

Outdoor Oklahoma

MAY / JUNE 2026 — ONLY \$10 A YEAR



A PUBLICATION OF THE OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION



PANORAMAS



Jena Donnell

Welcome to Outdoor Oklahoma's **Wildlife Diversity** issue. In these pages, you'll find many articles and features focusing on the state's great wildlife species that aren't normally pursued by hunters or anglers. For this issue, we chose a theme celebrating birds.

Who wouldn't agree that our feathered friends are captivating in so many ways? The variety within the bird world is astounding. Birds' sizes, shapes, colors, calls and behaviors are never-ending sources of wonder.

Oklahoma is recognized among the country's prime locations for **birdwatching**, or birding. About 500 bird species are known to reside or pass through the Sooner State. And there are quite a few marquee birding destinations that almost always produce excellent sightings.

Veteran birders may hit the road to **hotspots** including the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, Red Slough and Hackberry Flat Wildlife Management Areas, Sequoyah and Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuges, or Black Mesa State Park.

Fledgling birders wanting to start with the basics shouldn't overlook the prime bird-watching opportunities in their own **backyard**.

You'll need only peek out the window, sit on the porch, or amble about the backyard to observe several species that readily visit backyard spaces. Songbirds like cardinals, mockingbirds and blue jays are among the most typical native backyard birds, but woodpeckers, doves and sparrows also frequent urban and suburban yards.

Birding opportunities also await just outside the backyard. A sidewalk, road or grocery store parking lot can reveal new birds as well as old favorites. A city park, walking trail or park bench can become

part of your weekend routine and bring a new appreciation for your local bird community (and allow you to build your own birding community).

Venturing from the yard to the **neighborhood park** oftentimes allows birders to watch a more diverse set of birds, especially if the backyard is small or highly manicured. Neighborhood retention ponds can attract ducks, geese and herons, and wooded parks may bring in orioles, vireos and flycatchers.

The next level in birding may take you to some wild places. The Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department manages 32 **state parks**, many with hiking trails. A parking pass is required at 22 of the parks. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service operates nine national **wildlife refuges** in Oklahoma. The Nature Conservancy protects 12 **preserves** in Oklahoma; five are open to the public or have limited access.

Finally, the Wildlife Department manages about 100 areas for hunting, fishing and other wildlife-oriented activities. A current valid hunting or fishing license or a wildlife conservation passport is required for most people to enter **ODWC-owned** areas. For state residents, it might be more economical to buy a hunting or fishing license when annual access to ODWC areas is your goal, even if you don't plan to hunt or fish.

Some areas are closed to all nonhunting activities during certain hunting seasons, so birders need to check specific area regulations (found in the Oklahoma Fishing and Hunting Guide) for possible closures. 🦋

Jena Donnell

Jena Donnell, Communication and Education Specialist

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Don P. Brown, Managing Editor

CONTRIBUTING STAFF

Kelly Adams, Michael Bergin, Tell Judkins, Kinsey Matlock,
Lance Meek, Heather Del Moral, Jena Donnell, Kayleen
Sugianto, Betsy York.

PHONE

405-521-3856

WEBSITE

www.wildlifedepartment.com

E-MAIL

donald.brown@odwc.ok.gov

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

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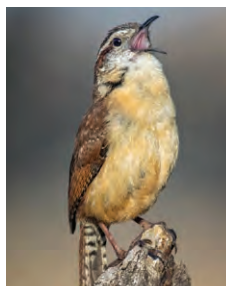
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

OFF THE BEATEN PATH.....	2
CELEBRATING WILDLIFE DIVERSITY.....	10
With a Focus on Birds	
Thinned Forest Habitat Helps Threatened Bird Expand Range in State	11
By Jena Donnell, Communication and Education Specialist	
Birding by Ear: Mnemonic Aids Help ID Species by Song	18
By Jena Donnell, Communication and Education Specialist	
CONSERVATION FOR KIDS	24
Pages Providing Learning and Fun for Youngsters	
Quiz: What Kind of Birder Are You?	26
By Jena Donnell, Communication and Education Specialist	
Tips for Identifying Oklahoma Look-alikes	28
By Jena Donnell, Communication and Education Specialist	
Public-land Hybrid Is Hunter's "One-in-a-Million Bird"	30
By Jena Donnell, Communication and Education Specialist	
Wildlife Plan Update to Guide Research Efforts, Funding	36
For Survey Team, "Getting Skunked" Smells Like Success.....	38
By Jena Donnell, Communication and Education Specialist	
Shells That Tell: Photos Show Turtles' Staying Power.....	40
By Kayleen Sugianto, Communication and Education Intern	
OUTDOOR STORE.....	46
Now available: Outdoor Oklahoma T-shirts!	
WATCHABLE WILDLIFE.....	48
Mountain Bluebird	
By Kayleen Sugianto, Communication and Education Intern	



ON THE COVER:

"Hey y'all, it's here!" This vociferous Carolina wren seems to be screaming the news that our annual wildlife diversity issue has arrived, with a focus on our feathered friends. Migrate over to Page 10 and you'll see what we mean. (Photo by David McGowen/Readers' Photography Showcase 2021)

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OKLAHOMA



OFF THE BEATEN PATH

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



ODWC CONFIRMS INVASIVE BLACK CARP IN STATE

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) confirmed the first report of an invasive black carp (*Mylopharyngodon piceus*) in Oklahoma. It was found in a private pond in McCurtain County.

Black carp are one of the four invasive carp species (bighead carp, silver carp, grass carp, black carp) native to Asia and found in the United States. They were imported into the United States in the 1970s and 1980s as biological control agents for snail pests in aquaculture ponds. By the 1990s, black carp had escaped captivity and were found in natural waters in the Mississippi River Basin,

where natural reproduction has been documented.

Black carp have the potential to seriously impact already imperiled native mussel species and may compete for food resources with other native fishes including small-mouth buffalo. Transporting live invasive carp is illegal in Oklahoma, so the fish must be dead before moving it. To learn more, scan the QR code. 



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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 or scan the code:



Becky Johnson, hybrid striped bass, Oct. 2, 2025, Oologah Lake.



NEW STATE RECORD!
Eric Dean Sanders, northern hog sucker, March 31, 2026, Illinois River, 2 pounds 4 ounces.



Darrell Ethridge, saugeye, Nov. 5, 2025, Lake Ellsworth.



James Bonds, blue catfish, Oct. 29, 2025, Arkansas River.



Kyle Ray, largemouth bass, April 3, 2026, Cleveland Lake.



Rowe Waelder, smallmouth bass, March 23, 2026, Lake Tenkiller.



BEAR COUNTRY SAFETY TIPS

Encountering a black bear in Oklahoma is a real possibility, a fact that still surprises many residents and visitors who never realized the animals are commonly seen in some parts of the state. Sightings are possible anywhere in the eastern half of the state and the western tip of the Panhandle.

To Avoid Conflict With Bears While...



Hiking or Walking

- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Hike in groups and stay together.
- Keep kids within sight.
- Keep dogs on a leash or leave them home.
- Make noise in thick cover.
- Carry bear spray.



With your Dog

- Keep dogs leashed.
- Do not let dogs chase or interact with bears.
- If you encounter a bear while with your dog, back away and leave the area.



Camping

- Keep a clean camp.
- Don't burn food scraps or trash in your fire ring or grill.
- Don't store food, trash, clothes worn when cooking, or toiletries in your tent. Store in approved bear-resistant containers, out of sight in a locked vehicle, or suspended at least 10 feet above the ground and 10 feet from any part of the tree.
- Cook downwind and as far from your tent as possible.



HOW TO SCARE THE BEAR



BearWise.org

The black bear's natural diet includes nuts, berries, grasses, insects, eggs, honey, small mammals, and carrion. But bears are opportunists and can be attracted by easy food sources provided by people, such as unsecured garbage or pet food left outdoors. May is typically when human-bear conflicts begin. August typically has the most conflicts as soft mast sources diminish and grasses and other vegetation dry out or become unpalatable.

Hazing Rules

- ✓ Never approach, corner or chase the bear.
- ✓ Stand in a safe place (50 yards or more away).
- ✓ Be sure the bear has an escape route, away from you.
- ✓ Stop hazing when the bear runs away or climbs a tree.
- ✓ If the bear approaches, do not run. Use **bear spray**.
- ✓ Be careful. Any hazing is done at your own risk.

Safe Ways to Scare a Bear



Make Noise

Blow a whistle, air horn or car horn. Clap your hands, bang pots, or shout. Your voice is a powerful deterrent!



Assert Dominance

Make eye contact with the bear. Wave your arms above your head to look bigger.



Carry Bear Spray

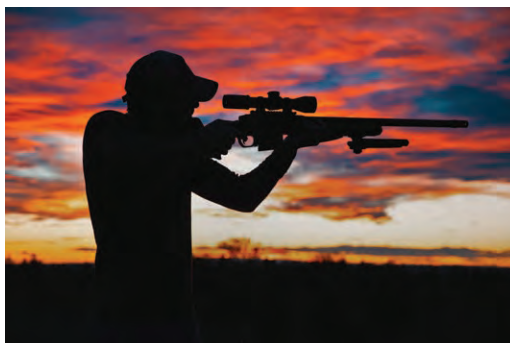
Keep bear spray accessible. It's the most effective method to deter a threatening bear. It doesn't work like bug repellent, so never spray your tent, campsite or belongings.

GAME WARDEN'S JOURNAL

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



Over the course of several months, Game Warden **Dartanion Tilley**, based in Nowata County, led an extensive investigation into a poaching spree. Two male teen-agers indiscriminately shot animals from roadways across the county, illegally killing 18 head of cattle, seven deer, five turkeys, 42 migratory birds, two hawks, an owl, and multiple domestic chickens taken from a local family's front yard. The investigation ultimately resulted in 221 criminal charges, including unlawful take of wildlife, reckless discharge of a firearm, shooting from a roadway, and hunting with the aid of a motorized vehicle. One boy, 16, pleaded guilty in state court. The persistent efforts of all District 1 game wardens were crucial in bringing this complex case to a successful conclusion.



Game Warden **Matthew Penwright**, based in Pittsburg County, received information from a hunter who had been run off U.S. Army Corps of Engineers property on Lake Eufaula by a family that had been using the area as their own personal hunting spot for at least 20 years. They were bold enough to have been baiting and hunting from permanent hunting blinds and accessing the area on UTVs for many years. The suspects were accessing the area from private property as any other access was very difficult. Charges were filed in the case.

Game Warden Lt. **Tyler Howser**, based in Caddo County, investigated a case involving a 7x7 bull elk harvested in Caddo County. A hunting guide took a client to hunt elk. The hunter didn't have

any licenses for hunting elk. The investigation revealed that the unlicensed hunter killed the elk at 8:30 a.m., bought licenses at 12:50 p.m. The hunter then proceeded to E-check the elk at 2 p.m. and recorded a harvest time of 1:45 p.m.



Game Warden **Jaylen Flynn**, based in Blaine County, investigated and cited three people in a case of hunting waterfowl over bait. One person was also cited for license issues. Flynn used the opportunity to interview one of the people about possible deer violations. The man told Flynn he bought deer licenses using his adult son's Go Outdoors Oklahoma online account and E-checking deer on his son's account. Flynn later seized two deer and issued citations for illegal possession of those deer.

On a tip from the Haskell County Sheriff's Office and with the help of a Haskell County sheriff's deputy and his drone, Game Wardens **Allen Couch**, based in Haskell County, and **Jerry Henry**, based in Sequoyah County, made a case for hunting waterfowl over bait. The drone allowed the documentation of bait at two ponds. Game wardens returned later and cited eight people for illegal hunting over bait and other violations.

(Reports from Oklahoma Wildlife Conservation Commission files.)

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:

Attempting to take an alligator gar is prohibited from May 1-31. At other times, alligator gar may be caught by use of rod and reel, trotline and throwline. The harvest of alligator gar must be reported within 24 hours via E-check at wildlifedepartment.com or <https://gooutdoorsoklahoma.com>. Alligator gar taken by bow and arrow, gigs, spears or spearguns cannot be released and must be harvested and reported. 🐢

2025 CREATIVE WRITING COMPETITION

HUNTING ISN'T JUST SOMETHING WE DO ..."

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and Oklahoma Station Chapter Safari Club International sponsor a creative writing contest for middle and high school students. Boy and girl winners are chosen from two age divisions. Students' essay theme can be "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 junior female winner Avery Hammons, 14, from Woodall Public School.



By Avery Hammons

Hunting has always been more than just a sport to me. It's a tradition that connects my family, teaches responsibility, and helps me appreciate nature.

Ever since I was little, I've watched my dad and Grumpy (grandpa) get up before sunrise, put on their camo and head out into the woods. I used to think they were just going to hunt deer, but now I realize they were sharing something much more meaningful: a way of life that has been passed down for generations.

When I turned 12, my dad took me hunting for the first time. I remember the cold morning air and how quiet the woods were. We sat together in the blind, barely whispering, just listening to the sounds of nature waking up. It wasn't just about getting a deer; it was about patience, respect and learning how to be part of something bigger than myself.

That day, I understood why hunting is called "sharing the heritage." It's about spending time together, learning skills and appreciating where our food comes from.

Hunting has taught me a lot of life lessons. I've learned patience from sitting for hours waiting for the right moment. I've learned responsibility from handling firearms safely and understanding the importance of following hunting laws and seasons. I've also learned respect for the

animals, the land, and the people who came before me who hunted to provide for their families.

When I harvest an animal, I don't take it lightly. We use the meat, and nothing goes to waste. That's what my Grumpy calls "honoring the hunt."

Some people think hunting is just about killing animals, but that's not true. It's about conservation, too. Hunters help keep wildlife populations balanced and support habitat protection through hunting licenses and fees. I feel proud knowing that by being part of this tradition, I'm helping take care of nature for future generations.

One of my favorite parts of hunting is the time spent with family. Whether we're sitting around the campfire, telling stories or hiking through the woods, it's time away from phones and distractions. It's where I feel closest to my dad and Grumpy.

Someday, I hope to pass this tradition on to my own kids so they can feel the same connection to the outdoors and our family heritage.

To me, hunting isn't just something we do; it's who we are. It's a way to learn, to grow and to stay connected to both family and nature.

Sharing the heritage of hunting means keeping those values alive and passing them on, one sunrise at a time. ♡



OUTDOOR CALENDAR

FOR THE LATEST UPDATES, GO ONLINE TO LICENSE.
GOOUTDOORSOKLAHOMA.COM/Event/Events.aspx

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

MAY 2026

- 2** OKC Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.
- 3** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Game Warden Stories, 8 a.m., OETA.
Quail Forever Red Dirt WOTC Learn to Shoot Clinic for Women, 1 p.m.,
Arcadia. Register: events.pheasantsforever.org/events.
- 4** Okla. Wildlife Conservation Commission meets, 9 a.m., Oklahoma City.
Livestream: [YouTube.com/@Okwildfedep](https://www.youtube.com/@Okwildfedep)
- 10** Mother's Day.
"Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Sight-in a Rifle, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 14** Bobbers and Bouquets, 6 p.m., Arcadia Conservation Education Area.
Register: license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/ViewEvent.aspx.
- 17** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Crappie Fishing Floodwaters, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 24** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Landowner and Professor, 8 a.m., OETA.
- 25** Memorial Day; state offices closed.
- 28** Tackle the Basics free fishing clinics, 6 p.m., Jenks-Zebco Pond and Arcadia Cons. Educ. Area. Register:
license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/ViewEvent.aspx.
- 31** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Falconry, 8 a.m., OETA.

- **Ducks Unlimited** events (date) in Miami (2), Norman (7), Kellyville (9), Bixby (15). Info: ducks.org/events.
- **National Wild Turkey Federation** events (date) in Seminole (30). Info: your.nwtf.org/members/events.

JUNE 2026

- 1** Okla. Wildlife Conservation Commission meets, 9 a.m., Oklahoma City.
Livestream: [YouTube.com/@Okwildfedep](https://www.youtube.com/@Okwildfedep)
 - 6** OKC Free Fishing Day, no city permit required.
 - 7** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Microfishing; Reel Talk, 8 a.m., OETA.
 - 13** Quail Forever Red Dirt Women Tye-dye & Foraging for Women, 10 a.m.,
Edmond. Register: events.pheasantsforever.org/events.
 - 14** Flag Day.
"Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, The Hefers; Darters; Soft Plastics, 8 a.m., OETA.
 - 18** Bobbers and Burgers, 6 p.m., Arcadia Conservation Education Area.
Register: license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/ViewEvent.aspx.
 - 21** Father's Day.
"Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Father's Day Special, 8 a.m., OETA.
 - 28** "Outdoor Oklahoma" TV, Producing Hybrid Stripers; Nighttime
Seining 8 a.m., OETA.
- **Ducks Unlimited** events (date) in Weatherford (12). Info: ducks.org/events.
 - **National Wild Turkey Federation** event (date) in Miami (5), Claremore (6),
Alva (6), McAlester (12), Ada (13), Chandler (13), Hooker (20), Idabel (20). Info:
your.nwtf.org/members/events.
 - **Delta Waterfowl** event (date) in Grove (19). Info: deltawaterfowl.org/events/.
 - **Tackle the Basics** free fishing clinics, 6 p.m. June 4, 11, 18, 25; Jenks-Zebco Pond and Arcadia Conservation Education Area. Register: license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/Event/ViewEvent.aspx.

** FOR HUNTING SEASON DATES, GO TO
www.wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/seasons **

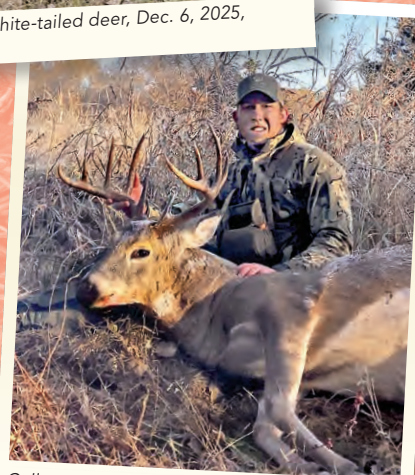
WELCOME TO THE TAILGATE!



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 or scan the code:



Lauren Shaefer, white-tailed deer, Dec. 6, 2025, Nowata County.



Collin H., white-tailed deer, Nov. 9, 2025, OLAP.



Justin Scott, northern bobwhite, Dec. 23, 2025, Garfield County.

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.

Dear Editor,

We want to lift up **Jacob Harriet**, game warden based in Lincoln County, and **Kyle Johnson**, private lands biologist, for their invaluable support and experience. They have helped us develop our church property into an outdoor classroom for our church members and our youths in particular.

Harriet has spent time with our kids helping them identify wildlife tracks and helping our core work group with wildlife management recommendations. Johnson has worked with our kids in identifying types of grasses and other vegetation, specifically poison ivy. Most our city kids had idea what poison ivy was much less why to avoid it. Our hats off to these two fellows who have become true partners in developing our Camp Calvary.

Les Stewart, elder, First Christian Church of Chandler



Jacob Harriet



Kyle Johnson

Dear Wildlife Department,

Thank you to **Weston Storer**, northwest region wildlife supervisor, and **Jason Badley**, game warden based in Harper County, for taking the time to participate in Buffalo Schools Career Fair and Touch-a-Truck event. Your willingness to share your careers, equipment and experiences with Buffalo students made the day exciting and meaningful.

Because of you, students were able to explore a variety of career paths, ask questions, and learn firsthand about the many opportunities that exist in our community. The conversations you had and the time you invested made a difference.

Tracy Pipins, school counselor, Buffalo Public Schools



Weston Storer



Jason Badley

Dear Wildlife Department,

Thank you for building some shooting ranges. We need them so folks can practice firearms safety and sharpen their shooting skills. I am a deputy sheriff in Arizona, and range time is important to keep our skills sharp. I was also a tactical handgun instructor. I am also disabled and am excited that you have some ADA areas there. I have my combo lifetime hunting and fishing license. The cost of gun range memberships are crazy, and they want to stack extra charges for long gun ranges. I appreciate you guys and all that you do, I am looking forward to bringing my guns out there and throwing some lead downrange.

Dave Taylor, via [Facebook.com/OkWildlifeDept](https://www.facebook.com/OkWildlifeDept)

APPLY BY MAY 20 FOR CONTROLLED HUNTS DRAWINGS

Oklahoma's Controlled Hunts Program will accept applications through May 20. Hunters wanting to enter the drawings for a possible "hunt of a lifetime" can enter online through their Go Outdoors Oklahoma account.

The Controlled Hunts program offers annual drawings for dozens of high-quality ODWC-sanctioned hunts for deer, elk, antelope and turkey. Hunters can apply individually or in groups, and there are categories for youths and people with disabilities.

Hopeful hunters can buy one extra Preference Point to add to their totals for each hunt category. And while there is a standard number hunt choices that an applicant can make in each category, extra choices can be purchased as add-ons for \$3 each (and there's no limit to the number of hunt choices that can be added).

To view the 2026-27 hunt dates and information, scan the QR Code. 



Annika Horton took her first deer during a controlled hunt Dec. 8, 2023, on the USDA Grazinglands Research Lab at Fort Reno.

CELEBRATING WILDLIFE DIVERSITY

WITH A FOCUS ON BIRDS

The diversity found in Oklahoma's natural world takes the spotlight here. Hundreds of species of plants, fish, birds and animals, along with a rich array of wild habitats, rightly deserve the attention and admiration of all Oklahomans. In this issue, read about some Wildlife Department conservation topics that can easily go unnoticed, with a theme built around birds in Oklahoma.

THE WILDLIFE DIVERSITY PROGRAM

Established in 1981, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's Wildlife Diversity Program focuses on rare, declining and threatened species of wildlife as well as common species that are not hunted or fished. More than 800 species have been documented in Oklahoma, of which nearly 90% are considered nongame species.

To help conserve our wildlife and maintain Oklahoma's rich biological heritage for present and future generations, the Wildlife Diversity Program has developed the State Wildlife Action Plan. This guiding document helps prioritize conservation issues and actions, and determine research and surveys on species considered to be of greatest conservation need. Read more about the latest revision of SWAP on Page 36.

ARKANS OHANIAN/NATURALIST CC-BY-NC.3



THINNED FOREST HABITAT HELPS THREATENED BIRD EXPAND RANGE IN STATE

A distinctive squeak in the tree canopy has led one U.S. Forest Service biologist on a journey of discovery and marked the return of the federally threatened red-cockaded woodpecker to Oklahoma's Le Flore County.

Jocelyn Howell has spent her U.S. Forest Service career managing habitat to benefit the red-cockaded woodpecker and monitoring the bird's populations across multiple states and administrative districts. As part of her day-to-day work, she has regularly heard the federally threatened bird's high-pitched call, a sound that reminds her of a squeaking dog toy. When she heard that familiar squeak last spring in Le Flore County — miles from the nearest known population — she had no doubt it meant something special.

"When you hear that squeak nearly every day for 15-plus years, it's in your head," Howell said, referring to her years spent working within the woodpecker's range. "It was unexpected [hearing that sound in Le Flore County], but I knew a red-cockaded woodpecker was in the area.

**BY JENA DONNELL,
COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION
SPECIALIST**

U.S. Forest Service biologist Jocelyn Howell, right, first detected red-cockaded woodpeckers in Le Flore County in May 2024. She has monitored a pair of birds as they've settled into a recently thinned timber stand on the Ouachita National Forest and Ouachita Wildlife Management Area-Le Flore Unit, an area owned by the Forest Service and cooperatively managed with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.



"I heard two birds calling to each other and eventually saw one of the birds, the first to be documented in the county in recent history. As soon as I heard that sound, I was so happy. It was the greatest feeling. Le Flore County had its first bird."

Howell was first introduced to the woodpecker's distinctive sound in 2007 while volunteering at the Sam Houston National Forest, north

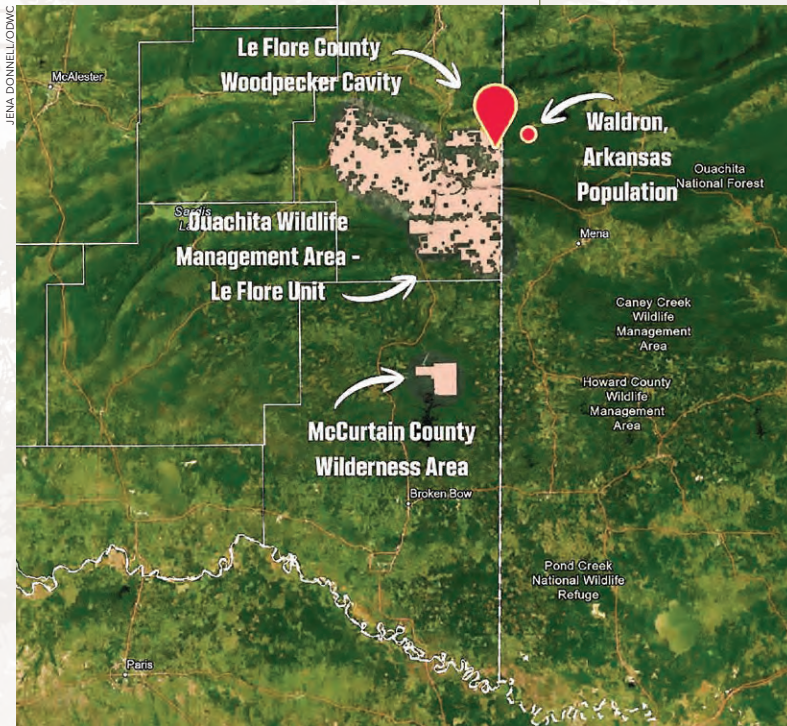
of Houston, and followed the squeak to her first official U.S. Forest Service posting there in 2008. She later trailed the call and the associated conservation work to the Davy Crockett National Forest in East Texas, back to the Sam Houston National Forest, and eventually to the Ouachita National Forest, first in Arkansas's Jessieville Winona Fourche Ranger District in 2020 and then to the Oklahoma Ranger District in 2022.

Regardless of her location, the red-cockaded woodpecker has been at the heart of her work.

"Red-cockaded woodpeckers operate in such a tight family unit and have such an interesting family dynamic," Howell said. "They mate for life ... remating if their original mate is lost. And older males from previous clutches will stay with the nesting pair as 'helper birds.' A lot of birds just don't put that

much energy into the next generation."

In a happy twist, Howell's red-cockaded woodpecker-filled career has come full-circle in Oklahoma. Birds she handled at the Sam Houston National Forest as part of a translocation effort were moved to the McCurtain County Wilderness Area and Ouachita National Forest-



DONATE TO DIVERSITY

Donations to the Wildlife Diversity Program support conservation efforts for nongame fish and wildlife. Here's how to help:

- **Make a Direct Donation:** Tax-deductible donations are accepted year-round at our Go Outdoors Oklahoma Outdoor Store. All donations to the Wildlife Diversity Program support conservation efforts of our state's nongame fish and wildlife. Go to license.gooutdoorsoklahoma.com/shop/inventory?groupId=5
- **Tag Your Ride:** Show your love of Oklahoma's wildlife with a specialty license plate that helps fund conservation efforts! Nine designs support the Wildlife Diversity Program, including the white-tailed deer, scissor-tailed flycatcher, and Texas horned lizard options. Plates may be ordered from the Oklahoma Tax Commission by mail, in person at a service location, or online through Service Oklahoma. Go to wildlifedepartment.com/wildlife/wildlife-tag
- **Subscribe to the Wild Side:** Stay connected to the Wildlife Diversity Program with the free e-newsletter, The Wild Side. You'll get monthly updates on conservation projects, tips for identifying Oklahoma's fish and wildlife, and suggestions on how to get involved.

Go to public.govdelivery.com/accounts/OKDWC/subscriber/new?topic_id=ODWC_2

Oklahoma Ranger District in 2017. At least one of those translocated birds has been confirmed to remain and nest in Oklahoma.

This success story comes on the heels of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's October 2024 Endangered Species Act downlisting of the woodpecker from federally endangered to federally threatened. The bird was first protected by the act in 1970 as suitable habitat became more and more limited.

For decades, Oklahoma's last remaining population of red-cockaded woodpeckers was thought to occur about 35 miles south of the newly discovered territory, at the Wildlife Department's McCurtain County Wilderness Area and the neighboring tracts of U.S. Forest Service land. The two agencies have long shared resources to monitor Oklahoma's small red-cockaded woodpecker population and maintain the open shortleaf pine habitat they require.

It was this kind of habitat work that led to Howell's 2024 Le Flore County discovery.

RETURN OF THE WOODPECKER

In May 2024, Howell was scouting a 740-acre tract on the Ouachita Wildlife Management Area-Le Flore Unit that had been logged over a 10-year period, burned twice in wildfires, and was scheduled for wildlife stand improvement.

When national forest timber is harvested for stand improvement and sold, a majority of the collected money is used by the U.S. Department

TO HEAR THE
SOUNDS MADE BY
A RED-COCKADED
WOODPECKER, SCAN
THE QR CODE.



JENA DONNELLODWC

One year after the Le Flore Unit's thinning project began, wildflowers bloom in the understory, attracting insects that serve as food for red-cockaded woodpeckers and other forest birds.



of Agriculture to fund its varied programs, including the National School Lunch Program. But a small portion may be held in a trust to fund habitat improvement efforts in the area from which the receipts were collected.

On the Ouachita National Forest, this habitat work (wildlife stand improvement) generally involves thinning the trees that have aggressively regrown after a logging event and measure less than a prescribed diameter. Regrowth is a continuing challenge in south-eastern Oklahoma, where rainfall totals average about 50 inches each year and woody vegetation thrives.

While surveying conditions for the upcoming habitat project, Howell immediately recognized the unexpected but tell-tale squeak of two red-cockaded woodpeckers. But she was less confident about the birds' origins. The nearest Oklahoma population was dozens of



The red-cockaded woodpecker nesting cavity tree in Le Flore County is indicated by the arrow.

miles beyond the maximum 5 to 6 miles the woodpeckers are known to disperse from their parents' tree cavities. But she knew an established population was within 10 miles, across the state line in the Ouachita National Forest's Poteau/Cold Springs Ranger District near Waldron, Ark., with another population about 10 miles in a different direction, near Mena, Ark.

To get the scheduled habitat work in motion, Howell prescribed a deep thinning, confident the area had potential for red-cockaded woodpeckers. All the while, she kept an ear tuned for any birds foraging in the area.

"I absolutely fell in love with the area. I knew there was a good chance something could come of the work."

By July 2024, contractors were starting to remove hardwoods measuring 1-10 inches in diameter at chest height along with pines measuring less than 8 inches. All the vegetation between the remaining trees was mulched into small chips with a masticator, disturbing the soil and allowing sunlight to hit the ground. Instead of leaving the brush and slash on the ground where the cut trees would continue casting shade, mulching encourages wildflowers to sprout, which can boost the insect

TO WATCH A SHORT
VIDEO ABOUT THE
DISCOVERY OF
RED-COCKADED
WOODPECKERS
NESTING IN LE FLORE
COUNTY, SCAN THE QR CODE



community and prey base for the protected woodpeckers.

As the thinning contract was getting under way, Howell made daily visits to the worksite while also digging into the woodpeckers' mysterious roots. Early on, she asked U.S. Forest Service colleague Warren Montague about the nearest Arkansas cavity as the woodpecker flies. Initially, the closest occupied tree cavity was thought to be 7.5 miles from the worksite. But Howell's question spurred a renewed search in Arkansas that revealed an even closer cavity, located just at the edge of the 5 to 6 miles birds willingly fly to disperse. While the woodpeckers' social nature and limited dispersal distance point to a strong connection to the Arkansas population, none of the birds observed in Le Flore County have identifying leg bands, and their origins remain a mystery.

WOODPECKER SURPRISE AFTER SURPRISE, AFTER SURPRISE

It was during Howell's daily visits to the worksite that she got a second woodpecker surprise. A male red-cockaded woodpecker had drilled a cavity in a pine tree within the treatment area, a process that can take birds more than a year to complete.

"Hearing birds foraging in a new area is one thing, but finding an established cavity is on another level," Howell said. "Just knowing the birds were foraging and likely expanding their habitat from the Arkansas population was a success. But the new cavity confirmed our habitat work was benefiting the birds.

"This type of work rarely comes with instant gratification. It's a long process. But I really enjoy turning the forest into something that benefits wildlife. It feels great to know that my management decisions can make an impact."

Howell continued to monitor the area as the seasons changed. But for months after the initial discovery, her only observations in Le Flore County were of the single male red-cockaded woodpecker.

Fast forward to March 2025, and Howell received a third woodpecker surprise. The lone male she had



Howell used a camera on a telescoping pole to check in on the Le Flore County cavity on June 2, 2025. A newly hatched chick was inside, along with a small egg.

been monitoring for months had paired with a female. Their persistent behavior at the Le Flore Unit's cavity tree indicated the pair was making the most of their new territory.

In early June 2025, during the heart of the woodpecker's range-wide nesting season, Howell used a camera attached to a telescoping pole to peek into the tree cavity and confirmed a newly hatched chick and a small egg were inside. Two weeks later, at the next cavity check, a near-fully feathered chick could be seen with the camera, and the foraging adults were making food deliveries to the cavity about every 10 minutes. The unhatched egg from the first nest check was likely infertile and had either been removed from the nest or remained hidden under the quickly growing chick.

Because the Le Flore County family group is new to the area and in such a vulnerable life stage, Howell only looked in on the cavity twice. Red-cockaded woodpecker chicks fledged 26-29 days after hatching, and the Le Flore County chick is thought to have left the nest just days after Howell's second time checking.

To help the new family group get a more solid footing, Howell returned to the area with Wildlife Department biologists to fit man-made nest boxes into nearby trees, giving the female and the chick a safer place to spend the night and avoid potential predators.

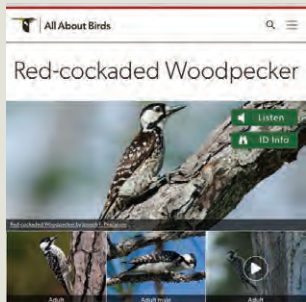
She's looking forward to continuing the management partnerships between the different agencies and states.

"The habitat work we're doing on Oklahoma's Le Flore Unit is giving the Arkansas birds a better expansion corridor into Oklahoma. And partnering to manage and monitor this new territory across state and agency boundaries, including any potential future translocations, will only strengthen our efforts," Howell said. "We're all in this together."



BETSEY YORK/OWDC

Howell returned to the cavity on June 16, 2025, and saw one near-fully feathered chick inside.



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE
FEDERALLY THREATENED RED-
COCKADED WOODPECKER, SCAN
THE QR CODE



BIRDING BY EAR: MNEMONIC AIDS HELP ID SPECIES BY SONG

BY JENA DONNELL, COMMUNICATION
AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST



One song playing on repeat throughout the state's grasslands is the eastern meadowlark's clear, high-pitched whistles that, to some, may sound like the bird is singing "sweet spring is here."

MICHAEL BRYAN/RPS 2015

Sweet spring is here, bringing with it an epic playlist of more than 200 bird species that breed in Oklahoma. Learning to recognize these avian vocalists by their signature sounds, tempos and lyrics — known as birding by ear — is a great way to level up your nature experience and appreciate birds and the challenges of birding in a new way.

"You won't always see a bird or get a great look at its identifying field marks, but you might just hear it," said Kelly Boyer, a communication and education specialist with the Wildlife Department. "Each bird species has a unique voice. Learning their songs, calls, chirps and trills can be a fun, new way to identify birds. It can also impress and annoy your friends!"

To train your ear, Boyer recommends starting with the birds you regularly encounter. Backyard birds like the blue jay, northern mockingbird, American crow, red-bellied woodpecker, and northern cardinal are often common enough and vocal enough for birdwatchers to start connecting those species to their respective sounds.

"You may already know what a northern cardinal looks like. But if you've never paid attention to the sounds it makes, you may be in for a fun surprise," Boyer said. "When I hear a cardinal singing, I envision a laser gun in a video game: 'pew, pew, pew'."

 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Cardinal/sounds

Once you've listened to your backyard bird visitors and are familiar with their sounds, slowly branch out to other birds you hear singing or try learning the songs of your favorite species. Apps like eBird and Merlin can serve as great references (more on the magic of Merlin later) as can printed field guides and online resources like the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All About Birds website. Other birders in your area or those on social

"You won't always see a bird or get a great look at its identifying field marks, but you might just hear it"

SCAN THE CODE TO
ACCESS MANY OF THE
RESOURCES CITED IN
THIS ARTICLE:



STEPHEN OSTHUN

Many may think all owls give a “hoot,” but the barred owl has quite the vocal repertoire.

Potato chip!



media may hear slightly different lyrics or have more memorable tricks, so connecting with the larger birding community can also help train your ear and grow your bird list.

POPULAR MNEMONIC AIDS

Learning bird sounds can be tough. These mnemonic devices have helped many birders isolate songs from the many that may be playing and learn to recognize birds by ear.

Barred owl: Many may think all owls give a “hoot,” but the barred owl has quite the vocal repertoire. If you’re in a wooded area at night (or even on a cloudy day) listen for their lyrical *“who cooks for you, who cooks for you all”* call. Mated pairs will also perform raucous duets in late winter and early spring.

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Barred_Owl/sounds

Tufted titmouse: This little bird may be muted in color but it’s not afraid to turn up the volume — in voice or body language. In addition to their quickly repeated song of *“Peter, Peter, Peter,”* titmice will also give scolding calls when disturbed.

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Tufted_Titmouse/sounds

Summer tanager: Despite their bright colors — males are strawberry red; females are mustard yellow — a quiet summer tanager can be a challenge to spot when perched among the leaves. Luckily, males readily sing from an exposed branch, and both sexes give *“pity-tut-tut”* calls.

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Summer_Tanager/sounds

American goldfinch: These feeder favorites can be easily recognized by their bright yellow breeding plumage as well as their *“potato chip”* flight call. Goldfinches have other vocalizations, but the flight call is most frequently used and helps keep the flock intact.

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/American_Goldfinch/sounds

Who cooks for you, who cooks for you all



**Fire fire,
where where,
here here**

INDIGO BUNTING

Carolina wren: With a bullhorn for a bill, the Carolina wren has no problem shouting “TEAKETTLE, TEAKETTLE, TEAKETTLE” into the forest. (Depending on your hunger-meter, it may sound like this feisty bird is saying “cheeseburger, cheeseburger, cheeseburger.”) Pairs stay together year-round, and females may give a rattle call when dueting with males.

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Carolina_Wren/sounds

Common yellowthroat: A trip to a wetland may be needed to listen for this masked warbler’s tell-tale “witchity, witchity” song. Males sing to attract females and defend territories, sometimes performing 125 songs per hour.

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Common_Yellowthroat/sounds

White-throated sparrow: These handsome sparrows may not nest in Oklahoma but can still be heard singing “Oh-sweet-canada-canada” in winter months and throughout their migration.

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/White_throated_sparrow/sounds

Northern yellow warbler: If you’re a tiny ball of bright yellow fluff, sometimes you just have to say “sweet, sweet, sweet, I’m so sweet.” These Neotropical migrants are most associated with streams and wetlands.

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Yellow_Warbler/sounds

**Sweet,
sweet, sweet,
I’m so sweet**

YELLOW WARBLER

Jeer! Jeer!



BLUE JAY

Great crested flycatcher: This flycatcher is more easily heard than seen as it nests in cavities and often hunts for insects high in the canopy. Listen for the distinctive “WHEEP” call in open woodlands across much of the body of the state.

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Great_Crested_Flycatcher/sounds

Indigo bunting: If this bird’s electric blue feathers don’t catch your eye, its repeating song of paired notes might catch your ear. Listen for “fire fire, where where, here here” spring through fall.

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Indigo_Bunting/sounds

THE MAGIC OF MERLIN

In 2020, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology began training cell phones to identify bird calls ... or more truthfully, it began training an algorithm to recognize images of audio recordings (spectrograms) of individual bird songs and calls. After dozens of clean recordings had been annotated for each species, the algorithm was added to the lab’s existing Merlin Bird ID app, which has become something of a birding mentor for millions. With only a few taps, the app can suggest bird identifications based on a general description, photo, or audio recording.

As tempting as it may be, don’t phone in your birding experience by turning this magical mentor into a birding genie that lives with your pocket lint and identifies birds on your command. If you aren’t hearing-impaired, watch the spectrogram as the app is actively recording and suggesting an identification, pinpoint the direction from which your target bird is calling, and try to physically find and watch the bird. Or

Chickadee-dee-dee-dee



CAROLINA CHICKADEE

replay your sound recordings and try to mimic the call or create your own mnemonic device — or even hand gestures — that can help you remember the cadence of the bird's song. If your hearing is limited, Merlin's Sound ID can still help you watch birds that may be in your general vicinity. Knowing which birds are calling loud enough to be detected by your phone can help narrow your search image or let you focus on your target bird's preferred microhabitats.

BIRDS THAT SAY THEIR NAME

Carolina chickadee: Only one chickadee, the Carolina chickadee, is found in Oklahoma. And while the small, acrobatic, black, gray, and white bird has a four-note song, its call is a rapid "*chickadee-dee-dee-dee*."

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Carolina_Chickadee/sounds

Eastern phoebe: Soon after arriving in Oklahoma in early spring, male eastern phoebes begin singing their two-part song, "*fee-bee*."

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Phoebe/sounds

Birder Beware: In the eastern half of the state, the phoebe's song may overlap with that of a related flycatcher, the eastern wood-pewee.

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Wood-pewee/sounds

After singing "*pee-a-wee*," the wood-pewee often adds a comical, down-turned "*pee-a-you*" to the end of the song.

Northern bobwhite: Many Oklahomans delight in hearing what could have been named the state bird, the northern bobwhite. The ringing "*BOB-WHITE*" is typically sung by males in search of a mate, but females have also been documented whistling the tune.

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Bobwhite/sounds

Eastern whip-poor-will: Most people are familiar (or think they're familiar) with the whip-poor-will's chanting song, "*WHIP-poor-WILL*." These heavily camouflaged birds may sing for hours throughout spring and summer nights.

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Whip-poor-will/sounds

Birder Beware: The song of the chuck-will's-widow closely resembles that of the whip-poor-will. To distinguish the birds, listen carefully to which syllables are emphasized. The first syllable of the more common and widespread chuck-will's-widow is typically quieter and may not be heard from a distance, "*chuck-WILL'S-WIDOW*".

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Chuck-wills-widow/sounds

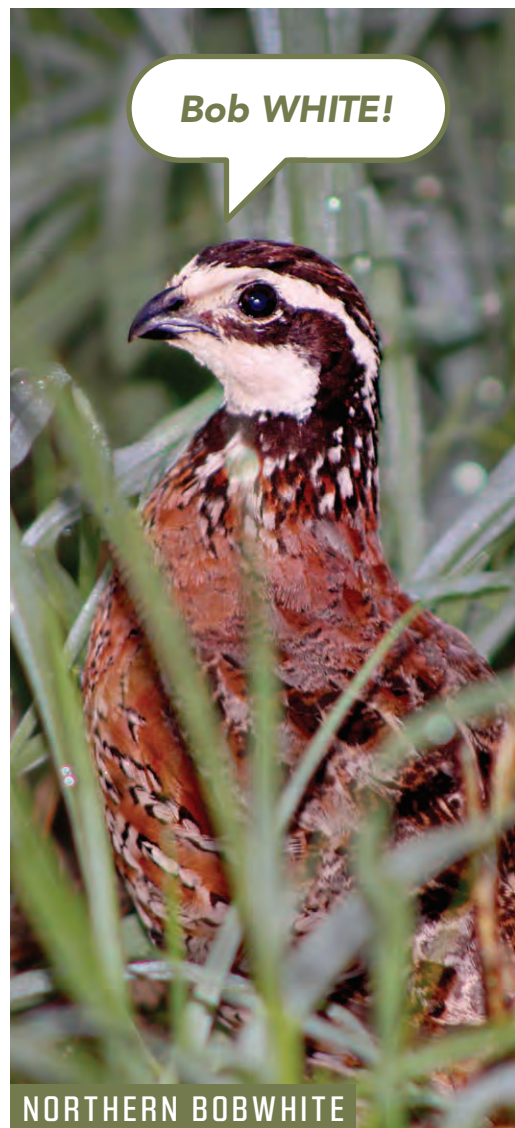
Blue jay: As if its bright colors and bold behavior weren't identification clues enough, the blue jay has a tendency to repeatedly call its name: "*Jay, jay, jay*." Surprisingly, the boisterous bird has a much softer "whisper song" of muddled clicks, whirs and whines.

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Blue_Jay/sounds

Birder Beware: In addition to the screaming calls and whispered songs, blue jays are also talented mimics that specialize in imitating red-shouldered hawk calls.

🔊 allaboutbirds.org/guide/Red-shouldered_Hawk/sounds 🛡️

In 2020, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology began training cell phones to identify bird calls ... or more truthfully, it began training an algorithm to recognize images of audio recordings (spectrograms) of individual bird songs and calls.



Conservation

for Kids!

Fun Outdoors!

Get a sense of the state's diverse terrain and outdoor wonders when you hit the trails! Oklahoma state parks offer thousands of miles of hiking trails through diverse habitats including woodlands, wildflower meadows, along rippling creeks, cypress swamps and rocky ridges. Find out more at travelok.com/hiking.

Hunting Tip

Make an effort to improve your deer hunting next season by planting a food plot where you will hunt. Ask a hunting mentor about planting protein-rich spring/summer plots (like soybeans, cowpeas or clover) to support deer herd health. Protein sources can help in fawn rearing and antler growth.

Fishing Tip

Be sure to mark your calendar for June 6-7, 2026. Those are Free Fishing Days across Oklahoma! Anyone may fish in the state on these days without a state license, but a free paddlefish permit is still required if you are trying to snag for those. Also, some municipal waters might require anglers to get city fishing permits. Be sure to take someone new and show them how enjoyable fishing can be!

Word Search: Oklahoma's Wildlife Diversity

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

Find and circle the hidden words that are examples of our state's diverse wildlife community.

ALLIGATOR
HORNED LIZARD
PADDLEFISH
RIVER OTTER

BADGER
MINK
PIRATE PERCH
SPOTTED SKUNK

BIGHORN SHEEP
NUTRIA
RINGTAIL
WHISTLING DUCK

COOL FACTS About Scissor-tailed Flycatchers:

- The tail feathers can be up to 9 inches long.
- They spend winter in Central and South America.
- They are neotropical migrants, nesting in North America.
- Oklahoma's official state bird arrives here in March or April and stays into October.
- In spring and early summer, males perform an elaborate courtship display called a "sky dance."
- Diet includes bees, wasps, grasshoppers, crickets and sometimes berries.
- The female builds a nest from 7 to 30 feet above ground in an isolated tree, utility pole or windmill tower.
- The female lays four to six eggs, one per day, then sits on them 12-14 days.
- Young of the year normally have shorter tail feathers than adults.
- Starting in September, they begin migrating south, flying at night.



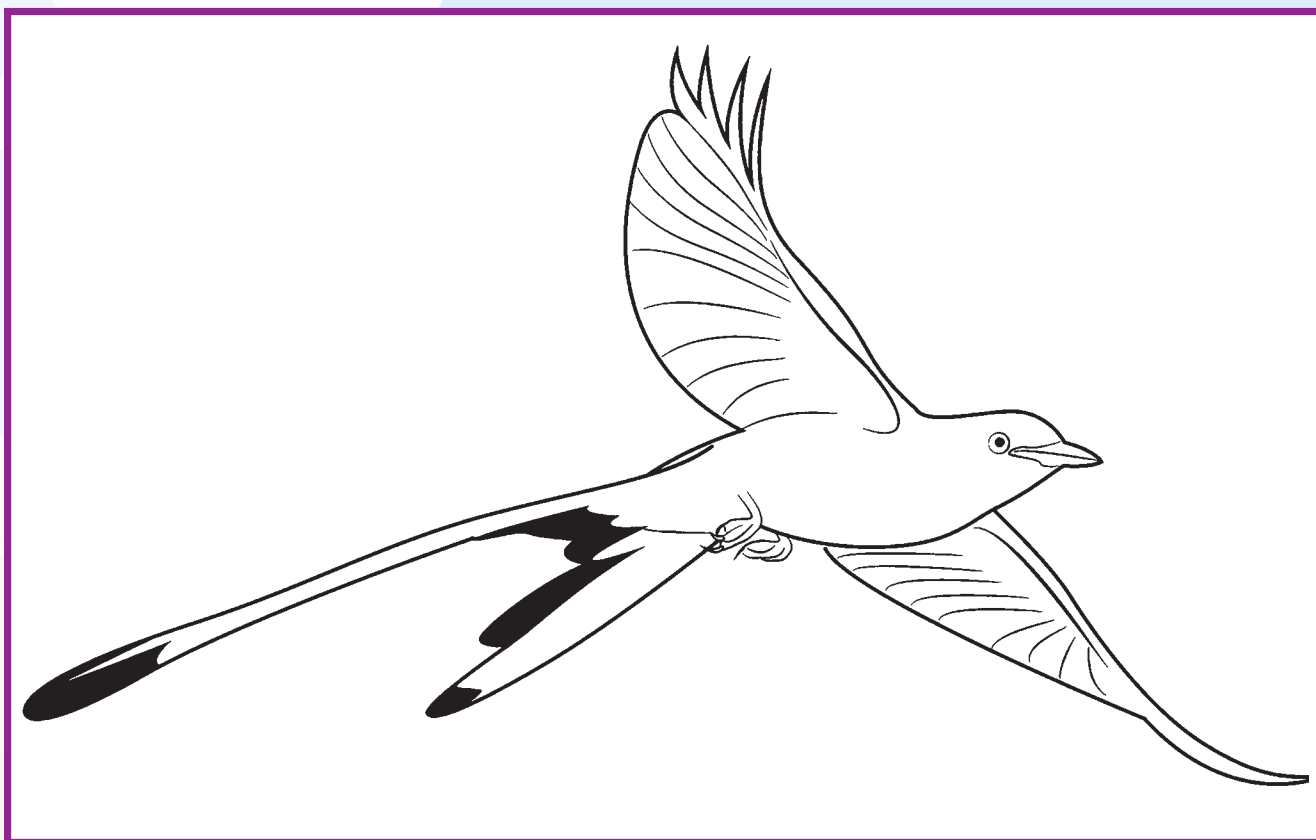
SHERMAN BARB/IPS 2015



RANDY SANDER/IPS 2019



Color a Critter: Scissor-tailed Flycatcher



QUIZ: WHAT KIND OF BIRDER ARE YOU?

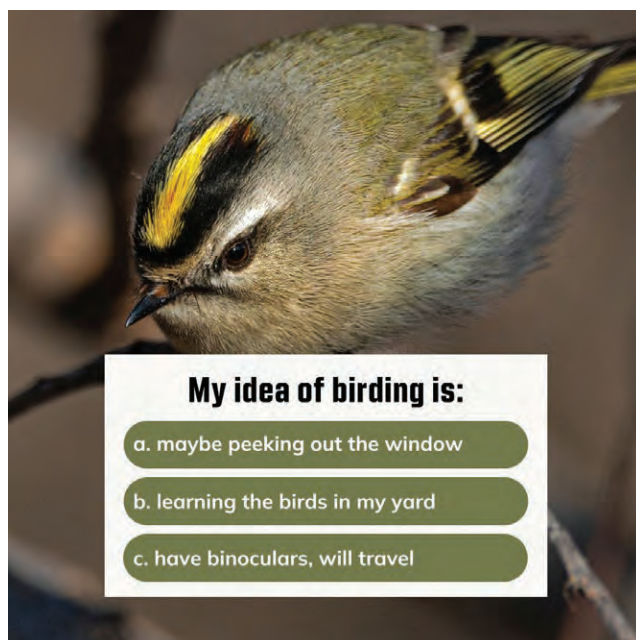
BY JENA DONNELL, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST

Are you a fledgling birder, a yard bird, or a long-distance migrant? Take our bird-watching quiz to find your birding style, then get tips for building skills and leveling up your birding experience.

Whether you know them casually as a “red bird,” “blue bird,” and “black bird,” or more formally as a “northern cardinal,” “blue jay,” and “American crow,” you’re welcome at nature’s observation deck known as bird-watch-

ing. As with most hobbies, bird-watching interests and skill levels can vary, as can investments in time and resources. And birders can chart their own course; building, maintaining, or leveling up their skills as life allows. The one constant? There’s almost always a bird to watch.

Take our bird-watching quiz to find your birding style, then get tips for building skills and leveling up your birding experience.



I ANSWERED MOSTLY "A."

YOU'RE A FLEDGLING BIRDER!

Welcome to the world of birding! Oklahoma has a great mix of birds that remain in the state year-round as well as those that only summer, winter, or pass through each year, making the state an epic place to begin your bird-watching journey.

Getting Started: You won't need much for this hobby's initial flight. Binoculars and a field guide can help (both can be found on the cheap at yard sales and discount sites) but the real trick is to start noticing birds and paying attention to things like their size, shape, color and behavior. These small details can help narrow the list of possibilities and are the building blocks for nearly all bird identifications.

Birds to Look For: Northern cardinal, blue jay, American crow, American robin.

How to Level Up: Consider investing in a field guide and committing to learning more about the birds that interest you or that you see in your everyday life. If you're driven by goals, try to learn five to 10 birds a year. If that's not your thing, try browsing free resources like the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All About Birds website, drawing a bird you see regularly, or cultivating friendships with other bird nerds.

I ANSWERED MOSTLY "B."

YOU'RE A YARD BIRD!

Home is where you build your nest, and where your bird-watching hobby can really settle in and get comfortable. As a yard bird, you can simply enjoy watching the birds that visit; focus on adding sources of food, water and cover (a.k.a. habitat) for the birds to use; or make the most of your chance to build and practice bird identification skills day after day.

Getting Started: Once you start paying attention to birds and mentally cataloging their size, shape, color and behavior, you'll probably find yourself staring out the window more, waiting to see your next bird. In addition to putting in your time at the window or on the porch, thumb through a field guide every few weeks to get more familiar with the book (or website) and the birds that may visit your yard. If you have binoculars, practice bringing them to your eyes without taking your attention off a specific leaf ... or fork in a tree branch ... or trash can. Birds won't always sit still and learning how to find what you wanted a closer look at through the binoculars can take a little time and muscle memory. If you're interested in bringing birds closer — either for enjoyment or for getting a better look at the field marks — a bribe in the shape of a bird feeder can help.

Birds to Look For: Carolina chickadee, northern mockingbird, eastern bluebird, brown thrasher.

How to Level Up: If you're comfortable identifying the birds that visit your yard — or you're just ready to see a different set of birds — consider making a birding trek to a neighborhood park or driving a back road where you can safely pull off and watch for birds from the vehicle. (If you're using binoculars in a populated area, remember to be courteous of other's privacy.) If you're not an outings kind of person, consider turning your yard into a wildscape that will attract even more birds and wildlife!

I ANSWERED MOSTLY "C."

YOU'RE A LONG-DISTANCE MIGRANT!

Your birding hobby is going the distance. You notice and identify birds in your yard, the grocery store parking lot, and sometimes even in your dreams. When you see a Carolina chickadee, your verbal call-back of "chickadee-dee-dee" is instinctive and automatic. And your friends and family have learned the best way to engage you in conversation is to lead with "I saw this bird ..." but know your attention may fly away as soon as a bird swoops into your field of view.

Getting Started: At this point in your birding journey, you can probably open your field guide to the right section and have a birding app open on your phone. If you haven't already invested in a decent pair of binoculars, it may be time to start shopping around for optics or setting up a sinking fund for a pair in your budget (a solid pair of 10x42 binoculars can run between \$100-\$300 while higher end models can start at \$2,000). As your birding skills continue to improve, consider taking them on the road. Visiting eBird hotspots, state parks, and wildlife management areas can challenge your skills and help build your bird list.

Birds to Watch: American avocet, northern harrier, blue-gray gnatcatcher, white-crowned sparrow.

How to Level Up: Sharing your bird brain — either by mentoring other birders or logging your sightings on nature-sharing platforms like eBird or iNaturalist — is a great way to take your birding experience to the next level. Documenting the specific what, when, and where details can help you remember the birds you've seen ... help fellow naturalists plan their next adventure ... and help biologists design their next survey or study.

Remember, no matter what style of birder you might be, the activity of birding requires regular practice and homework. Without those, your hard-earned skills could begin to soar away. 🦋

TIPS FOR IDENTIFYING OKLAHOMA LOOK-ALIKES

BY JENA DONNELL, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST

MARK ROBINSON/IRPS 2020



BALD EAGLE

WENDY MILLER/CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 DEED



GOLDEN EAGLE

Oklahoma's fish and wildlife communities have many look-alikes, from spitting-image songbirds to twin turtles and imitating eagles! Here are tips for identifying these look-alikes in a series of wild double takes to help you build identification skills and confidence! Get quick tips in our YouTube playlist or more detailed explainers in our Outdoor Oklahoma Journal at wildlifedepartment.com.

WILD DOUBLE TAKE: BALD AND GOLDEN EAGLES

Bald and golden eagles can look surprisingly similar in certain life stages, especially if comparing the

mostly brown juvenile bald eagle to any life stage of a golden eagle.

If viewing eagles in flight from a distance, look at the wing position while soaring. Bald eagles tend to hold their wings flat while golden eagles hold their wings in a slight "v." Coloration can also be a clue. Younger bald eagles have mottled feathers after their first year while adults have distinctive white heads and tails. Juvenile golden eagles may have some white plumage, but their white feathers are more concentrated in wrist patches and at the base of the tail. Adult golden eagles are more uniformly dark brown.

WESTERN MEADOWLARK

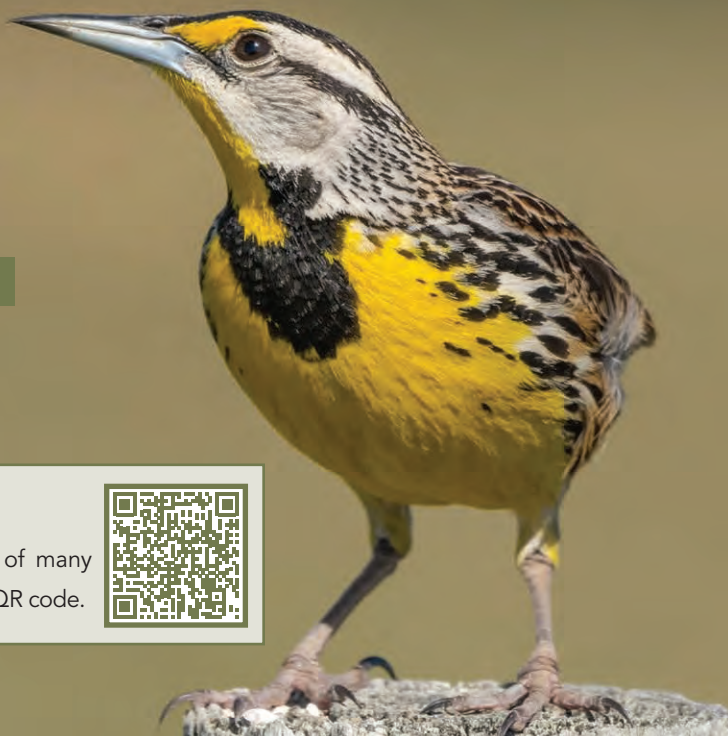


WENDY MILLER/CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 DEED

EASTERN MEADOWLARK

HAVE A LOOK-SEE!

To watch a video compilation of many Oklahoma Look-alikes, scan the QR code.



JOHN SUTTON/CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

WILD DOUBLE TAKE: EASTERN AND WESTERN MEADOWLARKS

Even though there are subtle physical differences between eastern and western meadowlarks, most birders rely on their songs to differentiate these look-alike species. The western meadowlark has richer gurgles in its song while the eastern has clearer whistles.

Both eastern and western meadowlarks are stocky grass-land birds that are members of the blackbird family. They have brown streaked backs and yellow breasts with black throat patches and their long, pointed bills are used to feed on insects and seeds. These birds are often found foraging

on the ground, but they may also perch on fences. Males regularly sing from elevated perches like fenceposts.

While song is the best distinguishing feature, subtle physical differences can be used to identify the look-alike meadowlarks. The yellow on western meadowlark's throat continues into the malar region near the lower mandible. The western meadowlark also has limited white feathers on the tail edges. Eastern meadowlarks have a pale malar in contrast to the yellow throat and have wider bands of white on the tail edges. ♡



Jeremiah Steinert and dog Atlas with their "one-in-a-million" bird, a suspected mallard/wood duck hybrid.

PUBLIC-LAND HYBRID IS HUNTER'S "ONE-IN-A-MILLION BIRD"

BY JENA DONNELL,
COMMUNICATION AND
EDUCATION SPECIALIST

Jeremiah Steinert has enjoyed hunting ducks throughout most of his life, and he's bagged several amazing memories along the way. This past season, he also bagged what he has called his "one-in-a-million bird."

In November 2025, Steinert was hunting in a public area in southwestern Oklahoma when he shot a waterfowl that he and biologists suspect was a mallard/wood duck hybrid — something unusual in the already unusual topic of hybrid waterfowl.

"It wasn't an ideal day" for duck hunting, Steinert said. "It was sunny with warm weather." The temperature reached a high of 74 degrees, well above the typical 30- to 50-degree weather many duck hunters favor.

After trying his first hunting spot with no luck, Steinert moved to another area that biologists intentionally flooded after late-season rains.

"This is my third season hunting that particular WMA, and I've never seen this area flooded before. I was super ecstatic to hunt it; it looked like a birdy area."

Two ducks flew straight into his new hunting spot, and Steinert bagged the hybrid duck. He sent his dog Atlas to retrieve the downed bird.

"Once I saw the bill, I knew it wasn't a normal duck. The bill color was a dead giveaway."

Atlas dropped the bird like a good dog, and Steinert immediately called his friends to ask their opinion. "Is this what I think it is?" They all agreed it may be a mallard/wood duck hybrid based on the mix of physical characteristics the bird showed.

After taking a series of photos of the bird's head, wing and breast feathers, and the feet, Steinert reached out to the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation to share the story of his incredible public lands hunt.



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THE SCIENCE BEHIND HYBRIDIZATION

"Hybrids are the unicorns of the natural world," said Jason Rockwell, migratory game bird technician for the Wildlife Department.

"Hybrids are simply the result of mating between two different species of animals," Rockwell said. "Most people are familiar with domes-





"Mallards and wood ducks are not in the same genus, and while they share a lot of the same habitat, they have very different behaviors. For example, wood ducks nest in natural and artificial cavities high off the ground. Mallards generally nest on the ground, often in grasslands. Obviously, nesting occurs after mating, but the different behaviors make these two an even more unlikely pair."

ticated hybrids like mules — the result of a mated horse and donkey. In the wild, it generally works the same way."

As for hybrid waterfowl, "they are something that many go without ever observing.

"The frequency of hybridization, or rarity, varies. It's incredibly hard to accurately sample but, in general, birds are thought to have a hybridization rate of less than 0.1%."

With that hypothesized rate, and the current mallard population estimate of nearly 6 million birds in North America, Steinert's bird might be one of roughly 6,000 mallard hybrids. But Rockwell suspects there are likely many more on the landscape.

"The order *Anseriformes*, to which ducks and geese belong, has some of the highest hybridization rates of all birds. Mallards are more likely to hybridize relative to other species. They do so with other mallard-like species around the world, closely related species like pintails, not-so-closely related species, and even with several

types of domesticated ducks that have been released or have escaped from captivity. There are 39 different species with which mallards have formed a hybrid."

What makes Steinert's hybrid duck so interesting is the mix of species.

"Mallards and wood ducks are not in the same genus, and while they



DAVID MCCOVEN/RPS 2023

share a lot of the same habitat, they have very different behaviors. For example, wood ducks nest in natural and artificial cavities high off the ground. Mallards generally nest on the ground, often in grasslands. Obviously, nesting occurs after mating, but the different behaviors make these two an even more unlikely pair."

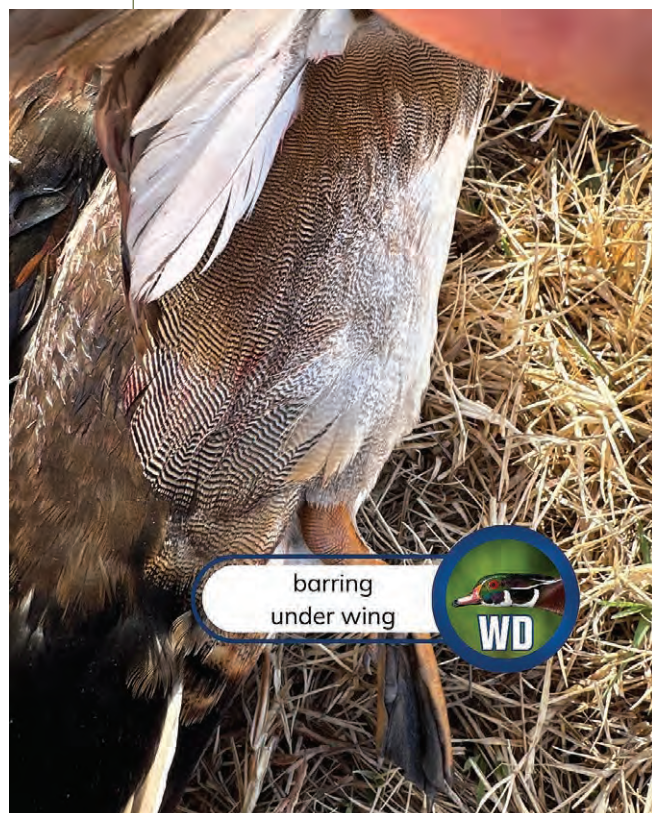
HOW DO HYBRIDS HAPPEN?

Duck hybrids are most likely to occur when the breeding ranges of multiple species overlap, or when habitat preferences of multiple species are similar.

"This effectively puts the males and females together at the right time and place. The more closely related two ducks are at the species level, the more likely they are to be genetically compatible. Added to that, many duck species have an even and sometimes common number of chromosomes, making it easier not only for a hybrid to be created but also for the hybrid to actually be fertile."

Though hybrids make for an interesting and natural science "experiment" — as well as a memorable hunt — they're rare for a reason. Biologically, birds and many other wild animals put a lot of energy into their young to further their lineage. Because lifespans are typically shorter in wild populations, every offspring matters from a population standpoint.

"If a hybrid duckling is produced and grows to maturity



"It can be even worse from a conservation standpoint if the hybrid is fertile. The hybridization of the mallard and American black duck has significantly affected black ducks and led to the question of whether the species is now genetically extinct. Over time, the uniqueness of one or both species can be eroded."

but is infertile, it is the result of a lot of risk, energy and effort on the part of a male and female pair of parent ducks," Rockwell said. "The infertile hybrid utilized resources and — while it might have made its mother proud — it is effectively a dead end from a population-level perspective. Ideally the hen would have produced viable offspring, and they would have been consuming resources for a net population gain. Instead, an entire year was lost from her productivity as it relates to the larger population.

"It can be even worse from a conservation standpoint if the hybrid is fertile. The hybridization of the mallard and American black duck has significantly affected black ducks and led to the question of whether the species is now genetically extinct. Over time, the uniqueness of one or both species can be eroded.

"Fortunately, in many cases, hybrid ducks aren't causing great harm to the population because they are so uncommon."

CLUES TO USE FOR DUCK ID

Rockwell knows the challenges of duck identification firsthand, both as a waterfowl hunter and as the migratory game bird technician who receives "what is this" emails, calls, and texts from other hunters.

"With hybrids, it's hard to say with 100% certainty because you are

visually evaluating them all on a big spectrum. Ducks are fascinating in that they have so much diversity among species and individuals.

"We can typically identify ducks simply by looking at their wings — when they play by the rules and aren't hybrids. Over time, you can learn clues that really help in identification."

One question on which seasoned duck hunters often focus is

"where's the white?" White patches tend to stand out at a distance, and their location on the bird's head, neck, body, wings, or rump can help narrow the options for identification. Asking "where's the white" can also help Rockwell narrow the identification of hybrids.

"Often, we see a giant patch of white in the wrong place and can immediately tell that a backyard poultry flock or a city pond is one duck



GARY GRADY/RPS 2023

short. Many times, a duck with a large amount of white feathers that seem out of place is the result of domestic duck genes.”

But natural variations like albinism and other color anomalies can also come into play.

“The first case of a leucistic black duck was confirmed in 2024. A white or blond ‘black duck’ is certainly a complicated thing to identify. But sometimes a broader band of white or blond-colored feathers might occur on a duck that otherwise seems identifiable as one species or another.”

For Steinert, a new DNA kit from Ducks Unlimited and the University of Texas at El Paso will take away the identification guess work. He submitted a tissue sample to duckDNA and expects to learn the heritage of his harvested duck while also contributing to the scientific knowledge about hybrid ducks.

“This was kind of a “one-in-a-million” bird,” Steinert said. “I’m excited to say that at least.” 🦆

Have you had a one-in-a-million hunt? Or just had your first waterfowl hunt this past season? Share photos of your harvest on The Tailgate online at wildlifedepartment.com/hunting/tailgate.



**“This was kind of a “one-in-a-million” bird,”
Steinert said. “I’m excited to say that at least.”**



Mallard

Length—24 in.
Weight—24 lbs.

Eclipse Drake

Hen

The mallard is our most common duck, found in all flyways. The males are often called “greenheads.” The main wintering area is the lower Mississippi basin and along the Gulf Coast, but many stay as far north as open waters permit.



Hen

Drake



Wood Duck

Length—18½ in.
Weight—1½ lbs.

Eclipse Drake

Hen

Found in all flyways; most numerous in the Atlantic and Mississippi flyways and fewest in the Central. They are early migrants; most of them have left the northern states by mid-November. Frequent wooded streams and ponds; perches in trees. Flies through thick timber with speed and ease and often feeds on acorns, berries and grapes on the forest floor.



Hen

Drake

DUCKS AT A DISTANCE

A WATERFOWL IDENTIFICATION GUIDE

Duck identification guides like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s “Ducks at a Distance” booklet highlight color differences in wings, as well as differences in size, shape, wing beat, and clues that can be helpful in duck identification. Websites and apps from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Ducks Unlimited offer color photos, range maps, and even call sounds. And experienced hunters can also be great mentors for those learning to identify and hunt waterfowl. Species identification is especially important from a regulatory perspective, and hunters should be able to identify their game before shooting.



Texas horned lizard: a species of greatest conservation need in Oklahoma.

WILDLIFE PLAN UPDATE TO GUIDE RESEARCH EFFORTS, FUNDING



Ever wonder how the Wildlife Department decides which nongame wildlife conservation efforts should be undertaken? Many of those decisions stem from what is reflected in a living document known as Oklahoma's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP).

This habitat-based document guides how ODWC manages rare, declining, threatened and endangered species, and it is required for ODWC's continued eligibility for funding from the federal State Wildlife Grants Program. States must update their plans every 10 years to remain eligible for research grants. The 2025 update has now been completed by ODWC's Wildlife Diversity Program.

Think of the SWAP as a guidebook for how ODWC spends federal money to help wildlife that aren't usually hunted or fished.

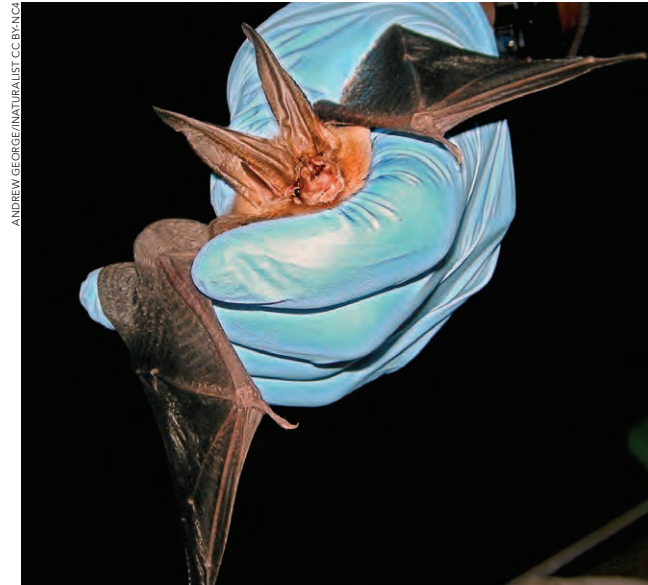
"This plan may be a required document for the Wildlife Department, but it is not regulatory in nature," said Mark Howery, a senior wildlife biologist. "Instead, it is a guiding and educational document that gives us the opportunity to share which species are declining in the state and what could be done to improve their status."

Consider these factors about the SWAP:

- **The Selection Process:** Scientists don't just guess which animals need help. They use a strict system with eight different rules, looking at whether an animal is already on the endangered species list and how much of its global population lives in Oklahoma.
- **Prioritizing Help:** Because there isn't enough money to help every single animal at once, the biologists put them into three tiers. Most Tier I animals need help right away, while Tier II and Tier III are still important but have slightly more stable populations.
- **Filling Gaps:** Sometimes, biologists know an animal is in trouble but they don't have enough facts to prove it yet. These are labeled species of greatest information need. "This category acknowledges the species may be in trouble, but our understanding is so limited that biologists can't point to population sizes or trends," Howery said.
- **The 2025 Update:** The list of animals in need changes every 10 years. In this update, biologists looked at 750 species and added 136 to the list. Many of these are bats and shorebirds that have seen "long, steady declines that have reached a point of concern in the past 10 years."
- **The Power of Insects:** The biggest group on the list isn't furry or feathered. Invertebrates, like insects and snails, make up 188 of the species on the list. Biologists are learning more about them every day by working closely with bug experts.
- **Removing Success Stories:** Because 51 species are now doing better, they were removed from the current list. "Many of these can be considered success stories," Howery said, pointing out that species like the bald eagle have an increasing population trend and have been removed from the Oklahoma SGCN list.
- **Protecting the Home:** The best way to conserve an animal is to save its home. The SWAP focuses heavily on habitats like grasslands, wetlands, and forests. Biologists use satellite photos and help from national partners to identify these areas because if the habitat is healthy, the animals living there usually are too.

By keeping an eye on the land and the water, Oklahoma can conserve hundreds of species at the same time. This plan ensures that the alligator gar can still swim in our rivers and the lesser prairie-chicken can still dance on the plains. With the public's help and a solid plan in place, Oklahoma's biological heritage is in good hands for years to come. 🍃

— Outdoor Oklahoma staff



Ozark big-eared bat: a species of greatest conservation need in Oklahoma.



Sequoia slimy salamander: A species of greatest conservation need in Oklahoma.



Arkansas River shiner: one of Oklahoma's species of greatest conservation need.

To read Oklahoma's State Wildlife Action Plan update for 2025, scan the code:



FOR SURVEY TEAM, “GETTING SKUNKED” SMELLS LIKE SUCCESS

BY JENA DONNELL, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION SPECIALIST



For many hunters and outdoor enthusiasts, “getting skunked” is the opposite of a good day. But for one Oklahoma State University survey team, getting skunks on camera was a critical first step in their three-year effort to learn more about the plains spotted skunk population in southeastern Oklahoma.

The survey’s first sweet smell of success came a month after the project began in January 2023, when the secretive species was detected at six camera trap sites on the Ouachita National Forest – Oklahoma Ranger District. The team would go on to detect the plains spotted skunk at about half of their survey sites and gain insights that can help survey teams in other parts of the skunk’s range.

Skunks are a familiar staple across the landscape, but few may realize Oklahoma is home to four species of the black and white carnivores. Beyond the most common striped skunk and much less common American hog-nosed skunk, two species of spotted skunk occur in the state. Though

genetic studies are underway for these small, uniquely patterned animals, the western spotted skunk is thought to occur in the Panhandle’s Black Mesa region while the plains spotted skunk has historically been documented across much of the body of the state.

Spotted skunks are nocturnal and feed on a wide mix of food, from rabbits and mice to bird eggs and insects, and even earthworms and berries. Both species are most associated with rocky outcrops, and both are unique among skunks in that they are strong climbers that may also den in hollow trees.

“A lot of mesocarnivores, including the plains spotted skunk, are rare or cryptic and therefore difficult to monitor,”

To learn more about spotted skunks from ODWC’s online field guide, scan the QR code.



said Danielle Brosend, the project's graduate research assistant. "Rare, meaning they occur in low densities, or cryptic, meaning they are just hard to find because of their habits."

Motion-triggered cameras facing a bait source or scented lure are often used to detect elusive species, and these camera traps were at the heart of Brosend's survey design. Instead of using a single camera and a single lure type, as have been used in other spotted skunk studies, Brosend clustered four trail cameras, each positioned in a different cardinal direction around a central location, and used multiple lures at each site.

"We used fatty acid tablets, a skunk-based lure, sardines, and a sweet lure made of peanut butter, jelly, molasses, anise oil and marshmallows," Brosend said. "This cafeteria style, where a skunk can visit whichever lure it had a preference for, is a novel approach for plains spotted skunk surveys."

Cameras were deployed from mid-January through mid-May, during the skunk's mating season, and were stationed at individual sites for a minimum of 14 days. If a skunk had not been detected at a site within those 14 days, the cameras were moved to a new site at least 0.9 miles away. But if a skunk had been detected within that time frame, Brosend's team left the cameras active at the site for an additional 21 days.

"We wanted to home in on the best methods to detect this rare and cryptic species. And then try to identify what factors drive the skunk to occupy certain sites."

All told, Brosend's team surveyed 91 sites on the Ouachita National Forest and nearby Wister Wildlife



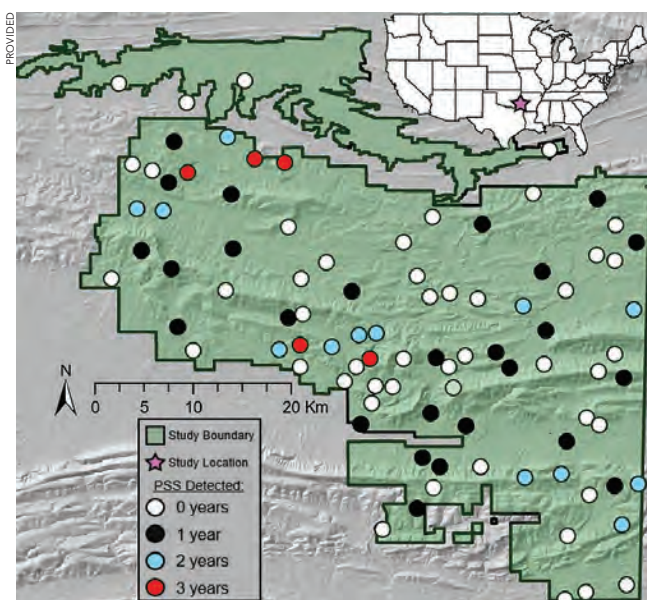
A survey team from Oklahoma State University used a series of scent stations and trail cameras to learn about the plains spotted skunk population in the Ouachita National Forest–Oklahoma Ranger District. Camera traps were deployed from mid-January through mid-May, during the skunk's mating season. The survey team sorted through more than 375,000 images triggered from 2023 to 2025.

Management Area between 2023 and 2025. Plains spotted skunks were detected at 44 of those sites; 26 sites had positive detections in one year of the three-year survey, 13 sites had positive detections in two years, and five sites had positive detections all three years of the survey. After modeling the survey results, Brosend found that 21 days was an adequate time frame to detect a spotted skunk if it were present, and that sardines were the preferred lure.

As this is the first project to effectively test lure preference of the plains spotted skunk and the minimum sampling time needed to detect the secretive species, the results can be used to help sampling teams in other states with their monitoring efforts. This will be especially important as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service considers a second petition to list the species under the Endangered Species Act. The first petition, submitted in 2012, when the species was still believed to be a subspecies of the eastern spotted skunk, was dismissed in 2023 after the federal agency determined a listing was not warranted.

"It was exciting to see how broadly we detected spotted skunks throughout the Ouachita National Forest," Brosend said. "This survey is just a snapshot of time. But based on these three years of data, the plains spotted skunk population appears to be generally stable in this study area." 🍀

This plains spotted skunk survey was funded by the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through Wildlife Restoration Grant F22AF02315 with matching resources provided by Oklahoma State University and the USGS Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit.



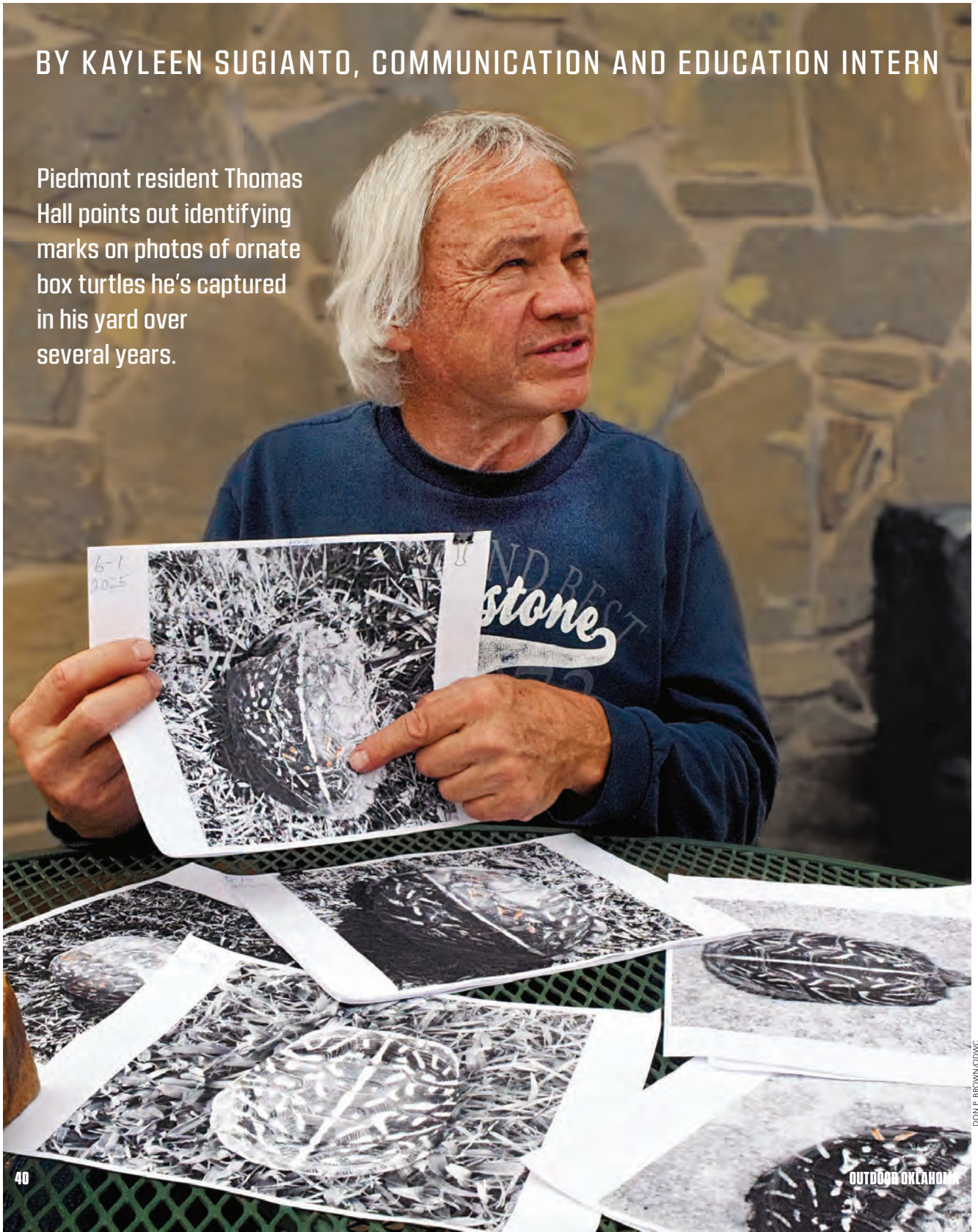
Plains spotted skunks were detected at 44 of the 91 survey sites in the Ouachita National Forest–Oklahoma Ranger District and nearby Wister Wildlife Management Area.

SHELLS THAT TELL

PHOTOS SHOW TURTLES' STAYING POWER

BY KAYLEEN SUGIANTO, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION INTERN

Piedmont resident Thomas Hall points out identifying marks on photos of ornate box turtles he's captured in his yard over several years.



Growing up on the south side of Oklahoma City, Thomas Hall's childhood was filled with a fascination for outdoor wildlife. After retiring from managing construction projects, Hall turned his attention toward the outdoors, more specifically his backyard.

In 2021, he became president of the Central Oklahoma Beekeepers Association and began to find enjoyment in helping and mentoring others in backyard beekeeping. He also built bluebird boxes and documented their numbers, and he created a habitat plot rich in diverse plants for the bees he nurtured. All of this contributed to the creation of a beautiful sanctuary for wildlife — all in his backyard!

The 65-year-old Piedmont resident has created his very own backyard-species hotspot for he and his family to enjoy. And that includes some recurring reptilian visitors.

It was just an ordinary day in 2018 when Hall caught sight of a beautiful ornate box turtle that had found its way to his backyard. Maybe it was fate, but this particular turtle aroused Hall's curiosity. Hall rummaged in his pocket for his phone and snapped a picture directly above the turtle's shell to get a full image of the stunning dark canvas streaked with vibrant yellow while the turtle timidly peeked out from underneath its shell.

With a bit of researching on the internet, he was able to identify the species and learned about the ornate box turtle. Individuals of this species usually live about 30 to 40 years, which made him wonder if this could be the same turtle that he had seen in his backyard in years before.

At first, his documentation was



His mobile phone's camera allows Thomas Hall to document the turtles that traverse his yard near Piedmont.



This ornate box turtle displays some striking reddish hues on the bottom edge of its shell and several "starburst" patterns alongside its central yellow line.



This ornate box turtle has more unusual shell markings than normally seen, with mostly yellow lines but very few spots.

Scientists study animals by looking at individuals and entire populations. They use a variety of mark-and-recapture and tracking methods — in other words, doing what Hall does but on a larger scale.



casual. He took a few pictures of turtles here and there. Then his mind changed once he realized he might be seeing the same turtle, and he started a collection of images of every turtle that showed up on his property.

What Hall is doing is not too far from methods that biologists in the field are using.

Scientists study animals by looking at individuals and entire populations. They use a variety of mark-and-recapture and tracking methods — in other words, doing what Hall does but on a larger scale. From big mammals to small invertebrates, figuring out “who is who” among individuals is essential for effective population monitoring, behavioral research, and informed conservation planning.

Traditional methods that have been used for monitoring include numbered ear tags, injected tracking devices, and other techniques considered invasive and possibly harmful to individual animals.

When Hall was a child, he saw people using fingernail polish to



Hall documented this specific turtle from 2021 (top left) to 2025 (bottom right), showing how a damaged shell healed over time.



Sept. 11, 2022

THOMAS HALL/PROVIDED



June 1, 2023

THOMAS HALL/PROVIDED



June 7, 2024

THOMAS HALL/PROVIDED



June 2, 2025

THOMAS HALL/PROVIDED

Hall has documented this turtle over four years, during which it experienced damage to the top and front of its shell.



May 28, 2025



Sept. 12, 2025

Hall's first photo of this specimen began with a bright shiny shell (top), but the wear and tear was evident only 3.5 months later (bottom).

mark turtles, a method he wanted to avoid. So, he decided that photographic identification would fit the bill. "I thought this is a very noninvasive way of kind of studying them as a backyard biologist kind of thing," Hall said.

Hall's method is noninvasive and also easy for anyone to practice if they are interested in doing something similar.

The ornate box turtle has a camouflaged appearance with yellow dots and streaks scattered across its dome-shaped shell. But with a closer look, unique markings can be spotted through comparison between pictures.

Hall's method is to locate an uncommon pattern in the markings. He focuses on one area of the shell and searches for any subsequent sighting of a turtle with the same pattern in the same location.

Hall said he likes to imagine features of faces within the turtle's markings; some markings look like two eyes or eyebrows. It only takes a few minutes to document what he needs to ID the turtle.

He has noticed many of the turtles he's seen over the years are the same ones. He's even seen a shell go through a repair process over four years. While patterns can get a little tricky, observers can grab another set of eyes by uploading photos to community-based apps like iNaturalist to get help with identification and specific questions.

"I would have given anything if I would have started this when I first moved here" 33 years ago, Hall said.

Ornate box turtles are seen more frequently during spring and summer months, but they can appear almost any time of the year. These

turtles tend to go to areas with plenty of food like June beetles and cozy places to burrow when the temperature starts to drop.

Hall said if he sees a turtle making its way under a pile of pine needles, he will leave it alone. His goal is to observe them while causing as little disruption as possible. A turtle might need to be picked up and moved out of a clearly dangerous situation. Hall's only close physical interaction with a turtle was when he was lawn mowing and had to move a turtle about 20 feet away from where he was mowing.

Hall hopes his backyard research might inspire others – especially youngsters – to take up similar projects in their backyards. He offered some advice for people who want to start observing a particular species: Prepare ahead of time by reading about the species' habitat preferences, its potential seasonal movements, and other facts that might point them in the right direction. Reading scientific articles, scanning

through field guides and keeping personal notes are all great options to hone wildlife viewing skills.

"For people like me that live on little acreages, it would be something fun for kids to record, especially if you started some of this when they're young," Hall said. "And getting the neighbors involved promotes better community connections."

With a cellphone camera and some knowledge about turtles, anyone can enjoy local turtle photography for years to come. Hall's kids and grandchildren are already taking part as he shows them how to go about photographing the reptiles and teaching them the proper way to do so.

Oklahoma is home to 18 species of turtles. A great way to determine what species you are seeing is to consult a field guide. The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has a website field guide and sells a printed "Field Guide to Oklahoma's Amphibians and Reptiles" in the Outdoor Store on Pages 46-47 of this magazine. ♡

"For people like me that live on little acreages, it would be something fun for kids to record, especially if you started some of this when they're young," Hall said. "And getting the neighbors involved promotes better community connections."

VISUAL PROOF

Similar photographic identification methods are being used by wildlife researchers here in Oklahoma. Snapping periodic pictures of the black and yellow thigh patterns of Cope's gray tree frogs and the giraffe-like patterns on the backs of crawfish frogs have been highly successful for identifying individuals within larger population surveys. Adopting photographic identification curtails the use of more harmful traditional methods of identification and just might become the favored practice for tracking species such as the ornate box turtle!



CRAWFISH FROG

JENA DONNEL/ODWC

OUTDOOR STORE

license.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.



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



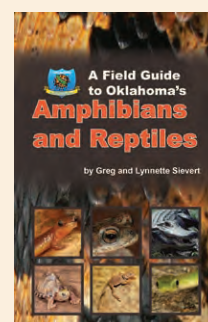
OKLAHOMA WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA ATLAS

The Wildlife Management Area Atlas presents maps of Oklahoma's WMAs and ODWC-owned fishing lakes. At 109 pages, the atlas features lands purchased before 2018. Each map shows special features such as parking sites, camping areas, and food plots. Your atlas purchase comes with a bonus one-year subscription to the award-winning *Outdoor Oklahoma* magazine. — \$25

LATEST

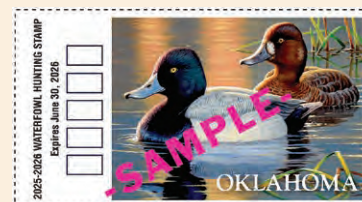
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MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD

BY KAYLEEN SUGIANTO, COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION INTERN

The mountain bluebird (*Sialia currucoides*) is a small thrush with a round head, thin bill, and brilliant bright blue plumage on the male of the species.

Exhibiting sexual dimorphism, the females have a gray-brown body with hints of sky-blue on their wings and tail. The belly feathers range from a pale rusty brown to grayish color, and a thin white eye ring is present. Juveniles share similar characteristics to the females, but have speckles and streaks on the back and belly.

An adult male stands out in the wild with

its intense, cerulean blue feathered body that tends to be a darker shade of blue above and a lighter blue-white below. The tips of the wings and tail are dark gray.

These birds are about 6 to 8 inches long, weigh only about an ounce, and have a wingspan of 11 to 14 inches.

Mountain bluebirds occupy western North America. They migrate in fall and spring, and their winter range varies depending on available food supplies. During the nonbreeding season, these birds can be seen in western Oklahoma, preferring vast meadows with scattered trees such as prairie and sagebrush steppe.

They are often spotted in mountainous areas at middle elevations in trees like conifers, but they have been seen as high as 14,000 feet. This species also will hang out around human-altered pastures and will nest in artificial bluebird boxes.

Similar to other bluebirds, mountain bluebirds pounce from perches to catch their food from the ground or in midair. But unlike other bluebirds, they can hover kestrel-like before pouncing on prey. The hovering technique is used mostly when food is scarce. They primarily feed on small invertebrates including crickets and spiders, and also eat fruit seeds and berries during winter.

The breeding range of these birds stretches from Arizona and New Mexico northward into Alaska. During winter, they move south to areas from Nebraska to central Mexico.

Mountain bluebirds are more commonly seen in Oklahoma during the winter months, and they can appear anywhere in the state west of Interstate 35. But it's possible to spot one in the extreme western end of Oklahoma's Panhandle at any time of the year.

Mountain bluebirds begin to pair and lay eggs from mid-April to early August. Males of the species venture out to find a suitable nesting cavity such as a knothole or small rock fissure for the female to choose from. They tend to favor dry cavities within 3 feet of the ground.

Once a courting male finds a nest cavity and a female, he will sing and fly back and forth between the two. The female will lay four or five eggs and incubate them about two weeks before they hatch. Both male and female fiercely protect the nest. The young take an additional three weeks to leave the nest.

Post-breeding flocks of 30 or more mountain bluebirds will later form, travel out of sight for days or weeks, return to the nesting areas, then disappear from the territory once the last fledglings become mobile.

The mountain bluebird is the state bird of Idaho and Nevada. It is said that Twitter's original bird logo was based on the mountain bluebird. ♡

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