



A publication of the Wildlife Diversity Program † Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

## Program Works With Landowners to Conserve At-Risk Species

Oklahoma's High Plains have changed dramatically since the first days of homesteading. Many practices have altered the native short-grass and mixed-grass prairie habitats. The introduction of domestic livestock, conversion of rangeland to cropland, wildfire suppression and the development of communities have all contributed to the changing prairies.

With less prairie habitat in which to live, populations of High Plains species like the black-tailed prairie dog, burrowing owl, swift fox, ferruginous hawk, mountain plover, lesser prairie chicken and long-billed curlew

have been declining.

It's an age-old story: mans' needs and native species' needs in conflict.

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"Private landowners are the key to conserving the prairies and species of the High Plains."

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It can be difficult to find a solution that's both economically and ecologically sound. That's the balance the

Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) is attempting to create.

Natural Resources Section biologist Larry Wiemers is overseeing the implementation of LIP, a new Department of Wildlife landowner conservation program. It is designed to assist private landowners conserve

at-risk prairie species on their lands.

"More than 95 percent of Oklahoma is privately owned," Wiemers said. "Private landowners are the key to conserving the prairies and species of the High Plains."

Landowners in the High Plains prairie regions of western Oklahoma may partner with the Department to manage their lands for at-risk wildlife species. By entering into an individualized, ten-year agreement, landowners may receive management materials, technical support and financial assistance.

The Black-tailed prairie dog is a target species for the Landowner Incentive Program. A candidate for

...continued on page 7

## Department's New Landscaping Book Helps Turn Your Property Into a Haven for Nature

Many people enjoy watching wildlife from the comfort of their front porch, backyard patio or window. Learning how to create the habitats that will attract these critters is now easier than ever before.

The Department announces the release of its first full-length guide book, "Landscaping for Wildlife: A Guide to the Southern Great Plains." The book is available through the Wildlife Department's Outdoor Store and at local and university bookstores. When you purchase the book through the Wildlife Department, a portion of the proceeds return to the Wildlife Diversity Program.

Beginners and experts alike will benefit from the detailed, easy-to-follow guidelines for attracting wildlife. Oklahoma species receive specific emphasis.

Written for the Department by Jeremy D. Garret, president of NaTour Communications and former Department employee, this 224-page book is the first of its kind to cover landscaping with wildlife in mind for the southern Great Plains.

Containing the most complete and up-to-date listing of wildlife-friendly plants for the region, readers will also find helpful advice on feeding preferences, water needs and living requirements for a host of wildlife species.

Book appendixes list address and telephone numbers for seed and plant sources. A woodworking section provides species-specific nesting and feeding station patterns.

Color photographs complement the text relating to landscaping features, structures and techniques. Illustrated by Coral McCallister, biological illustrator for the Department of Zoology at the University of Oklahoma, diagrams label the plants and show a birds-eye-view and a 2-dimensional view of each photo.

...continued on page 2

FALL 2003

### Inside

Butterfly Count	2
Exotic Visitors	2
Upcoming Bioblitz	3
Program Recognition	3
Rare Species Projects	4
Wildlife Research	5
Oklahoma's Wildscapes	6
Donor Appreciation	7

## 29th Annual Butterfly Count

The sky was overcast and threatened to bring rain clouds. Even so, nineteen species of butterflies were counted in northwest Oklahoma.

The count was a part of the North American Butterfly Association's 29th annual butterfly counts.

Wildlife Diversity personnel and six volunteers spent four hours spotting and identifying species at the Byron Watchable Wildlife Area and Fish Hatchery.

This is the Wildlife Diversity Program's 6th year to participate.

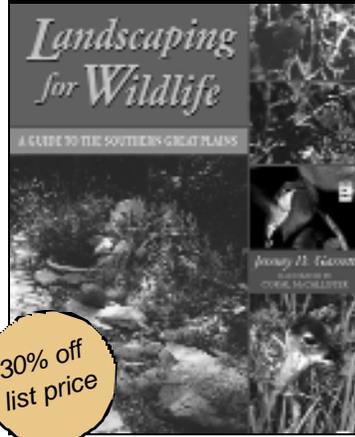
Counts from other parts of the state will be combined with count results from all over the nation, Canada and Mexico to obtain distribution and abundance data of the butterflies of North America.

Monitoring year to year changes help biologists to better understand the effects of weather and habitat change to butterfly populations.

Special thanks to our Byron volunteers for all their help!

## Landscaping Book Continued...

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**Cost:**  
**\$20.00**  
**(\$4.00 S/H)**

**To order, go to the online Outdoor Store at [wildlifedepartment.com](http://wildlifedepartment.com)**

**Or mail a check to the Wildlife Diversity Program.**  
(see order form on last page)

each photo.

Follow the recommendations in this book and bring your property to life. Create a sanctuary for wildlife and never be far from nature.

## Exotic Vistors in Central OK

Wildlife Department game warden Ron Comer observed six roseatte spoonbills (*Ajaia ajaja*) at El Reno Lake in the town of El Reno on Saturday, Aug. 2.

"It was definitely unusual, not something you see every day," Comer said.

Spoonbills are commonly found along the Gulf Coast from south Florida to Texas down into Mexico. They breed near fresh and saltwater wetlands, usually within 50 miles of a coast.

El Reno is more than 500 miles outside the normal range of roseatte spoonbills. While the birds are known to wander after breeding season, they don't usually come this far inland.

If you see one, it is unmistakable. It is the only bird with a bill that flattens out like a spatula at the tip. Its bill is used as a strain to sift invertebrates from the water. The adults have bright

pink feathers, pink legs and red eyes while juveniles have mostly white feathers with pink accents.

Biologists aren't sure why these birds wandered so far inland. It may be a result of random wandering or they may have been blown this direction by tropical winds. Whatever the cause, it's always exciting to see a species so far out of its natural range.



*Roseate spoonbill in wetland breeding habitat. Photo by D.A. Rintoul.*

## Flying Mammals Recognized By Birders As A Must-See

The flight of one million Mexican free-tailed bats at the Wildlife Department's Selman Bat Cave was named a "must-see" in *Birder's World* magazine August 2003 issue. Matt SchlagMendenhall, associate editor of *Birder's World*, said the magazine "decided to highlight lesser-known – but still jawdropping – spectacles deserving of birders' attention."

The Bat Watch was the only non-bird demonstration on the list of the "10 not-so-well-known places to see a spectacle".

If you missed this summer's Bat Watch, catch one next year. As a Wildlife Diversity Program Supporter, you'll receive notification about the 2004 Bat Watch in the mail before any of the media are notified.

## Don't Miss the BIOBLITZ - September 12 & 13

Mark **Sept. 12 and 13** on your calendar, and join the Oklahoma Biological Survey for a Bioblitz with sponsors Oklahoma Department of Wildlife, Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, Oklahoma City Zoo, Sam Noble Museum of Natural History and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. *All survey participants will meet at Boiling Springs State Park in Woodward County.*

This year's Bioblitz is the perfect opportunity to experience the short and mixed-grass habitats and wildlife species of northwestern Oklahoma. A Bioblitz is a 24-hour survey of all the plant and animal species that can be found in that time period.

In addition to the fresh water spring areas of the state park, you'll also inventory the open sand hill terrain of Cooper Wildlife Management

Area and the wetland habitats of Fort Supply Wildlife Management Area.

As a volunteer, you'll collect and count species with biologists from all over the state. Last year, 140 biologists from 26 organizations tallied 1,017 different species of the Broken Bow Lake area in McCurtain County.

If collecting plants and critters sounds a little *too* interactive, support staff volunteers are also needed.

Registered volunteers may *tent camp for free* at the State Park.

**Even if you don't volunteer, visit on Saturday, September 13.** Free activities and interpretive displays from **9 a.m. to 3 p.m.** teach about the plant and animal species of the area and how they're surveyed.

For a schedule of events and to download a registration form go to [www.biosurvey.ou.edu/bioblitz](http://www.biosurvey.ou.edu/bioblitz).

### An inventory helps biologists determine:

- q What species live in an area.
- q Species' habitat preferences.
- q Species' ranges (all the places they may occur in the state, country or world).
- q The health of the natural community.

For most areas, the greater number of plant and animal species (the more biological diversity) the healthier the area.

The Wildlife Diversity Program is responsible for monitoring, managing and promoting Oklahoma's 800 wildlife species not hunted or fished.

The program falls under the Natural Resources Section of the Wildlife Department.

#### Natural Resources Section:

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This newsletter is published free for Oklahoma's wildlife and outdoor enthusiasts.

Please email [jthom@odwc.state.ok.us](mailto:jthom@odwc.state.ok.us) with comments, suggestions or article ideas.



# Projects Target Rare Species

## Biologists Work to Save Species Before They Are Endangered

One of the Wildlife Diversity Program's main purposes is to manage fish and wildlife species that are rare or at risk of decline. Two species of concern, those designated as having the greatest conservation needs, are the black-tailed prairie dog and the swift fox.

### A Little Background

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was petitioned in 1995 to list the swift fox as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. It was determined that population sizes were low enough to be listed, but other species held higher priority.

In 2001, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service re-evaluated the swift fox and determined it no longer warranted candidate listing.

Black-tailed prairie dogs have recently captured the attention of several wildlife organizations. While there are no scientifically based estimates of historic occupied acres, biologists from state wildlife agencies agree there has been a substantial reduction in prairie dog population size since the early 1900s.

Several nonprofit organizations have petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list the species as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, but the species' need for protection has not yet been assessed.

The intent of current black-tailed prairie dog projects are to increase the species' numbers so that they will not need to be listed as threatened.

### Where is the swift fox?

Program biologists have developed a model for monitoring swift fox distribution in Oklahoma. Historically, swift foxes were in the three panhandle counties of Cimmaron, Texas and



*The swift fox can run 6 mph and is the size of a domestic cat. Photo by Lu Carbyn.*

Beaver, as well as the northwestern counties of Harper, Woodward and Ellis. We believe the swift fox is present today in five of the six counties.

During a three-year, baseline survey, swift foxes' tracks were detected in 114 of the 272 townships surveyed across the three panhandle counties. Although no tracks were detected in Harper, Ellis or Woodward counties during this survey, there is documented evidence of swift foxes in both Ellis and Harper counties. Beginning in 2005, every third township will be surveyed every three years to keep an eye on distribution changes and trends.

### Partnering To Aid The Fox

Timed track searches indicate whether or not the swift fox is present in an area but don't provide accurate population density (numbers). In partnership with the Wildlife Department, graduate students from Oklahoma State University are working to fill in that information.

Using the 1998-2002 distribution data, they are trapping swift foxes. Captured foxes are marked with ear tags and either recaptured or re-sighted by using cameras. Students will then use a standard mathematical formula to estimate population.

Combining these data with range of distribution data will help us determine habitat use and preferences of the swift fox.

### Prairie dog good news?

Black-tailed prairie dogs aren't home free, but their situation is looking brighter. Wildlife Diversity Program research from 2002 indicates that prairie dogs inhabit 3.8 times more acreage than estimated.

According to the Black-tailed Prairie Dog Interstate Working Group, comprised of biologists from different organizations in multiple states, prairie dog towns need to exist on approximately 68,000 Oklahoman acres for a stable population.

During 2002, natural resources biologist aids Vonceil Harmon and Jacque Northrip flew over portions of northwestern Oklahoma to determine



*Prairie dogs communicate a greeting by nuzzling noses.*

town locations.

Matching these data with aerial surveys from 1995, it was determined that black-tailed prairie dogs inhabit 32,199 acres within the 3 panhandle counties. That's considerably more than the pre-survey estimate of 9,000 acres.

Additional acreage may be uncovered by on-the-ground surveys of the 3 panhandle counties. Ground surveyors verify data from the 2002 aerial surveys and uncover town locations not seen from the air.

Using ground and aerial survey results, biologists will define target areas for black-tailed prairie dog management efforts in Oklahoma.

# Wildlife Research

## Bat Census To Provide Important Regional Perspective

Exactly how many Mexican free-tailed bats emerge from the Selman Bat Cave? Do the numbers change from year to year? Has the colony at Selman grown, as biologists suspect? How do the population numbers in Oklahoma compare to the maternity site populations in New Mexico and Texas? The answers will unfold as the population-census system at the Selman Bat Cave begins to deliver data.

Biologists have estimated the population at Selman. During the winter, after the bats migrated, biologists measured stained areas on the walls and ceiling of the cave. One bat stains a certain amount of area. The total number of bats can be extrapolated by knowing the total stained area in the cave. From this, it is believed that at least one million free-tails use the site.

However, Wildlife Diversity Program biologists were looking for a more accurate census procedure, and one that could be easily repeated during the summer months when the bats roost in the Selman Bat Cave.

Beginning next summer, an infrared digital camera will capture images of emerging bats during three periods of the breeding season: June, to determine the number of adult females in the cave; the end of July, to determine total population with pups; and September, to determine when migration south may begin.

The population size will then be calculated using a mathematical formula developed by bat conservation researchers. No part of this census technique involves going into the cave, which has potential to disturb the bats.

The videotaping system is in the final set-up stage with a

test run set for early September. Once started, the census will occur in perpetuity each summer.

Dramatic declines in numbers of Mexican free-tailed bats and total roost desertions have occurred for some of the historic maternity colonies in the United States and Mexico. Protection of this important Oklahoma cave

resource was one reason the Department purchased the Selman Bat Cave in 1997.

Selman Bat Cave is one of five major caves in Oklahoma used by maternity colonies of Mexican free-tailed bats. Regionally, the Oklahoma caves are ecologically important. They represent an isolated, northwestern cluster, far removed from other maternity caves in Texas and New Mexico.

Because the Oklahoma sites are used as maternity caves and stopover roosts during migration, they are an important link in maintaining the northern part of the species range in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and Nebraska.

On-going population monitoring currently occurs in only five caves in the United States: one in New Mexico and four in Texas.

Oklahoma maternity colonies represent the northernmost extent of the free-tails' breeding range, so accurate population data is important. It provides a regional perspective of Mexican free-tailed bat population trends.

Regional data offers a method of comparison between maternity colonies. Managers can determine if noted population differences (declines or increases) are a regional, state or local occurrence and respond accordingly. The bat population study at Selman will play an important role in Mexican free-tail bat conservation.



*A nursery cluster of Mexican free-tailed bat pups can contain up to 300 pups per square foot.*



### **Prairie Dog** - *Cynomys ludovicianus*

- W A social animal; it lives in "towns".
- W Communicates by barking.
- W Lewis and Clark called them the "wild dogs of the prairies".
- W Diurnal: spends 1/2 the day eating forbs and grasses, 1/3 socializing & rest of day underground in burrows.
- W Keeps vegetation short to spot predators.
- W Predators: coyotes, bobcats, badgers, golden eagles, ferruginous hawks

### **Swift Fox** - *Vulpes velox*

- W Lives in open deserts and plains.
- W Nocturnal, it spends the day underground in burrows.
- W The smallest North American canid.
- W Prefers flat, open habitat, enabling it to see predators.
- W Makes its den in open, over grazed pastures.
- W Eats mostly small mammals.
- W Major predator: coyote



# Wildscaped Properties



“Wildscaping” is landscaping your yard or property with the habitat needs of wildlife in mind.

Through the Wildlife Diversity Program, the Wildlife Department began the Oklahoma Wildscapes Certification Program in 1995.

The program provides information on how to attract wildlife to your property. It also recognizes Oklahomans who are committed to creating and maintaining habitat for the state’s wildlife resources. Habitat includes elements of food, water and shelter.

Approved properties are entered into the Oklahoma Wildscapes Registry and issued an official number. Property owners are given a certificate and weatherproof outdoor sign.

Placing that sign in your wildscaped habitat shows that your property is a part of a statewide Wildscapes network.

The following property owners joined the Wildscapes network. Oklahoma’s wildlife thanks you!

## Habitat Level

- 376 Breniss & Daniel O’Neal
- 377 Basil and Nina Hallum
- 378 Cochran & Barnes
- 379 Gail & Jeff Turner
- 380 Larry & Barbara Alexander
- 381 Pearl & Robert Cushman
- 382 Jan Ward
- 383 Pat Rodgers
- 384 Carolyn Lester
- 385 Dot & EJ Turman
- 386 Henry R & Gloria D Barrett
- 387 Janice & Max Hixson
- 388 David L & Bonnie M McNeely
- 389 Phil Moss
- 390 Packard Point Ranch
- 391 Malcolm & Georgeanna Hager
- 392 Kathleen Ryan
- 393 Cheryl McIntosh
- 394 Barbara Wolf

## Garden Level

- 37 George Deslongchamp
- 38 David & Ruby Miller
- 39 Alabaster Caverns State Park

## The Law and Wildscaping

The Wildscape Certification Program carries no legal authority. It does not provide immunity from municipal ordinances or state laws. It also does not protect your property from any future plans for development.

**We recommend you do the following before starting:**

- **Check your city ordinances.** Codes may restrict the number of things you can do to your yard.
- **Check mowing ordinances** if you are considering a wild flower meadow or prairie. For example, some ordinances require the front lawn grass be mowed every three weeks.
- **Talk with your neighbors about your plans.** Most city ordinances are initiated by neighbor complaints.

## Feeder Tip:

Leave hummingbird feeders up through the fall. In addition to the ruby-throated hummingbird, you might also attract fall migrants like black-chinned or rufous hummingbirds.

## Cleaning reminder:

A deadly fungus grows in dirty feeders. Be sure to clean them with hot water and vinegar.

## Cleaning Schedule:

Hot/Warm weather: clean every 3-4 days  
Cool weather: clean once a week

The following donors are helping conserve native Oklahoma wildlife.

Thank you!

**Scissortail Supporter**  
**(\$10-39)**

Larry Barnett  
Ruth Boyd  
Ricky and Catherine Farmer  
Marlie B. Hawk  
C. Morgan  
Drew and Karen Patterson  
Jana Wilson  
Nancy Wise

**Bat Boosters**  
**(\$75-124)**

Ann Crump  
Allen and Evelyn Decker  
Gary N. Shields

**Nongame Conservator**  
**(\$200+)**

OKC Zoological Park

**C Bald Eagle Tours**

Bald Eagles begin arriving in Oklahoma in November and early December with numbers peaking in January and February. Most guided Eagle Tours occur in January, with some in December and February.

**O**

As in year's past, we are compiling a list of dates, times and places to host eagle tours during 2003-2004. This information will be available by Oct. 31 at [www.wildlifedepartment.com](http://www.wildlifedepartment.com).

**M**

**2004 Winter Bird Survey**

The Wildlife Diversity Program will conduct its 17th annual, **Winter Bird Survey, January 8 – 11**. Information collected by survey participants provides a greater understanding about what types of food and feeders attract winter birds.

**I**

A survey form will be available in The Wild Side's winter newsletter, the Nov./Dec. issue of Outdoor Oklahoma magazine or the Department's website. Be ready to count birds. We can't wait to learn what species are in your yard!

**N**

**New Funding!**

**G**

The Natural Resources Section has received over \$2 million dollars in federal grant money over the past three years. The money targets state wildlife species with no source of permanent funding, those species that are not hunted or fished. It has enabled projects like the Bat Census discussed on page 5. Many projects are being conducted in partnership with other organizations.

Some of the 30+ projects either in-the-works or being planned are designed to benefit migratory birds, others to develop the Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma and yet others to study biological communities and associated species of concern like the fish, mussels and crayfish of Oklahoma rivers.

**U**

These grant monies are not guaranteed from year to year, but they are helping start exciting new projects. You can look forward to hearing more about these monies and the projects being funded in future issues of "The Wild Side."

**P**

## More About the Landowner Incentive Program

... continued from front page

The Black-tailed prairie dog is a target species for the Landowner Incentive Program. A candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act, the Black-tailed prairie dog is a keystone species of the short and mixed-grass prairie regions. It is key because other prairie species need to live in habitat created by prairie dogs.

"Assume there are several short-grass prairie habitats," Wiemers said. "Some have prairie dogs and others do not. Habitats with prairie dogs will have species like the mountain plover, burrowing owl and swift fox. On the other hand, habitats without prairie dogs will also be without the other species. They're all connected."

Under LIP, a landowner agrees to allow black-tailed prairie dogs to con-

*The burrowing owl is a grass-land bird. It is no larger than a robin and lives underground in abandoned burrows of animals like prairie dogs and badgers.*



tinue to live on the designated land area. There will be no prairie dog control efforts for the length of the agreement. The landowner will not plow, disk or otherwise alter the designated habitat. The landowner may still graze livestock and maintains the right to control access to the property.

The Landowner Incentive Program is made possible through a \$1.495 million dollar grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This cost-share grant involves a 75 percent federal / 25 percent non-federal match.

Landowners who wish to apply for the Landowner Incentive Program or obtain additional information may contact Larry Wiemers – Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation at P.O. Box 53465, Oklahoma City, OK 73152 or call (405) 424-0096.