny bird. There's a pair of them."

"It's a lifer bird," Samuel said

"That's a lifer bird for you?"

"Yeah. Umm, it's a bird that you've always wanted to see."

Howery explained, "Birders keep a list. A lifer bird is when you, just like Samuel said, when you see a bird you want to see and

you're seeing it for the first time."

Howery has some tips for anyone wanting to take up birding.

"For anyone that's starting out in birds, I always say get a field guide or two that you like to help you identify the birds you're seeing. I've got a bunch of field guides. There's not a bad field guide out there for birds.

"Field guide, binoculars, and just practice watching birds. A lot of people start watching birds at a backyard bird feeder. That's the way I was. The first probably five years that I watched birds, it was just winter birds at the backyard feeder.

"I guess other advice I would have is find a place that you're comfortable, like a park. It doesn't have to be any place fancy. It can just be a city park. It can be a lake. Someplace that's kind of quiet. And just look and listen for birds.

"Some of the birds are going to be very ... cooperative birds. Like cardinals are usually pretty cooperative. They'll sit out in the open, and you can hear them. Other birds like painted buntings, they cooperate in the sense that they're really vocal. You can hear painted buntings a lot, but they're hard to find. You've got to be really patient with them."



American robin

**"Samuel did an excellent robin and an excellent summer tanager. And those are hard, very hard.**

"Today, people have access to the internet, so you can see videos of birds to learn calls and learn identification. Then you've got the Merlin app that helps people identify birds by song and by sight. Really, to learn birding, it's just practice and repetition."

Samuel agreed. "I think anybody can pick up birding. It's just a matter of patience."

On this day, patience paid off, as the pair tallied at least 20 bird species in just a few hours. Among them were a Mississippi kite, brown-headed cowbird, great-tailed grackle, blue-gray gnatcatcher, hummingbird, northern cardinal, red-tailed hawk, fish crow, white-faced ibis, eastern kingbird, great-crested flycatcher, Carolina chickadee, tufted titmouse, Canada goose, red-bellied woodpecker, Lincoln sparrow, great blue heron, mourning dove, dark-eyed junco and Carolina wren.

"He knows his birds," Howery said.

Mother, Lori, said she hopes her son will continue to spread the word about wildlife conservation and, of course, birding. But she also hopes that Samuel's love for birds can inspire others to nurture and grow in their passion, too, whatever that might be. ♡



JERRY OLDENNETTEL (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Summer tanager

### SEE IT ON TV!

Tune in to the Outdoor Oklahoma weekly TV show to see more about Samuel's birding trip with Mark, scheduled to air at 8:30 a.m. Sunday, Feb. 8, 2026, on the OETA statewide network.



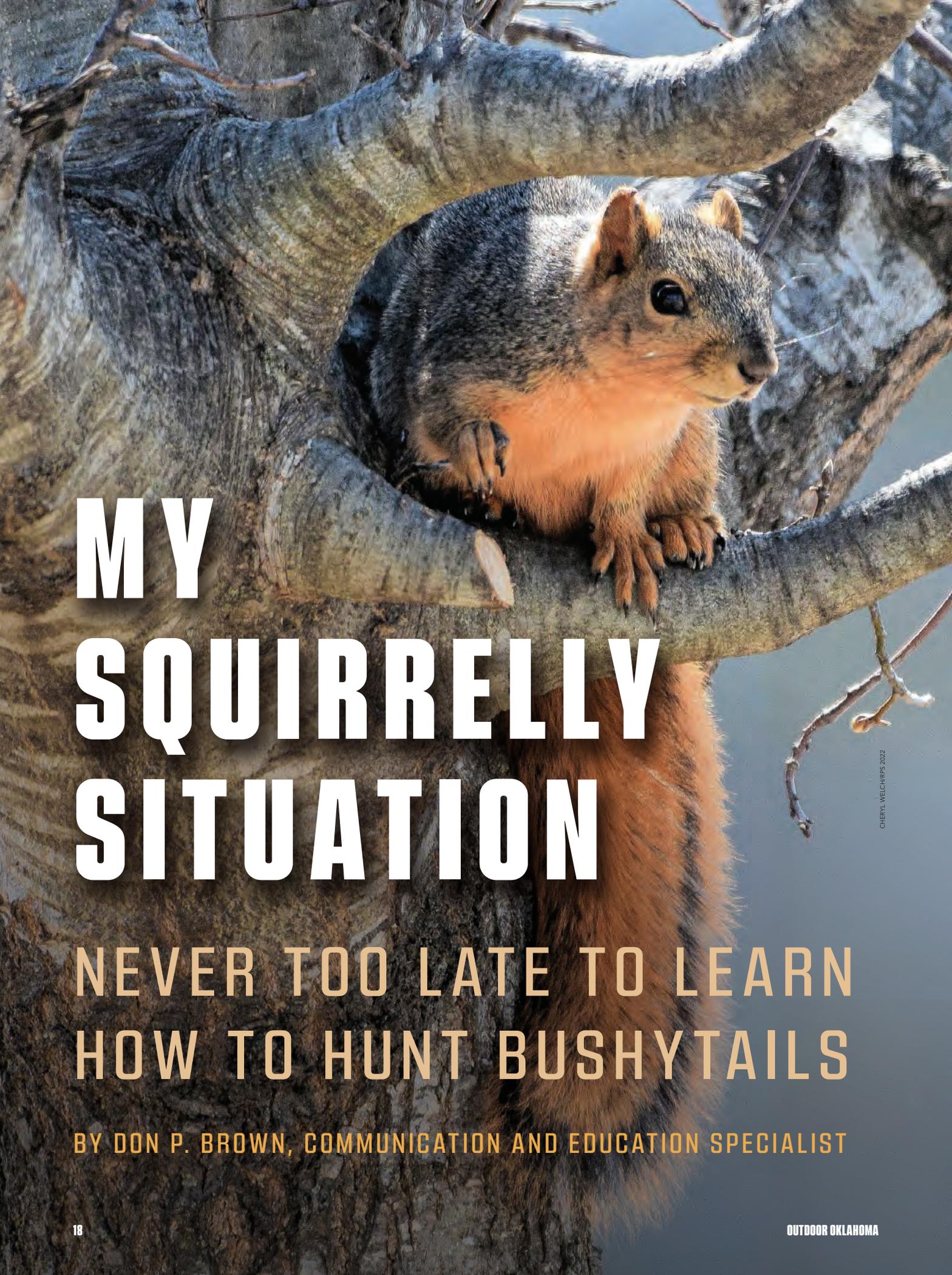
DOAN P. BROWN/ODWC

Samuel and Mark catch sight of white-faced ibises flying overhead.



LINDA GUENTHER/READERS' PHOTO SHOWCASE 2015

**"Some of the birds are going to be very ... cooperative birds. Like cardinals are usually pretty cooperative. They'll sit out in the open, and you can hear them.**



# MY SQUIRRELLY SITUATION

NEVER TOO LATE TO LEARN  
HOW TO HUNT BUSHYTAILS

BY DON P. BROWN, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST

CHERYL WELCH/RPS 2022

Call me backwards — I hear that often. Sometimes I just don't seem to get things in the proper order that folks would deem normal.

One example in my life is hunting. We've always heard that the best introduction to hunting for youngsters is small game hunting. Learning to harvest rabbits and squirrels forms a foundation that can support a lifetime of outdoor pursuits.

And success comes readily.

Well, living up to my backwards tendencies, I finally decided — as I'm nearing retirement age — that I needed to experience small game hunting for my very first time.

Oh, I've enjoyed many other types of hunting in my lifetime, mostly wing-shooting and waterfowling. But hey, it's never too late to learn something new, right?

There's a family history for me: My grandfather and my uncle were avid squirrel hunters, so in the interest of family heritage, I chose to go on a squirrel hunt.

And just maybe that could rekindle a spark to lead me back outdoors and take up hunting once again.



DON F. BROWN/ODWC

Here I am, the old guy, setting out on my first squirrel hunt with my hunting mentor Colby Farquhar, at right. Hey, better late than never, right?

## LOOK AT ME, I'M R3

The hunting tradition in the United States isn't as strong as it once was. Hunters that went afield in robust number in the latter half of the 20th century are now "aging out" and new hunters aren't filling in to replace them. This decline threatens the future of wildlife conservation as we know it. Our North American system greatly depends on hunters to make it work.

To address that situation, conservation agencies have been pushing a strategy called R3, which stands for recruitment, retention and reactivation. By focusing public outreach efforts in those areas, agencies are hoping to build back the number of hunters so wildlife conservation can continue for future generations.

I suppose two of the R's applied to me and my first squirrel hunt. I was being recruited as a new squirrel hunter, and I was being reactivated because my hunting participation has been almost nonexistent for many years.



DON F. BROWN/ODWC



COLBY FARQUHAR/ODWC

If chewed acorns are scattered on the ground, it's likely that squirrels are in the area.



COLBY FARQUHAR/ODWC

With the squirrel in close range, I line up the bead for the shot.



Success! My first squirrel was an eastern gray on public land.



A convenient way to carry harvested squirrels is to cut a hole just below the knee joint in one or both legs and push a stick through to create a handle.

## MENTOR MAGIC

I knew what I didn't know. In other words, I needed some education about small game hunting. So I reached out to a colleague who frequently hunts squirrels to show me the ropes. Colby Farquhar agreed to become my mentor. And we soon had a plan.

Colby and I met on a warm, windy November morning at Eufaula Wildlife Management Area. I had a million questions as we made our way into the woods, the dry, brown oak leaves crunching under our boots. My first question was if he forgot to bring his shotgun. Colby said he didn't forget, because he didn't plan on bringing it. He said this hunt was all about teaching me how to hunt squirrels.

Now that's what I call a dedicated mentor!

We trudged into the hardwoods under a canopy that still held a hefty amount of brown, gold and red leaves. Plenty of acorns were scattered among the thick layer of dead leaves on the forest floor. Colby easily weaved his way throughout the tree trunks, softly stepping,

scanning side to side, up and down for any sign of squirrels. As for me, each step was a struggle to keep from creating loud crunches underfoot.

Colby told me there are two main approaches to squirrel hunting: moving slowly through the woods, or sitting still and waiting. We were doing some of both.

I wore full camouflage shirt, pants and hat. Colby said full camo is nice but not necessary. And because there was no firearms hunting season open for big game at the time, I wasn't required to wear any blaze orange covering.

Also, some hunters prefer to use a rifle, and others prefer a shotgun. The chosen method of take can have an impact later when dressing out the harvest. I was toting my shotgun, and Colby recommended lead shot No. 6 or bigger, or steel shot No. 5 or bigger. Squirrels are tough critters with tough hides, he said.

## STROLL IN THE FOREST

We walked slowly for about 30 yards, then stood quietly to look for motion and listen for rustling leaves. Then we repeated the process. However, this day wasn't ideal. A brisk southerly breeze blew rattled through the trees, effectively masking any sound or movement a squirrel might make. Colby said on windy days, squirrels tend to stay holed up in den trees or leaf nests, which are called dreys.

Several hundred yards into the forest, and no squirrel sighting. Not a good sign, Colby said. But then he froze and pointed ahead. A squirrel on the ground, betrayed by its movement in the leaf litter. Colby motioned me to move forward, even before I could even see the critter. Then, about 20 yards in front of me, I saw a flash of gray streaking to the base of a nearby dead oak, and up went the rodent.

We went to the oak and stood still, waiting and watching. In a few moments, Colby caught sight of just the squirrel's head, poking around from the backside of the tree trunk. He told me to target my shot at the animal's head, not the body. Then I fired.

A hit! Success! My first squirrel harvest.

I picked up the smallish gray squirrel, and Colby showed me a neat trick. Since I didn't have a game vest or pouch, he rigged up a carrying handle using an 8-inch stick by running it through holes he sliced below the critter's knees. Carrying the squirrel that way kept the squirrel cooler and kept the hunter from getting bloody.

## CLEANING WITH CONFIDENCE

We kept going for another hour, but only saw a few more squirrels conveniently out of range. As the sun began to put out its midmorning heat, we decided to call it a day. Once we were back at the truck, it was time to learn about dressing out my harvest. Colby explained step by step his favored method, which involves hanging the squirrel for leverage, slicing the skin in the right places, pulling off the skin basically in one piece, gutting the animal, then cutting up the carcass in advance of cooking.

One consideration when using a shotgun is that the carcass will likely contain some pellet wounds that require attention to ensure no pellets remain in the meat.

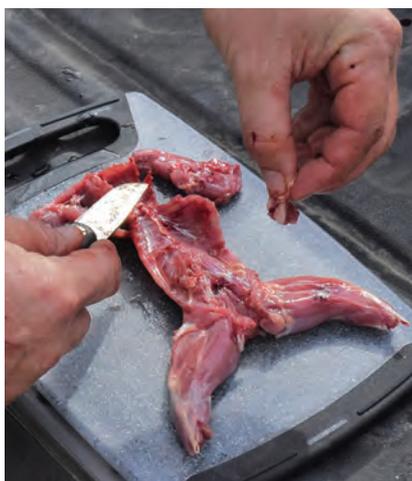
With a hearty expression of gratitude and a wave to my magnificent mentor, I drove away not only with fresh wild game for that night's dinner, but with the knowledge and confidence I needed to go out and bag a limit of squirrels from the abundant bounty found in Outdoor Oklahoma. 🍷



The cleaning process begins with the squirrel hanging from a small tree, and the hunter makes an incision in the skin near the anus.



Removing the skin can take some heavy pulling.



After the squirrel is skinned and gutted, the carcass is cut into pieces.



The ribcage is cut away from the backstrap.



Cutting the squirrel into pieces — arms, legs and back — is the final step in the cleaning process.



# SNIPPETS FOR SQUIRREL SUCCESS

*By Michael Bergin, Senior Communication and Education Specialist*

Squirrels are very active in the woods during fall, which makes for some good hunting. In late winter, though, it's a different story. The hunting is still good. But with virtually no leaf cover and plenty of "crunchy" debris on the forest floor, you might have to sharpen your stealth game if you want bring home a mess of squirrels.

If late-season squirrel hunting is on your mind, you've got until Feb. 28 to get it done. Here are four tips to help you.

## HUNT PEAK ACTIVITY

During winter, fox and gray squirrels may be less active overall, so perhaps your best bet is to hunt early in the morning or wait until later in the day and hunt until the last legal minute. Squirrel hunting closes at official sunset daily. On a sunny winter day, that's all the time you'll need. Look for den trees and leaf nests high in trees, as squirrels might stay closer to them this time of year. In winter, the major food source for squirrels is hard mast such as pecans, acorns and hickory nuts. Once you've walked through an area to find a spot, take a seat and let things get quiet. It may take 15 minutes or more for squirrel activity to pick up again.

## USE ODWC'S SQUIRREL RESOURCES WEBPAGE

This webpage is loaded with some of the best curated hunting information, especially material dedicated to helping you be a squirrel hunter any time of year. You'll find our own small game hunting guide that lines out season information and tips, plus numerous videos and articles. Being prepared mentally is important for any challenge.

## KNOW YOUR QUARRY

Fox and gray squirrels are present in Oklahoma, depending on where you hunt. The fox squirrel can be found across the majority of the state, except the extreme western portion of the Panhandle. Gray squirrels are found in mature bottomland forests, hardwood uplands, forested ridges, and oak-hickory-pine forests in the eastern half of the state.

And while tactics for hunting are often similar for both, it helps to know a little about each. Fox squirrels are larger than grays and generally less flighty. They're more likely to "freeze up" to stay hidden. That means a keen eye and a good pair of binoculars could come in handy. Scan trees carefully for the "shape" of a squirrel or squirrel parts, such as a head and ear. Gray squirrels, on the other hand, are given to fast breaks through the treetops. Be ready with a shotgun. If you miss on your first shot, nine times out of 10 a gray squirrel is going to move ... and fast. Set up in an area with lots of safe, open shooting lanes to increase your chances.

## TAP IN TO PUBLIC LAND SQUIRREL HUNTING

While some seasons and regulations on public areas may vary from state-wide norms, most wildlife management areas offer late-season squirrel hunting. Check our list of WMAs. You're likely to find an area close by that has squirrel populations. But if not, go somewhere new! The most important thing is that when you select a WMA on the list, you'll see dropdown menus for "Game Species of Interest" and "Area Specific Hunting Regulations." Both will provide pertinent information to help you narrow down a location.

You can also take advantage of the Oklahoma Land Access Program (OLAP). Administered by the Wildlife Department, OLAP provides financial incentives to landowners who allow public access for hunting, fishing, stream access and wildlife viewing opportunities on private lands. A land access permit (available at [GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com](http://GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com)) and hunter check-in are required to use OLAP properties. 🍷



*The various areas of Eufaula Wildlife Management Area offer excellent opportunities to find squirrels in its ample mixed-hardwood forests.*

# Conservation

## Fun Outdoors!

When it's below freezing outside, make a frozen suncatcher! Gather small, animal-friendly, natural items from the yard, like pine needles, berries, sticks and leaves. Put nonstick spray on a plate (paper is fine), then arrange items in colorful patterns. Cover with a thin layer of water and let it freeze solid. For more color, add a drop or two of food coloring to the water before freezing.

## Hunting Tip

If you are in the cold for many hours, dehydration is a concern. Never eat snow in place of drinking water, as it will cool the body too quickly. Avoid sweating when moving or hiking, as that can lead to hypothermia when you stop moving. And leave your head exposed when hiking; you can wear your hat when you stop to eat or drink.

## Fishing Tip

Want to try ice fishing? Pack up and go to northern states. Venturing out onto a frozen water body is not a good idea in Oklahoma because the ice almost never gets thick enough to safely walk on. Experts say that at least 4 inches of clear ice is necessary to support a person. White or cloudy ice is about half as strong, so white ice less than 8 inches thick is unsafe to walk on.

# for Kids!

## Word Search: Water In Winter

T	A	R	J	C	G	Q	G	G	C	S	I	R	V	U	A
J	T	I	Y	S	R	I	O	O	Z	Y	S	T	G	A	L
W	A	M	R	B	U	F	G	X	P	H	N	F	X	H	I
C	O	E	N	W	R	E	L	Z	Z	I	R	D	J	Z	I
C	M	E	F	Y	N	Z	B	R	A	I	N	T	U	X	D
W	O	N	S	U	W	Y	U	R	L	F	H	E	Q	L	X
T	Z	B	R	R	L	J	G	O	A	P	H	R	U	Z	G
R	W	J	X	K	B	N	E	D	W	G	N	Y	N	H	J
U	F	U	S	T	I	V	F	U	L	N	Y	M	A	F	Z
Z	V	M	E	Z	N	U	B	A	E	E	F	G	N	K	G
L	X	E	E	Q	U	G	Z	C	P	P	U	L	J	F	R
S	L	E	C	V	I	E	L	H	U	M	P	A	P	M	V
S	R	M	X	I	C	O	J	J	A	O	S	J	C	I	X
F	V	Y	K	H	U	N	S	H	R	G	J	D	F	K	A
X	V	O	S	D	W	P	F	Y	G	R	X	O	D	O	T
F	G	Y	S	O	R	F	H	N	I	V	C	R	Q	B	P

Find and circle the words that refer to different types of outdoor moisture during winter.

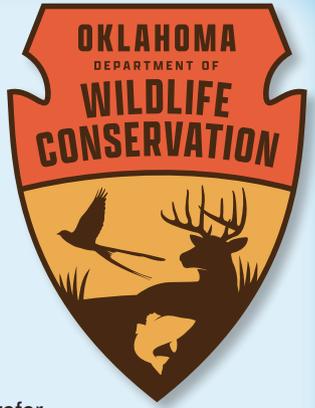
SNOW  
CLOUDS  
DRIZZLE  
RAIN

ICE  
FROST  
GLAZE  
RIME

FOG  
SLEET  
FREEZING RAIN  
GRAUPEL

## COOL FACTS About Squirrels:

- In Oklahoma, there are three types of squirrels: eastern fox squirrel, eastern gray squirrel and southern flying squirrel.
- Fox squirrels are seen statewide, while gray squirrels are seen in eastern Oklahoma. Flying squirrels are found in the eastern and southern parts of Oklahoma.
- Gray squirrels have white undersides; fox squirrels have brownish-orange undersides.
- Fox squirrels weigh about 1 to 2.5 pounds; gray squirrels are smaller and weigh less than 1.5 pounds.
- Fox squirrels use leaf nests (dreys) or tree cavities for shelter and litter rearing.
- Fox squirrels create caches of buried food to eat later. They prefer shelled and high-fat items like acorns and nuts.
- Gray squirrels are thought to create several thousand food caches each year.
- Fox squirrels normally produce two litters each year, averaging three pups per litter.
- Squirrels can carry diseases like typhus, plague and tularemia, and parasites like ringworm, fleas, lice, mites and ticks.



## Color a Critter: Squirrel





# Dancing & DEER



YOUNG LADIES PURSUE PASSIONS BOTH ON STAGE AND IN THE FIELD

BY HEATHER DEL MORAL, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION TECHNICIAN

Tiny dancers: Amelia, left, and Armonia.

The story of these two young women could be called “Grace Meets Grit.” In different ways, they have discovered balance, power and joy in their lives as both dancers and hunters.

On one side of life, there’s glitter, bright lights and the heartbeat of music pulsing through a stage floor. On the other side, there’s the stillness of a sunrise, the soft rustle of leaves and the whisper of a steady breath before a shot.

For Amelia and Armonia, these two worlds — dancing and hunting — aren’t opposites at all. They’re threads of the same story, weaving together confidence, patience and pride in who they are as young women.

Though they’ve actually never met and live about 100 miles apart in different areas of Oklahoma, Amelia and Armonia share a spirit that bridges the distance between them — one that finds beauty in both dancing and hunting.

“Both dancing and hunting take patience in their own way,” Amelia said. “With dance, it is patience with your skills and tricks; with hunting, it is patience for learning how to track and wait for what you are hunting.”

Said Armonia, “I don’t know many people who can be girly and dance and be a hunter all in one. But for me, it just fits.”

## TRADITION PASSED DOWN

Hunting for Amelia began as a cherished family ritual — quiet mornings spent outdoors with her dad, learning the rhythm of the woods. At first, it was her brother who went along with Dad on hunting trips. But before long, Amelia decided she wanted to join them. She took to it immediately.

One unforgettable memory came during youth season with her dad, when she harvested her first deer. “That day was so special,” Amelia said. “It was only my third time in the woods. We were tracking the deer as they approached the feeder. I waited for the best shot, took a deep breath, and made a perfect heart shot. I got my first deer right then and there — a moment I’ll never forget.”

Armonia's love of the outdoors started early, thanks to her mom. “I was about 5 when she started taking me out,” she said. “I was 8 when I got my first deer.” Her mom didn’t just hand her a rifle; she handed her a legacy. The lessons weren’t about trophies, but about patience, respect and connection.

Some memories stand out more than others. “My favorite hunting memory was during my controlled youth hunt



Amelia in her hunting gear.



Armonia in her hunting gear.

at Pine Creek. My mom and I hadn't seen anything all day, and we were just about to pack up when, in the last 30 minutes, a few hogs finally appeared. We stepped out of our blind so I could get a better shot and sat in front of a tree with just my gun. I took a steady aim and fired. But as soon as the shot rang out, about 20 hogs came charging at us from out of nowhere! We sprinted back to our blind, half-terrified and half-dying of laughter. It's still one of the funniest, most unforgettable hunts we've ever had."

## LIVES IN MOTION

Both Amelia and Armonia have been hunting and dancing from a very young age, before they started going hunting. Dancing was their first passion, soon followed by hunting.

"I've danced since I was 4 years old, and I am 18 now," Amelia said. "My favorite styles are jazz and ballet with a little bit of contemporary. When I performed my first solo, it was thrilling and nerve-racking but exciting, too. That moment when the lights hit you and it's just you and the music, it's unforgettable."

Armonia began dancing at 3 years old, and she is 17 now. "Dancing in front of a crowd with lights beaming on me is nothing new. Stepping onto a stage by yourself, and

all the attention being on you is exciting, nerve-racking and thrilling all at the same time, a feeling you never want to forget.

"Hunting is a similar feeling. The nerves of waiting for a deer to come out, and when that time comes, you have so many different emotions running through you."

Though dancing and hunting may seem different, the girls both had similar things to say about these two passions, having the same spark, the same rush. When you are hunting, you're waiting, your heart's pounding, you're focused. Then, when the moment comes, everything slows down. It's pure adrenaline, just like on stage.

## FOCUS, PATIENCE, POWER

Ask either young woman what connects dance and hunting, and their answers are very similar: discipline, patience and timing.

"Both require you to observe, to wait, to be ready," Amelia said. "You can't force a perfect dance move or a perfect shot. You have to trust the process and yourself." That mind-set has carried over into every part of their lives.

"Dance and hunting have both taught me to be patient even when things don't go as planned," Armonia said. "They've made me confident, resilient, and sure of who I am."



Armonia and her first deer harvest.



Amelia with a deer harvest.



Armonia showing her dance moves.



Amelia performing on stage.

## FEMININE AND FEARLESS

In an activity still seen as male-dominated, Amelia and Armonia both unapologetically embrace their femininity.

"Being a girl that hunts just blends in naturally for me," Amelia said. "I'm a tomboy and a girly girl. I wear makeup and get my nails done. During fall, I'm just full-out 'let's get into the woods and hunt!' My dance friends think I am crazy for hunting and even make up hunting nicknames for me. On the flip side, most of my hunting friends are boys, and they don't even think about me being a dancer."

Armonia said, "I grew up around uncles and brothers, so I'm not afraid to get my hands dirty. But you also better believe I wake up at 4 a.m., do my makeup and wear my jewelry just to sit in a hunting blind all day." Her dance friends, she admits, are shocked that she hunts. "They're all pink and glitter and sunshine. Hunting sounds like a 'big no' to them. But people are impressed when I tell them that I hunt, especially when they find out it's my mom who takes me."

It's a balance both girls have learned to own: sparkle and strength, mascara and mud, stage lights and sunrises.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Amelia already knows she wants to keep the legacy of hunting going. "I plan on making sure that my future husband hunts," she says with a smile. "And when I have kids,

I'll take them out at a very young age and get them into the outdoors life."

Armonia dreams of auditioning for the Oklahoma City Thunder Girls after graduation, while also continuing to hunt as a lifelong connection to her roots. "Hunting is part of my childhood," she said. "It's something I want to carry with me. My mom showed me it's possible to do it all: to work, raise a family, and still make time for what you love."

Dancing and deer hunting isn't just about two disparate hobbies. It's about what happens when you refuse to choose between strength and softness after realizing that both can live side by side.

For Amelia and Armonia, life's meaningful moments are found in the in-between space where the music fades into the rustling of leaves in the wind, and where grace meets grit in perfect harmony. ♡

### INSPIRED TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HUNTING?

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation is committed to providing quality hunting resources to hunters of all skill levels, as well as those who are interested in trying hunting for the first time. Scan the QR code to learn more and start your journey today!





# How BearWise Are You?

Bears are curious and will follow their powerful noses to just about anything with an odor (it doesn't have to be a good odor). Bears may also investigate anything they've learned can yield a food reward: garbage, birdseed, pet food, chickens, beehives...you get the idea.

Use our [Be BearWise Checklist](#) to learn what attracts bears and how you can keep bears away from your home and property.

## BBQ Grills, Smokers

- Grill and/or smoker is stored inside when not in use. *If not:*
  - Drip pans and grates are cleaned after every use.
  - Grill/smoker is kept covered.
- Utensils are stored indoors.
- Food is not left unattended when cooking or eating outdoors.



**Be BearWise:** Keep a look-out when you cook-out. Thoroughly clean grills and smokers.



## Trash, Recycling

- All trash containers are cleaned often to reduce odors.
- Recycling is rinsed out and clean.
- Bear-resistant trash containers are always closed and latched.

*If containers are not bear-resistant:*

- Regular trash cans are stored inside a sturdy locked building or bear-resistant enclosure.
- Garbage is put out the morning of pick up (not the night before).



**Be BearWise:** For certified bear-resistant containers and ways to modify your standard trash cans, visit [BearWise.org](#).

## Vehicles Parked Outside

- No food or anything with a fragrance is left in vehicles, car trunks or truck beds, including pet food, birdseed, food, beverages, scented air fresheners and trash.
- Vehicle windows are kept fully closed and doors locked.



**Be BearWise:** Keep a small trash bag in your vehicle and empty daily. Use an odor-removing spray. Roll up and lock up.

## Feeding Birds

- Birds/hummingbirds are not fed when bears are active in your area.
- Bird food is stored in bear-resistant containers or inside a sturdy, locked building.

*If you feed birds when bears are active:*

- Bird food and feeders are brought in nightly.
- Fallen birdseed and leftover food is picked up daily before dark.



**Be BearWise:** Download our bulletin: *Attract Birds, Not Bears* for feeder-free options.

## Feeding Pets, Strays

- Food is not put outside for stray animals or wildlife.
- Pets are fed indoors.

*If you must feed pets outside:*

- Pets are fed in single portions; bowls are removed and feeding area cleaned as soon as pets have eaten.
- Pet food is stored in a sturdy locked building or bear-resistant containers.



**Be BearWise:** Download our bulletin: *Dogs + Bears = Problems* for more safety tips.

*continued >*



## Fruit Trees, Gardens

- Fallen fruit is picked up daily OR fruit is picked before it ripens.
- Fertilizers are free of blood-meal and bone-meal.
- Electric fencing protects the fruit trees, edible gardens, berry bushes, and ornamental fruit-bearing trees (such as flowering crabapples).



### Be BearWise:

Avoid planting and consider removing ornamental fruit-bearing trees and bushes.

## Compost

- Meat, bones, fish, oil, grease, dairy products, eggshells, garbage or large amounts of fruit are not put in the compost.
- Compost is protected with a bear-resistant enclosure or electric fence.



### Be BearWise:

Follow USDA composting guidelines. Consider using an indoor composter.

## Unexpected Attractants

Be aware that some outdoor features that can't be removed or easily protected can attract bears, such as:

- ◆ Swimming pool, hot tub, pond, stream, water features.
- ◆ Nearby woods, dense bushes, conservation areas.
- ◆ Natural foods (i.e. berries, acorns).



### Be BearWise:

Don't give naturally curious bears **any other reasons** to stick around and look for people-provided 'food'.



If properly installed for your soil conditions and maintained, electric fencing is an effective deterrent for keeping bears out.

## Chickens, Farm Animals

Bear-resistant buildings, enclosures, containers and/or electric fences protect:

- Animals at night
- Newborns, always
- Livestock feed
- Dead animals are not buried near homes, buildings, livestock areas.



### Be BearWise:

Take extra steps to keep your animals safe and their feed away from bears.

Bears may dig up buried carcasses. Consult your county for other options.

## Beehives

- Permanent or portable electric fencing protects the beehives.
- Beehives are at least 3 feet away from the electric fencing.
- Beehives are at least 300 feet from dense bushes, trees or other places bears could hide.



### Be BearWise:

Wisely locate and protect beehives. Spread the word to your fellow beekeepers.

## Homes, Outbuildings

- **Doors and windows** in houses and outbuildings are kept closed and locked, especially at night or when people are not home. Pay special attention to sliding glass doors, inward-swinging doors, French doors and doors with lever handles.
- **Crawl spaces and small openings** under home and other buildings are barricaded before hibernation.
- **Refrigerators and freezers** are kept inside sturdy, locked buildings.
- Attractants are not stored on **upper-level balconies/decks** that bears can reach by climbing stairs, trees or deck posts.
- **Garage doors** are kept closed to keep bears away from stored attractants (i.e. pet food, birdseed, trash, food in fridge/freezer).
- **Coolers** with food/drinks are not stored on the porch, patio, deck or in a vehicle.
- **Pet doors** are locked at night.



### Be BearWise:

Screens don't keep out bears. Visit [BearWise.org](http://BearWise.org) to learn how to use bear unwelcome mats and get other practical tips for keeping bears out.

**Bears are smart, quick learners and may be active at any time of day.**

Check with your state wildlife agency to find out when bears are most active in your area and what solutions are most effective (state and local regulations may vary).

**Thanks for helping to keep people, pets and property safe and bears wild.**



Learn More!  
[BearWise.org](http://BearWise.org)

BearWise® is a program of the Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies © 2023





# PHENOLOGY

BY BETSY YORK, HUMAN DIMENSIONS SPECIALIST

I grew up in northern Illinois. As such, my sense of seasons was tied to the weather and the trees. There were four distinct seasons I knew as a youth:

### SUMMER

Hot, humid weather, lush green trees standing in the black loamy soil, and plentiful summer storms.

### FALL

A crisp breeze in the air with beautiful red and yellow leaves everywhere, falling to the ground.

### WINTER

Frigid temperatures and bare tree branches beautifully covered in fresh powdery snow.

### SPRING

Thawing temperatures and flowering trees.

When I moved to Texas and then Oklahoma, the passage of seasons was less stark. The leaves turned brown and sometimes stayed on the trees all winter. The crisp, cool breeze would falter and reverse itself into a sweltering heat.

My mind has been left wanting for another clear frame of reference for the passage of time.

In ecology, the study of the passing of seasons is referred to as phenology. The National Park Service explains phenology as “the study of recurring plant and animal life cycle events, or phenophases, such as leafing and flowering, maturation of plants, emergence of insects, and migration of birds.”

After moving to Oklahoma, I have also become interested in birding. As such, my perception of the passage of seasons can now be tied to the migration of birds through or to my backyard in Oklahoma City, along with the changes to the native plants I have placed in my yard to establish beneficial habitat for these species.

Phenology is an easy activity to help you become more attuned to the natural areas around you, including (maybe most importantly) your backyard! It’s as easy as marking dates on a calendar (either a virtual calendar on your mobile phone or a paper calendar).

Mark the first day you notice a specific species of bird in your yard, or the first day you notice a sprout coming out of the dirt on a native plant, or the first time you notice an insect — even if it’s a mosquito! Then, the next year, you can look ahead and know what to expect and create comparisons across years.

And if you are feeling curious and want to investigate, you could try to determine why some phenological event might have happened earlier or later than it did the previous year.

## WINTER

In late fall and early winter, I begin putting out bird feeders because natural food sources become scarcer for our backyard birds. I fill the feeders, and my partner always says, “Make sure to put some feed on the ground for the dove and dark-eyed juncos once they get here!”

He eagerly awaits the day that we see a dark-eyed junco on the ground as the northern cardinals take turns visiting the squirrel-proof feeders. The junco means that winter has arrived.

According to the Audubon website, this phenomenon we have observed tracks with their migration. They arrive at their winter range, which includes Oklahoma, in early to late November and stick around until early to late March.



*When the dark-eyed junco appears in the backyard, you know that winter is near.*

Another winter visitor to our yard is a species that was a complete surprise to me. I remember one summer I was in the high mountains of Colorado and got so excited when I saw a white-crowned sparrow. It was a beautiful bird with alternating black and white stripes down its head and neck, jumping around at 12,500 feet in elevation. I told my partner, and he said, "Oh yeah, we get those in the yard in the winter!" Lo and behold, the next winter I saw a white-crowned sparrow and was astounded.

Their summer range is typically in Canada but they also summer in a small area of the high mountains of Colorado. Then they start arriving in Oklahoma in November and December.

## SPRING

Spring is always an exciting time. Oklahoma gets a lot of exciting birds migrating through in large numbers, however many of the species that arrive after the cold winter don't stick around for long. Spring migration tends to be much more concentrated than fall migration.

My favorite arrival in spring is the cedar waxwing. These sleek-looking birds travel in groups, and we typically see at least 10 sitting together on high branches of the trees in our yard. It seems as if I only see these birds for about a month, and I always try to snap a picture, especially when the sun is glinting off their yellow-tinged feathers.



When warmer weather arrives for spring, so do the cedar waxwings.

## SUMMER

I was inspired to write this article because I saw a Mississippi kite soaring near my home on April 29. Each spring, we anxiously await our neighborhood kites that nest and sit atop power poles, surveying the neighborhood for insects to eat.

As soon as the Mississippi kites arrive, we know that summer and the accompanying summer heat is about to arrive. This tracks with their migration, as they spend the winter in central South America, inhabiting parts of Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil.

The Audubon website shows that their spring migration happens from March through May. These birds travel that far just to hang out on the power poles in our neighborhoods, and we are so excited when they arrive.

The kites begin their journey south again in mid- to late August.

## FALL

As I was considering which species makes me feel like fall is on the way, I was having a hard time and then realized that maybe it is the absence of so many species that feels most like fall.

The plants around me are senescing (fading), birds are migrating after their breeding season but not in large numbers at once. In the fall, migration is much more spread out based on the success of nesting pairs. As such, fall migration is not as showy as spring. For this reason, I can appreciate the other seasons and the excitement they bring even more, and settle in for the coming long nights of winter and the anticipation of those the dark-eyed juncos. ♡



*The Mississippi kite travels into Oklahoma to spend the summer from places much farther away than the Gulf of America coast.*



*When various bird species begin migrating through and the air takes on a slight chill, we know that autumn is on the horizon.*

# APPLY TO JOIN SELECT GROUP GOING ON CONTROLLED HUNTS

A large buck with impressive antlers stands in a field, looking directly at the camera. The background is a soft-focus landscape with trees and foliage. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

CRUNCH THE NUMBERS AND  
UP YOUR DRAWING ODDS

Imagine hiking into the back country of the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge and finding yourself in a stare-off with a 6-by-6 bull elk. How about putting a bead on one of the “10 Most Wanted” white-tailed bucks at the McAlester Army Ammo Plant? Or having a 3,000-acre wildlife management area almost all to yourself to target a buck and a doe in a day?

These exciting what-if scenarios might become real-life experiences for hunters selected in the next round of controlled hunts drawings conducted by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

This coming June, more than 5,000 drawings will be held for exclusive hunting opportunities across the state. And if you play your odds right, your name could be selected.

But first, you must enter your name and select which hunts you want to try to win. This article is designed to give controlled hunts applicants insights into how the program works, insights that might give you an edge in having your name selected for what could end up being your hunt of a lifetime.

## CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

Take some time and look into last year’s statistics on controlled hunts, and you could increase the likelihood that your name will be drawn this year for a controlled hunt permit. The numbers do reveal some application trends that you can use to your advantage.

In the 2025-26 controlled hunts drawing that were conducted in June 2025, about one out of every 27.4 applicants had his or her name drawn. Hopeful hunters turned in 139,757 applications for one of the 5,106 individual controlled hunt permits available last year. Many of those applicants will apply again this year when the 2026-27 controlled hunts application submission period opens online.

The No. 1 most important thing a hopeful hunter can do is to apply each year.

The application period will open in early April 2026 online at [GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com](https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Licensing/CustomLookup.aspx) (<https://license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Licensing/CustomLookup.aspx>). The application period will close in mid-May 2026.

The online application process is straightforward, and the system is designed so that only the applications that are completed correctly will be accepted and confirmed. This assures every applicant that his or her entry was suc-

cessful and that the applicant’s name will definitely be in the drawings.

Hunters will be able to apply for several hunts within each category, which increases one’s chances of being selected for a hunt. Winners are randomly selected through a computerized process that draws applications from the entire pool of applications for each hunt.

Those not drawn in a hunt category will gain a preference point for that category in future years, as long as the application is made in the same hunt category. Not only that, but some hunt categories allow applications for a group of hunters, which boosts chances of being drawn.

Applicants in the once-in-a-lifetime elk and pronghorn categories will be able to **add another preference point** to their

total for an additional \$10 for residents or \$50 for nonresidents. These “extra” preference points work just like the traditional points earned every time your application isn’t drawn — they carry forward for future drawings and increase your odds of being selected even more.

Another option is the ability to add more hunt choices above the standard number allowed in each category. These add-on choices will cost \$3 each, and there will be no limit to the number of hunt choices added.

## ABOUT CONTROLLED HUNTS

Controlled hunts are held in areas where unrestricted public hunting would pose safety concerns or where overharvest might occur. So, these hunts take place on Wildlife Department-owned or -managed areas where hunting for the target species is normally not allowed.

Controlled hunts are offered for deer in three categories; wild turkey in two categories; elk; and pronghorn.

Hunters wishing to go on a controlled hunt must submit an online application, which goes into the running with all other applications for that hunt. Hunters are selected through random drawings in each category.

**2025-26 OVERALL  
ODDS OF BEING  
DRAWN:  
1 IN 27.4**

### CONTROLLED HUNTS WEBSITE

To learn more about the controlled hunts process online, scan the code.



Getting drawn for a controlled hunt is a matter of odds and, to some degree, putting the odds in your favor by making informed hunt choices. Many controlled hunt choices are highly sought-after, and the number of applications for these marquee hunts greatly exceeds the number of available permits. But if you keep applying year after year, you'll likely get a chance sooner or later to enjoy a controlled hunt.

**How do I participate?** Simply submit an easy-to-complete application online through your GoOutdoorsOklahoma account. Applications are accepted online only.

Since applications are completed and submitted online, you will receive confirmation

### WHAT'S THE COST?

A \$10 **application** fee allows multiple hunt selections in controlled hunt categories (elk, pronghorn, deer, spring turkey) and includes the option to select Preference Point Only. **PointGuard insurance** is available for an additional \$10 for residents or \$50 for nonresidents. Applicants may also add unlimited **additional hunt choices**, at \$3 apiece, beyond the standard limit of 14 choices. Applicants may buy one **additional Preference Point** in each hunt category at a cost of \$10 for residents and \$50 for nonresidents.

that your application was completed correctly. This system helps to minimize mistakes, so make sure you receive confirmation of your application. If you do have any issues, call the toll-free help line listed at the bottom of the webpage, (833) 457-7285, or send email to HelpDesk@goutdoorsoklahoma.com.

### DO THE HOMEWORK

You can increase your chances by first doing some research. This article provides data from the most recent controlled hunts drawing cycle. Anyone who plans to apply this coming year is urged to study the numbers presented here to help guide you as to which hunts you should apply for if you want higher odds of being selected.

For example, you might see that only two controlled hunts will be held in the wildlife management area that you are hoping to hunt. You notice the odds of being selected were greater last year for one of the hunts, and so you might decide to apply for that hunt in anticipation that this year's applicant numbers remain about the same as last year's.

Every time you apply and do not get selected, you earn a preference point in that category for all future drawings. So, when you apply next year, it's like getting your name put into the drawing an extra time for each preference point. Your odds of being drawn improve if you apply again year after year. This strategy gains greater impact with the option to buy an additional preference point, which is an option in all hunt categories. Applicants who spend \$10 (for residents) or \$50 (for nonresidents) for the extra preference point will carry forward two preference points to next year in the event they are not drawn this year.

Additionally, some hunt categories allow you to apply with a group of other hunters, so that if one of the group is drawn, the entire group gets to hunt.

All hunters who are selected for a controlled hunt will receive hunt instructions at the email address attached to your online GoOutdoorsOklahoma account.

### HELPFUL TIPS

Applicants have the chance to buy **extra hunt choices** at \$3 apiece, which will be in addition to the basic application fee. This increases your overall odds of being drawn simply by putting your name into more of the drawings in a category.

You might consider adding the insurance called **PointGuard** to your application as a safety net just in case something unexpected comes up and you won't be able to attend your hunt. This option is designed to protect your preference points in the event you are drawn but for some reason you end up not being able to go on your hunt. PointGuard costs an additional \$10 over the basic application fee for residents, and an additional \$50 over the basic application fee for nonresidents.

Each preference point you earn acts like an extra application for the next year. But if you already know you cannot hunt this year and still want to earn a preference point, you can now choose to mark your application as **Preference Point Only**. This PPO option allows you to earn a point this year that carries over to next year, but it keeps your name out of the hunt drawings for this year. The PPO option is available as part of the applicant's \$10 initial application fee.

Every year you apply, your chances of selec-

DEER HUNTS

Hunt Location-Permit Type	Hunt Type	Begin Date	End Date	Hunt Number	Applicants	Permits Allowed	Draw Ratio 1 in ( )
Cookson WMA - Antlerless Only	Muzzleloader	11/9/25	11/9/25	3062	45	23	1.96
McAlester AAP Physically Challenged - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	10/10/25	10/12/25	3170	192	80	2.40
Lexington WMA - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	11/20/25	11/20/25	3153	339	135	2.51
Fort Gibson WRP - Antlerless Only	Muzzleloader	11/18/25	11/18/25	3112	137	50	2.74
Fort Gibson WRP - Antlerless Only	Muzzleloader	10/22/25	10/22/25	3111	149	50	2.98
Cookson WMA - Antlerless Only	Muzzleloader	11/8/25	11/8/25	3061	70	23	3.04
Lexington WMA - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	11/19/25	11/19/25	3152	411	135	3.04
Deep Fork NWR - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	11/3/25	11/30/25	3081	927	300	3.09
Lexington WMA - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	11/16/25	11/16/25	3151	501	135	3.71
Fort Gibson WRP - Antlerless Only	Muzzleloader	11/19/25	11/19/25	3114	109	25	4.36
Cookson WMA - Antlerless Only	Gun	11/2/25	11/2/25	3065	87	18	4.83
Four Canyon Preserve - Antlerless Only	Muzzleloader	10/17/25	10/18/25	3090	21	4	5.25
Lexington WMA - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	11/15/25	11/15/25	3150	776	135	5.75
Spavinaw GMA - Antlerless Only	Gun	10/25/25	10/26/25	3291	176	30	5.87
Cookson WMA - Antlerless Only	Gun	11/1/25	11/1/25	3064	127	18	7.06
McAlester AAP - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	10/17/25	10/19/25	3171	1,980	275	7.20
Sequoyah NWR - 2 (Antlerless Only)	Muzzleloader	11/19/25	11/21/25	3282	223	30	7.43
Sequoyah NWR - 2 (Antlerless Only)	Muzzleloader	12/3/25	12/5/25	3283	228	30	7.60
Sequoyah NWR - 2 (Antlerless Only)	Muzzleloader	10/29/25	10/31/25	3281	243	30	8.10
Pontotoc Ridge Preserve - 2 (Antlerless Only)	Gun	10/10/25	10/12/25	3224	55	6	9.17
McAlester AAP - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	10/24/25	10/26/25	3172	2,664	275	9.69
Pontotoc Ridge Preserve - 2 (Antlerless Only)	Gun	12/12/25	12/14/25	3225	60	6	10.00
Pontotoc Ridge Preserve - 2 (Antlerless Only)	Gun	10/3/25	10/5/25	3223	63	6	10.50
Fort Gibson WRP - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	10/21/25	10/21/25	3110	575	50	11.50
Four Canyon Preserve - Antlerless Only	Gun	11/7/25	11/8/25	3092	47	4	11.75
Wichita Mts. NWR - Antlerless Only	Gun	11/18/25	11/20/25	3341	514	40	12.85
Oka'Yanhli Preserve - 2 (Antlerless Only)	Gun	12/12/25	12/14/25	3207	92	7	13.14
Canton WMA - Either Sex	Gun	11/22/25	11/23/25	3030	1,001	75	13.35
McAlester AAP - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	10/31/25	11/2/25	3173	4,011	275	14.59
Oka'Yanhli Preserve - 2 (Antlerless Only)	Gun	10/3/25	10/5/25	3206	116	7	16.57
McAlester AAP - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	11/14/25	11/16/25	3175	4,811	275	17.49
Salt Plains NWR - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	12/1/25	12/4/25	3240	455	25	18.20
McAlester AAP - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	11/7/25	11/9/25	3174	5,038	275	18.32
Cherokee GMA - Either Sex	Gun	11/13/25	11/13/25	3046	1,101	60	18.35
Sequoyah NWR, Refuge Islands - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	11/10/25	11/14/25	3284	74	4	18.50
Deep Fork NWR - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Muzzleloader	10/13/25	10/19/25	3080	933	50	18.66
McGee Creek WMA - Either Sex	Gun	11/21/25	11/23/25	3201	1,293	65	19.89
Little River NWR - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	10/31/25	11/2/25	3160	605	30	20.17
Pushmataha WMA - Either Sex	Muzzleloader	12/5/25	12/7/25	3230	1,149	50	22.98
Little River NWR - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	11/7/25	11/9/25	3161	696	30	23.20
Cherokee GMA - Either Sex	Gun	11/12/25	11/12/25	3044	1,393	60	23.22
Grady County WMA - Either Sex	Muzzleloader	10/25/25	11/2/25	3120	243	10	24.30
Washita NWR - Antlerless Only	Gun	11/11/25	11/12/25	3320	122	5	24.40
Sans Bois WMA - Either Sex	Muzzleloader	11/7/25	11/9/25	3275	388	15	25.87
Candy Creek WMA - Either Sex	Muzzleloader	10/25/25	11/2/25	3020	311	12	25.92
Tishomingo NWR - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	11/8/25	11/16/25	3370	556	20	27.80
Salt Plains State Park - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	10/14/25	10/17/25	3350	349	10	34.90
Salt Plains State Park - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	12/8/25	12/11/25	3351	354	10	35.40
Salt Plains NWR - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Muzzleloader	11/3/25	11/5/25	3242	897	25	35.88
Sequoyah NWR - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	11/10/25	11/14/25	3280	1,089	30	36.30
Tishomingo NWR - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	11/20/25	11/21/25	3300	775	20	38.75
Fort Gibson WRP - Either Sex	Muzzleloader	11/19/25	11/19/25	3113	986	25	39.44
Neosho WMA - Either Sex	Muzzleloader	11/8/25	11/9/25	3203	237	6	39.50
Salt Plains NWR - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	12/1/25	12/4/25	3241	423	10	42.30
Okmulgee GMA - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Gun	11/15/25	11/16/25	3210	1,324	30	44.13
Sans Bois WMA - Either Sex	Gun	10/24/25	10/26/25	3276	668	15	44.53
Atoka WMA - Either Sex	Gun	11/21/25	11/23/25	3001	1,353	30	45.10
Candy Creek WMA - Either Sex	Gun	11/22/25	12/7/25	3021	544	12	45.33
Sequoyah Resort Park - 2 (1 Either Sex, 1 Antlerless)	Archery	12/6/25	12/7/25	3286	1,113	24	46.38
Grady County WMA - Either Sex	Gun	11/22/25	11/30/25	3121	532	10	53.20
McCurtain Co. WA - Either Sex	Gun	11/7/25	11/9/25	3190	888	16	55.50
Salt Plains NWR - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	11/17/25	11/19/25	3246	1,542	25	61.68

tion only get better. If you've applied for the controlled hunt of your dreams for five years straight without having been selected, then you will have five "tickets in the hopper" compared to a first-time applicant, who will have one.

Although preference points increase your odds of selection, they do not guarantee that applicants with the most points will get drawn. What is guaranteed is that their odds of selection improve. First-time applicants with no preference points can — and do — get drawn for popular hunts, while hunters who have many preference points can miss out being selected.

The drawing pool size related to the number of hunt permits also affects one's odds of being selected.

Applicants who hold **20 or more preference points** in the once-in-a-lifetime elk and pronghorn hunt categories will enjoy higher likelihood of winning a permit, as the drawing procedure has been enhanced for those categories. An initial drawing for half of the elk hunt permits and half of the antelope hunt permits will be conducted from a pool of only those applicants having 20 or more preference points in the category. The winners for the remaining half of hunt permits in each category will be drawn from the pool of all applicants (excluding those who were drawn out for hunts in the initial drawing).

In some categories, hunters may **apply in groups** of up to four people. An average of the total preference points of all hunters is used for each hunter in the group. If not drawn in that category, each applicant in the group will earn a single preference point that carries forward with the rest of their points to future drawings.

Once you are drawn for a hunt, all preference points that you have built up in that hunt category are cleared. You can begin building

preference points again with your application next year in the deer and turkey categories. (Elk and pronghorn controlled hunts are once-in-a-lifetime draws; previous winners are not allowed to apply again.)

Here are some **other tips** for increasing your chances of winning a controlled hunt:

- For those locations that offer multiple hunts in the same category, the second or third hunts (the **later hunts**) are often easier to get selected for than the earliest hunts.
- Hunts that are considered by some to be **less desirable**, such as antlerless deer hunts, may be just the right choice for a meat hunter looking to raise his chances of getting to hunt at a premier location.
- By designating **additional hunt choices**, you increase your overall odds of being selected for at least one of the choices, so make as many selections as a category allows (five in the deer category, for example), rather than just three, two or one. Then consider adding even more hunt choices at \$3 each, no limit.
- Consider the **ratio** of permits to applicants to help you decide which hunts might give you the best chance of selection. A selection ratio of 1-in-25 is better odds than a ratio of 1-in-80.
- You can increase your odds of being drawn when you apply for hunts that happen on **key dates** of the regular statewide seasons, such as the opening weekend of muzzleloader or gun season. Many hunters may skip those dates because of already-planned hunts.

*(Compiled by Outdoor Oklahoma Staff)*

## 2025-26 DEER HUNTS

- Total applicants (includes first, second, third, fourth and fifth choice preferences): 69,199.
- Total permits available: 3,708.
- Overall odds of getting drawn for any one permit: 1 in 18.7.

**NOTE:** Steer clear of the most popular hunts in order to have better chances of getting drawn. Controlled hunts such as those at the McAlester Army Ammunition Plant, the Wichita Mountains buck gun hunt, the Sandy Sanders buck gun hunt, and Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge either-sex hunts will not offer the better odds of selection.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Anything different for next year in regards to controlled hunts?

Nonresidents accessing certain Oklahoma public hunting and fishing areas are now required to check in and check out of the area. By checking in and out of these areas, hunters, anglers, shooters, birdwatchers, hikers and any other users can help the Wildlife Department better understand how the areas are being used. There is no cost associated with checking in or out of an area.

DEER HUNTS (CONTINUED)

Hunt Location-Permit Type	Hunt Type	Begin Date	End Date	Hunt Number	Applicants	Permits Allowed	Draw Ratio 1 in ( )
Spavinaw GMA - Either Sex	Gun	10/25/25	10/26/25	3290	1,286	20	64.30
Salt Plains NWR - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Muzzleloader	11/3/25	11/5/25	3243	685	10	68.50
Four Canyon Preserve - 2 (Either Sex)	Muzzleloader	10/17/25	10/18/25	3091	173	2	86.50
Salt Plains NWR - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	11/12/25	11/14/25	3244	2,212	25	88.48
Cookson WMA - Either Sex	Muzzleloader	11/8/25	11/9/25	3060	1,141	12	95.08
Osage-Western Wall WMA - Either Sex	Muzzleloader	11/7/25	11/11/25	3220	1,051	10	105.10
Salt Plains NWR - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	11/17/25	11/19/25	3247	1,277	10	127.70
Cookson WMA - Either Sex	Gun	11/1/25	11/2/25	3063	1,940	12	161.67
Salt Plains NWR - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	11/12/25	11/14/25	3245	1,741	10	174.10
Beaver River WMA - Either Sex	Gun	11/22/25	11/23/25	3008	449	2	224.50
Four Canyon Preserve - 2 (Either Sex)	Gun	11/7/25	11/8/25	3093	473	2	236.50
Beaver River WMA, McFarland Unit - Either Sex	Gun	11/22/25	11/23/25	3007	523	2	261.50
Wichita Mountains WR - Antlered Only	Gun	11/18/25	11/20/25	3340	8,067	30	268.90



TED HUIZINGA/PIKABAY.COM/CCO



## 2025-26 YOUTH DEER HUNTS

- Total applicants (includes first, second and third choice preferences): 4,173.
- Total permits available: 812.
- Overall odds of getting drawn for any one permit: 1 in 5.14.

**NOTE:** Select hunt dates that are within the regular statewide season dates, especially those that fall on opening weekends, since many hunters already have other hunting plans in place at those times. Controlled hunts that take place outside the regular muzzleloader and gun seasons typically draw more applications and therefore lower the odds of getting selected.

YOUTH DEER HUNTS							
Hunt Location-Permit Type	Hunt Type	Begin Date	End Date	Hunt Number	Applicants	Permits Allowed	Draw Ratio 1 in ( )
Cross Timbers WMA - Antlerless Only	Gun	11/22/25	11/30/25	5025	16	30	0.53
Fort Cobb WMA and SP - Antlerless Only	Muzzleloader/ Shotgun	10/18/25	10/19/25	5040	22	25	0.88
McAlester AAP - Doe	Shotgun	11/28/25	11/30/25	5090	34	25	1.36
Spavinaw GMA - Either-Sex	Muzzleloader	11/1/25	11/2/25	5180	55	40	1.38
Neosho WMA - Either-Sex	Muzzleloader	10/11/25	10/12/25	5095	12	6	2
Little River NWR - 2 Deer (Only 1 Antlered)	Gun	10/24/25	10/26/25	5085	36	15	2.4
Pushmataha WMA - Either-Sex	Gun	10/24/25	10/26/25	5140	92	35	2.63
Deep Fork NWR - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Muzzleloader	10/20/25	10/26/25	5030	70	25	2.8
Waurika Lake CoE - Antlerless Only	Gun	11/8/25	11/9/25	5270	14	5	2.8
Camp Gruber Cantonment - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Muzzleloader	11/28/25	11/30/25	5009	130	40	3.25
Cherokee GMA - Either-Sex	Gun	11/1/25	11/2/25	5010	168	50	3.36
Spavinaw GMA - Either-Sex	Gun	11/7/25	11/9/25	5181	140	40	3.5
Fort Gibson WRP - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Muzzleloader	11/15/25	11/15/25	5050	71	20	3.55
Hugo WMA - Either-Sex	Gun	10/10/25	10/12/25	5060	108	30	3.6
James Collins WMA - Either-Sex	Gun	10/17/25	10/19/25	5070	148	40	3.7
Pine Creek WMA - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Gun	11/7/25	11/9/25	5130	96	25	3.84
Washita NWR - Antlerless Only	Gun	11/7/25	11/8/25	5260	40	10	4
Sequoyah NWR - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Muzzleloader	10/17/25	10/19/25	5160	124	30	4.13
Pushmataha WMA - Either-Sex	Gun	11/7/25	11/9/25	5141	146	35	4.17
Washita NWR - Antlerless Only	Gun	10/10/25	10/11/25	5240	46	10	4.6
Cookson WMA - Either-Sex	Gun	10/25/25	10/26/25	5020	146	30	4.87
Okmulgee GMA - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Gun	11/8/25	11/9/25	5111	98	20	4.9
James Collins WMA - Either-Sex	Gun	10/24/25	10/26/25	5071	210	40	5.25
Tishomingo NWR - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	10/23/25	10/24/25	5210	108	20	5.4
USDA Grazinglands R.L. - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	11/7/25	11/8/25	5220	109	20	5.45
Neosho WMA - Either-Sex	Gun	11/1/25	11/2/25	5096	34	6	5.67
Salt Plains NWR - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	10/24/25	10/26/25	5150	150	25	6
Beaver River WMA, McFarland Unit - Either-Sex	Gun	10/17/25	10/19/25	5006	145	15	9.67
USDA Grazinglands R.L. - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	12/12/25	12/13/25	5221	102	10	10.2
Tenkiller CoE - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Gun	10/31/25	11/2/25	5190	109	10	10.9
Keystone/Heyburn CoE - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Gun	12/5/25	12/7/25	5080	125	11	11.36
Sequoyah Resort Park - 2 (1 Either Sex, 1 Antlerless)	Muzzleloader	12/13/25	12/14/25	5170	196	16	12.25
Hugo Lake CoE (Kiamichi Park) - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Gun	12/12/25	12/14/25	5062	142	10	14.2
Eufaula CoE - Gaines Creek PUA	Gun	10/31/25	11/2/25	5035	72	5	14.4
Texoma CoE (Lakeside) - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Gun	11/14/25	11/16/25	5201	121	8	15.13
Hugo Lake CoE (Kiamichi Park) - 2 (Only 1 Antlered).	Gun	10/10/25	10/12/25	5061	168	10	16.8
Texoma CoE (Burns Run) - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Gun	11/7/25	11/9/25	5200	122	6	20.33
Kaw Lake CoE - 2 (1 Either Sex, 1 Doe)	Gun	11/7/25	11/9/25	5055	172	6	28.67
Canton WRP	Gun	12/13/25	12/21/25	5015	58	2	29
Skiatook CoE - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Gun	12/5/25	12/7/25	5175	116	4	29
Canton WRP	Gun	11/8/25	11/16/25	5014	102	2	51



## 2025-26 DEER HUNTS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- Total applicants (includes first, second and third choice preferences): 342.
- Total permits available: 114.
- Overall odds of getting drawn for any one permit: 1 in 3.

**NOTE:** Northeastern Oklahoma areas generally attract the most applications. Examples are Cherokee, Cookson Hills, Gruber, and Spavinaw WMAs. Consider hunts in other parts of the state.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Who can apply?

Any resident or nonresident who possesses a valid hunting license or who is otherwise exempt may apply for controlled hunts. A list of which hunting licenses are valid is available at [wildlife-department.com](http://wildlife-department.com). Applicants must have a license prior to applying for controlled hunts (unless exempt). Applicants who are eligible for, and possess, apprentice-designated hunting licenses may also apply (although some hunts require hunter education certification by the date of the hunt.) Check the website for more information.

### DEER HUNTS (NONAMBULATORY, VEHICLE)

Hunt Location-Permit Type	Hunt Type	Begin Date	End Date	Hunt Number	Applicants	Permits Allowed	Draw Ratio 1 in ( )
Cherokee GMA - Either Sex	Gun	10/25/25	10/26/25	4001	50	40	1.25
Sequoyah Resort Park - 2 (1 Either Sex, 1 Antlerless)	Muzzleloader	12/20/25	12/21/25	4070	21	16	1.31
Fort Gibson WRP - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Muzzleloader	12/16/25	12/17/25	4025	24	10	2.4
Deep Fork NWR - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Muzzleloader	10/27/25	11/2/25	4020	13	5	2.6
Sequoyah NWR - 2 (Only 1 Antlered)	Archery	11/10/25	11/14/25	4060	6	2	3
Tishomingo NWR - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	11/6/25	11/7/25	4080	33	10	3.3
Cookson WMA - Either Sex	Gun	11/15/25	11/16/25	4010	41	12	3.42
Sequoyah NWR - 2 (Antlerless Only)	Muzzleloader	11/19/25	11/21/25	4061	8	2	4
Copan CoE Parks - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	12/5/25	12/7/25	4015	31	5	6.2
Oologah Lake CoE - 2 (1 Doe, 1 Buck)	Gun	11/14/25	11/16/25	4040	64	9	7.11
Salt Plains NWR - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Muzzleloader	11/3/25	11/5/25	4050	10	1	10
Salt Plains NWR - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	11/17/25	11/19/25	4052	17	1	17
Salt Plains NWR - 2 (1st Antlerless, 2nd Either Sex)	Gun	11/12/25	11/14/25	4051	24	1	24



## 2025-26 ELK HUNTS

- Total applicants (includes first, second and third choice preferences): 37,906.
- Total permits available: 306.
- Overall odds of getting drawn for any one permit: 1 in 123.9.

**NOTE:** Enhanced drawings are now upping the odds for applicants with 20 or more preference points in the category. New this year is the option to buy one additional preference point to increase your odds for next year's drawing.

### ELK HUNTS

Hunt Location-Permit Type	Hunt Type	Begin Date	End Date	Hunt Number	Applicants	Permits Allowed	Draw Ratio 1 in ( )
Wichita Mountains WR (walk-in only) - Cow	Gun	1/12/26	1/16/26	1051	462	45	10.27
Wichita Mountains WR (walk-in only) - Cow	Gun	1/5/26	1/9/26	1041	558	45	12.4
Wichita Mountains WR - Cow	Gun	12/2/25	12/4/25	1021	1,091	70	15.59
Wichita Mountains WR (walk-in only) - Cow	Gun	12/15/25	12/19/25	1031	769	45	17.09
Wichita Mountains WR - Bull	Gun	12/2/25	12/4/25	1020	8,668	40	216.7
Wichita Mountains WR (walk-in only) - Either Sex	Gun	1/12/26	1/16/26	1050	5,583	20	279.15
Wichita Mountains WR (walk-in only) - Either Sex	Gun	1/5/26	1/9/26	1040	7,937	20	396.85
Wichita Mountains WR (walk-in only) - Either Sex	Gun	12/15/25	12/19/25	1030	9,031	20	451.55
Cookson WMA - Either Sex	Gun	9/25/25	9/26/25	1001	3,807	1	3,807



## 2025 PRONGHORN HUNTS

- Total applicants (includes first and second choice preferences): 13,501.
- Total permits available: 40.
- Overall odds of getting drawn for any one permit: 1 in 337.5.

**NOTE:** New this year is the option to buy one additional preference point to increase your odds for next year's drawing. Pronghorn controlled hunts are once-in-a-lifetime opportunities.

### PRONGHORN HUNTS

Hunt Location-Permit Type	Hunt Type	Begin Date	End Date	Hunt Number	Applicants	Permits Allowed	Draw Ratio 1 in ( )
Texas County - Doe Only	Gun	9/8/25	9/17/25	2011	770	10	77.00
Cimarron County - Doe Only	Gun	9/8/25	9/17/25	2002	1,263	15	84.20
Cimarron County - Either Sex	Gun	9/4/25	9/7/25	2001	5,985	10	598.50
Texas County - Either Sex	Gun	9/4/25	9/7/25	2010	5,483	5	1,096.60

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Will my controlled hunt harvest count toward my regular season limit?

No; you may still harvest your entire regular season limit during open season. Controlled hunts harvests are considered bonus and require the hunter to have the appropriate bonus license.

### If I apply for long enough, am I guaranteed my name will be drawn?

No; drawings are random from the entire pool of applicants. But your odds get better every year you submit an application because you earn preference points in future drawings.

## 2026 SPRING TURKEY HUNTS

- Total applicants (includes first, second and third choice preferences): 13,342.
- Total permits available: 101.
- Overall odds of getting drawn for any one permit: 1 in 132.1.

**NOTE:** Skip the hunt choices that attract the most applications, such as the McAlester Army Ammunition Plant hunts.

## 2026 YOUTH TURKEY HUNTS

- Total applicants (includes first, second and third choice preferences): 1,294.
- Total permits available: 25.
- Overall odds of getting drawn for any one permit: 1 in 51.8.

**NOTE:** Choosing hunts that take place later in spring come with better odds of being selected.



PAUL HOOD/READERS' PHOTO SHOWCASE 2020

SPRING TURKEY							
Hunt Location-Permit Type	Hunt Type	Begin Date	End Date	Hunt Number	Applicants	Permits Allowed	Draw Ratio 1 in ( )
Little River NWR - Tom	Shotgun	4/24/26	4/26/26	6040	1113	20	55.65
McAlester AAP - Tom	Shotgun	4/17/26	4/19/26	6051	1276	14	91.14
McAlester AAP - Tom	Shotgun	4/10/26	4/12/26	6050	1470	14	105
McCurtain County WA - Tom	Shotgun	4/10/26	4/12/26	6060	1707	16	106.69
Four Canyon Preserve - Tom	Shotgun	4/10/26	4/11/26	6021	244	2	122
Cross Timbers WMA - Tom	Shotgun	5/9/26	5/13/26	6001	1266	10	126.6
Four Canyon Preserve - Tom	Shotgun	4/3/26	4/4/26	6020	358	2	179
Deep Fork NWR - Tom	Shotgun	4/20/26	5/16/26	6010	2019	10	201.9
Cross Timbers WMA - Tom	Shotgun	4/16/26	4/20/26	6000	2219	10	221.9
Tishomingo NWR - Tom	Shotgun	4/23/26	4/24/26	6080	1670	3	556.67

YOUTH SPRING TURKEY							
Hunt Location-Permit Type	Hunt Type	Begin Date	End Date	Hunt Number	Applicants	Permits Allowed	Draw Ratio 1 in ( )
Deep Fork NWR - Tom	Shotgun	4/11/26	5/16/26	7020	259	10	25.9
Little River NWR - Tom	Shotgun	4/17/26	4/19/26	7040	157	5	31.4
Hugo CoE (Kiamichi Park) - Tom	Shotgun	4/4/26	4/5/26	7000	277	4	69.25
Salt Plains NWR - Tom	Shotgun	4/10/26	4/19/26	7075	141	2	70.5
Wichita Mtn NWR (walk-in only) - Tom	Shotgun	4/10/26	4/12/26	7096	204	2	102
Washita NWR - Tom	Shotgun	4/10/26	4/12/26	7010	256	2	128

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### How do I pay my application fees?

You may pay the one-time application fee (\$10 for residents or \$50 for nonresidents) plus any additional add-on selections using a Visa or MasterCard credit or debit card online at [GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com](http://GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com). If your name is drawn, additional license and user fees may be required for some specific hunts.

### Can I keep accumulating preference points indefinitely?

Yes, in each category, up until your name is drawn, or whenever you do not submit any application for five consecutive years. And you now may choose to buy one additional preference point in each category, which will also carry forward for those not selected in the drawings.

### What if I have an address change after I apply?

Notify the Wildlife Department's License Section by calling (405) 521-3852.

# OUTDOOR STORE

license. [GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com](http://GoOutdoorsOklahoma.com)

Sign in or shop online as a guest. Some items also available in person at ODWC headquarters, 1801 N. Lincoln Blvd. in Oklahoma City.

\*\*Prices listed on these pages do not include \$3 online ordering convenience fee.



## ODWC LOGO DRINKWARE

Double-wall high-grade stainless steel 16-oz coffee mugs and 20-oz tumblers made by Yukon with DuraGrip powder coat finish featuring the new ODWC arrowhead logo. Tumblers come in navy, white, and bottomland camo; mugs come in olive drab and navy. They are vacuum-insulated and BPA-free. (Online sales only.) — \$20

## DURABLE COLLECTOR'S CARDS

Every hunting and fishing license holder can upgrade to a customized hard plastic card that won't be damaged by water, sun, dirt, or regular wear and tear like paper documents. Cards hold customer and license information on one side; the other side features artwork from Oklahoma artists that changes periodically. Several designs available. (Account sign-in required.) — \$6



## OKLAHOMA HABITAT DONOR WINDOW DECALS

Show your support of the Wildlife Department's conservation efforts with these striking window decals. — \$10 each



## NEW OUTDOOR OKLAHOMA CAPS

These sleek fabric caps sport the latest Outdoor Oklahoma logo design! They are the Richardson 112 model, mid-pro shape, pro-curved visor, adjustable snap-back, 60% cotton/40% polyester. Various colors and styles will be available (subject to availability). (Online sales only.) — \$20



## YUKON FLOATING GUN CASE

Welded waterproof construction, thick foam padding for protection, 500d tarpaulin exterior shell, carry strap and handle, universal fit for shotgun or scoped rifle. (Online sales only.) — \$70

## YUKON ODWC BACKPACK COOLER

Double duty — works as cooler or padded gear bag, keeps ice for days, air tight zipper, rugged welded construction, 20 can with ice capacity. (Ships separately from other Outdoor Store items) — \$140.00

## YUKON LUNCHBOX COOLER

Keep your cool with an ODWC-logo lunchbox with four pockets and a welded thermal foil liner that is antimicrobial and leak-resistant. It will hold eight cans and is 12.5 inches long. — \$27

## RIVERSIDE DRY BAG

This handsome high-capacity dry bag sports the ODWC shield. Measuring 28 by 15 by 9 inches, it has four pockets and a rugged exterior shell. — \$80





## WILDLIFE LICENSE PLATES

Dress up your vehicle while showing your support of our great state's wildlife resources by getting a wildlife license plate. Nine Wildlife Conservation Plates are available to serve as your regular, rear-bumper license plate. The plates cost just \$41.60 (original or replacement) above your regular annual registration fee with proceeds going to Oklahoma's Wildlife Diversity Program. The forms are available at local tag agencies, or online at [tinyurl.com/wildlifetag](http://tinyurl.com/wildlifetag).



## OUTDOOR OKLAHOMA T-SHIRTS

Show that you support ODWC's magazine and TV show with these logo tees! These Bella unisex soft shirts are machine-washable and come in two designs: white with logo, and black with angler and logo. — \$25.

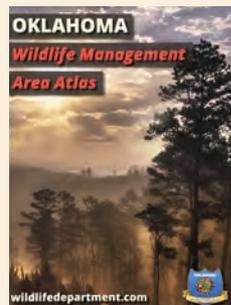
## ODWC LOGO WATER BOTTLE

Made of high-grade 18/8 (304) stainless steel, this ODWC-logo 32-ounce bottle is highly durable and corrosion-resistant. With copper plate insulation and double-wall vacuum seal, it keeps beverages cold for 24 hours or hot for up to 6 hours. Includes Sip 'n Chug Leakproof Lid. — \$27



## HABITAT DONOR CAP

Top-quality, American-made cap displays the Bass Habitat Donor Patch, which designates you as a supporter of the Wildlife Department's conservation efforts. Wearing this hat means you care about future generations and the great hunting and fishing tradition. — \$20



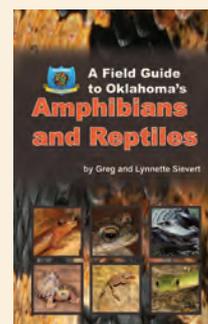
## OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA ATLAS

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# SWAMP RABBIT

BY OUTDOOR OKLAHOMA STAFF

The swamp rabbit (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*) is a rodent that inhabits lowland swamps and river bottoms from east Texas and southern Oklahoma to Georgia. In Oklahoma, swamp rabbits are most likely to be found in southeast McCurtain County and swampy areas along the rivers of eastern Oklahoma.

The swamp rabbit is not too difficult to distinguish from its relative, the cottontail, if you give it a second look. It's larger (up to 6 pounds), has larger ears and darker, shorter fur. The tail is white

underneath, but it is slender and different from the round puff of white that gives the cottontail its name.

The swamper is more likely to be found in mature woods, especially in swampy areas where standing water is interspersed with ridges of higher ground. They are territorial, and males will sometimes fight to defend a home range.

One good way to tell if you are in

swamp rabbit territory is to look for the droppings they characteristically leave on top of stumps, logs or other elevated spots. This habit is so predictable that some biologists have used the number of such sites in an area to help make population estimates.

The track of the swamp rabbit is large, and the imprint of the slightly splayed toes and large toenails are distinctive. Also, the swamp rabbit often chooses to walk rather than hop. This is almost unique among rabbits and leaves an unmistakable trail in mud or snow.

Like all rabbits, this one is a vegetarian. It forages at night for herbaceous plants, especially

sedge grasses, but less grass than the cottontail. In winter, the diet consists primarily of bark, twigs and the seedlings or roots of perennial herbs.

Swamp rabbits are not often found far from water, and they are willing swimmers.

Water is a favorite refuge from pursuing enemies. This rabbit may try to escape a pursuing dog by diving. Sometimes a harried swamper is discovered hiding under an overhanging bank, totally submerged except for eyes and nose. This bunny seems to have no aversion to getting wet, even in the coldest weather.

Swamp rabbits are much like cottontails in their behavior, except that they are more vocal. Five different calls can be heard.

Mating is preceded by lively courtship behavior involving mad dashes and dispersal of scent, accompanied by assorted leaps by both doe and buck. Fights between bucks occur at this time but usually results in little more than the loss of some fur.

Mating activity is highest in February and March though it may continue until September. Some of the rabbits that breed late may be young does born early the same season. The young are born about 40 days after mating, usually two to four in a litter and already covered with fur. In two or three days, their eyes open and the young rabbits start taking their first steps.

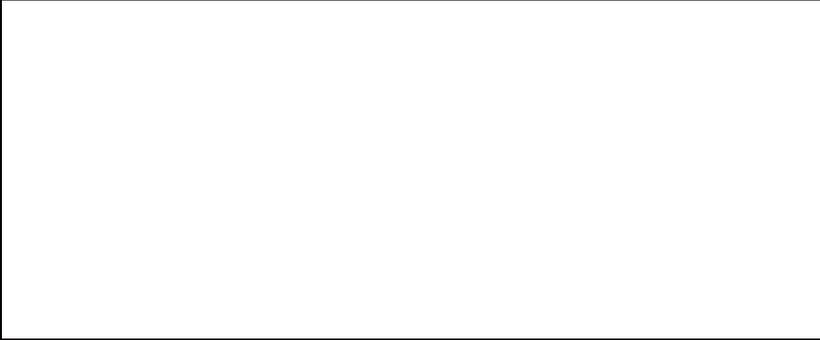
They will remain in the area of the nest for a few more days then will disperse to feed on their own. The average lifespan in the wild is 1.8 years.

A swamp rabbit nest is usually a depression on the ground. It may be concealed by thick weeds or the edge of a brush pile, or may be hidden under a fallen branch or log. It is not elaborate but is made comfortable with a soft lining of fur pulled from the mother's belly.

Swamp rabbits, along with cottontails and jack-rabbits, are fair game during Oklahoma's rabbit hunting season, currently set from Oct. 1 to March 15 annually. The bag limit on swampers is three daily, and six in possession after the first day. ♡

*Water is a favorite refuge from pursuing enemies. This rabbit may try to escape a pursuing dog by diving. Sometimes a harried swamper is discovered hiding under an overhanging bank, totally submerged except for eyes and nose. This bunny seems to have no aversion to getting wet, even in the coldest weather.*





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