



Dear Wildlife Enthusiast,

As you know, migration is in full swing. You may spot a bird new to you. Last week, I helped conduct a fishing clinic when I was surprised to see a blackbird I had never seen. I am not a fan of blackbirds, due to the starlings that constantly target my car. However, this bird was quietly perching on some cattails nearby and all of the sudden it flew displaying a beautiful, rich red color.

I quickly screamed, "What is that," excited to spot something new. Thanks to one of the fisheries biologists, I figured it was a red-winged blackbird. "A blackbird," I asked. I never knew those pesky birds, which I tend to call them all starlings simply because of my ignorance, had different species that were so vibrantly colored. I did some research and found they are here year-round, so I cannot believe I've never seen it. However, I also learned about the yellow-headed blackbird, which is migratory. I cannot wait to find one of them after looking at their photo! After all, this is my first year on the job.

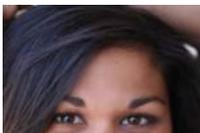
I have caught myself paying closer attention to blackbirds the past few days. Be on the watch for these beautiful blackbirds! If you see something new to you, try to snag a photo and connect with us!



Enjoy,

Rachel

Rachel Bradley
Wildlife Diversity Information Specialist





Red-cockaded woodpecker at McCurtain County Wilderness Area. Photo by B. Heck.



Protecting the Nest **By Ben Davis, ODWC Information Specialist**

Imagine if you got paid to climb 30 to 40 foot trees in beautiful, southeastern Oklahoma. I can't help but think, how terrifying, yet what an amazing view. This is typical work for Clay Barnes, wildlife technician, who monitors one of Oklahoma's endangered species, the red-cockaded woodpecker.

He examines trees to find tiny, 3-inch holes, 30 to 40 feet above his head. Signs of occupation are shown by a small hole in a live pine tree, with tree resin trails around the whole.

The red-cockaded woodpecker is an endangered species that has reached the edge of extinction, but thanks to Barnes and Senior Biologist Dr. John Skeen, the McCurtain County Wildlife Management Area provides a number of homes for the birds. Every six weeks, Barnes loads his ATV with several sections of 10-foot ladder, straps on his



Clay Barnes inspects a cavity nest for red-cockaded woodpeckers and nest invaders. Photo by Ben Davis.

acorns [stored by squirrels] are the hardest to fish out. I have to put resin on the end of my wire to clear them out. Sometimes I can clean pretty quickly, and others take awhile because there's so much to dig out."

tool belt, and climbs trees all day to assure the homes are in good condition.

"Few people know there are jobs like mine out there," said Barnes. "It is pretty active management, very involved. It's nice to show the diversity of the Wildlife Department."

Red-cockaded woodpeckers are quite particular. Once a squirrel, wasp, or other animal gets into their hole, they will abandon it. It takes a red-cockaded woodpecker eight months to a year to build a new cavity, and without a hole to nest in; they are at greater risk the entire time they are building new homes.

"We install man-made nest boxes in the trees, and clean out the holes they aren't using so the birds have somewhere to go if they abandon a nest," said Barnes.

He's never quite sure what he'll find inside.

"I've found wasps, spiders, slugs, snakeskin, and dirt daubers in the cavities," he said. "Hickory nuts and

This particular woodpecker is the only bird in North America that mines cavities in living old grove pine trees. It prefers park-like settings that are burned frequently to keep the undergrowth minimal.

"The canopy is thinned and the undergrowth is removed to allow sunlight to reach the ground and open the forest floor," said Barnes. "By reducing canopy cover, it reduces competition from other trees so they get more sunlight and water."



Man-made nest boxes inserted in a pine for red-cockaded woodpecker use. Photo by Ben Davis.

The woodpeckers aren't the only species benefiting from the habitat work, what's good for the woodpecker has also been good for deer, turkey and quail.

Despite the time, effort and potential stings required to maintain habitat for the red-cockaded woodpecker, Barnes believes the restoration work being done at Beaver's Bend important.

"These birds are endangered because of human impact, so it is our responsibility to get involved and restore their habitat," said Barnes.

[Learn More...](#)



Flying squirrel removed from a red-cockaded woodpecker cav

How Do You Bird?

Register today for the fourth annual Red Slough Birding Convention May 5 through 8 and learn new tricks of the trade. This ecotourism project is hosted by the Idabel Chamber of Commerce and will take place on Red Slough Wildlife Management Area, Little River National Wildlife Refuge and

McCurtain County Wilderness Area.

Diverse habitats lie among these areas, providing an opportunity to see a wide variety of wildlife diversity. Birders come from across the nation to catch a glimpse of birds such as the Swainson's warbler and the purple gallinule.

"Only about 38 percent of birders come from Oklahoma," said Robert Bastarache, Oklahoma ranger district wildlife biologist for the Forest Service at Ouachita National Forest. "It's neat to get other states' perspectives on our wildlife compared to their own."

Birders may also see American alligators, flying squirrels and other small reptiles and amphibians.

Keynote speaker, Nancy L. Newfield, co-author of Hummingbird Gardens will share her experiences of more than 30 years of study on the small, winged jewels.

Visit redsloughconvention.com to register for the event and to get a glimpse at the events on the agenda. Newfield's speech and dinner is open to the public not attending the convention for \$25 with an RSVP to the Idabel Chamber of Commerce at (580) 286-3306.

[Learn More...](#)



Purple gallinule with juvenile at Red Slough Wildlife Management Area. Photo by B. Heck.



Swainson's warbler at Little River National Wildlife Refuge. Photo by B. Heck.

Early Detection for Zebras

The Wildlife Department is currently monitoring plankton, or free-floating microscopic organism, populations for zebra mussel offspring. These net surveys are conducted to detect the introduction of these invasive mussels into Oklahoma waters.

Adult mussels spawn twice yearly (spring and fall), expelling all offspring, tiny plankton known as veligers, or juvenile, free-floating mussels. As they age, they develop a shell and search for a place on which to attach. These are the only mussels in Oklahoma that attach to things.



Zebra mussel cluster. Photo by Dale Kolke, California Department of Water Resources.

"Zebra mussels prefer semi-rough surfaces, so they are often seen on rocks, boats, docks and submerged vegetation," said Curtis Tackett, aquatic nuisance species biologist for the Wildlife Department. "We also sample around boat docks and marinas, because theoretically, if they are a recent establishment, they came in on a boat, so they'll be around the slips."

Zebra mussels are an expensive nuisance species. It is important that people are aware of them and take measures to prevent further spreading.

"As we move forward into future conservation of Oklahoma's aquatic environments, invasive species will have to be a top priority," said Tackett. "The impacts of these species are widespread across the state. Whether it be an angler, lake recreationist, or a corporate plant, everyone is affected."

Zebra mussels have a negative economic impact on companies and individuals because they get stuck in hydroelectric power plants, restricting water flow, and boat motors causing them to clog. Environmentally, they remove microscopic nutrients when filter feeding

that other native species (mussels/crayfish) rely upon. They can also attach to crayfish and other mussels, smothering them to death.

How Can You Help

Because zebra mussels can survive over land transport, for example on boats and trailers, they can easily be introduced into new bodies of water. Thoroughly wash, dry and inspect your boat for mussels. Be sure to drain all of the water from your live wells, bait buckets, bilge pumps and motors before entering a new body of water.



Zebra mussels with a dime displaying their small size. Photo by California Department of Fish and Game.

Reporting

If you find zebra mussels, or other aquatic invasive species, contact the Wildlife Department's Fisheries Division at (405) 521-3721 or visit wildlifedepartment.com for more information. [Learn More...](#)



Tackett pulls a plankton net through Fort Cobb Lake to detect early signs of zebra mussels. Photo by Clayton Porter.

In Other Words

- Get ahead of schedule and plan your wild summer activities with the help of the Wildlife Department's [Outdoor Calendar](#).
- Sign-up for the [Oklahoma Bat Watch](#) this summer and see a million bats fly. Registration begins May 29 and tours begin July 6.
- Free [family fishing clinics](#) begin each Thursday from May 31 through July 26 at ODWC's Arcadia Conservation Education Area on the south side of Lake Arcadia and at the Jenks Casting Pond at the Oklahoma Aquarium. Clinics begin at 6:30 p.m. and all equipment is provided by the Department. Pre-registration is required to attend.
- Calling all teachers grades K-8! OSU is hosting a [STEM Teacher's Institute](#) June 15. Teachers will learn fresh ideas to implement science, technology, engineering and mathematics into their classrooms.
- Participate in a [Great American Clean Up](#) around Oklahoma this spring to help improve habitat and outdoor areas near you.



All ages are welcome to attend fishing clinics.
Photo by Rachel Bradley.

The WildSide e-newsletter is a project of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation's Wildlife Diversity Program. The Wildlife Diversity Program is dedicated to all species in Oklahoma that are not hunted or fished. It is primarily funded by the sales of Wildlife Department license plates, publication sales and private donors.

Visit wildlifedepartment.com for more wildlife diversity information and events. For questions or comments, please email info@odwc.state.ok.us.

Like us on Facebook 

Follow us on 

This program operates free from discrimination on the basis of political or religious opinion or affiliation, race, creed, color, gender, age, ancestry, marital status or disability. A person who feels he or she may have been discriminated against or would like further information should write: Director, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, P.O. Box 53465, Oklahoma City, OK 73152, or Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

[Forward this email](#)



Try it FREE today.

This email was sent to kkillman@odwc.state.ok.us by info@odwc.state.ok.us | [Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation | PO BOX 53465 | Oklahoma City | OK | 73152