

The Wild Side

Spring 2008

Newsletter of the Wildlife Diversity Program • Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

The Bats Are Back In Town!

By Melynda Hickman, ODWC

Discover a far-from-ordinary summer adventure in northwest Oklahoma!

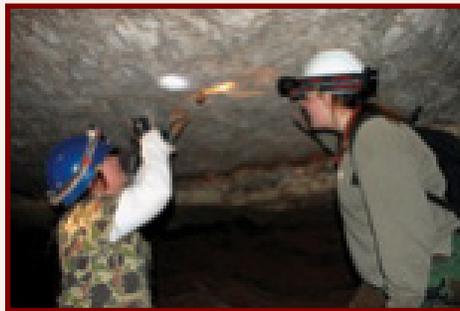
As the days warm up, thoughts turn toward vacation. The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation would like to invite you to consider a trip to watch over one million bats flying out into the evening sky near Alabaster Caverns State Park during mid-summer. The popular Selman Bat Watches have been providing visitors a chance to see this “jaw-dropping spectacle” since 1997. Visitors have traveled from 11 other states and four other countries to watch streams of Mexican free-tailed bats fill the evening sky as they relax in a prairie surrounded by beautiful gypsum bluffs.



Melynda Hickman, Selman Bat Watch coordinator, watches with excitement as the bats emerge from their cave.



It's a tight squeeze in the cave!

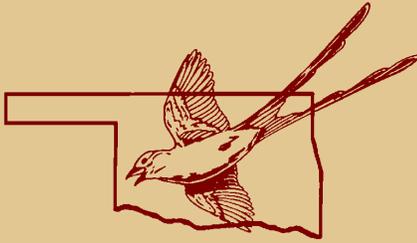


This year the bat watches will take place the last three weekends in July and the first weekend in August. The cost is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children (12 and under). Pre-registration is required from June 2nd and ends June 16th. To pre-register, print off the registration form from the bat watch website: www.watchbats.com. Complete and mail the form with payment as soon after the registration period begins as possible. Because dates fill up quickly, consider providing at least two preferred dates to attend. Much more information and details about the Selman Bat Watch can be found on our website.

Note: Our e-newsletter will continue to have more details about the Selman Bat Watch! ■

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Eastern Bluebirds

By Brett Cooper, OSU Zoology Graduate Student



WARREN WILLIAMS

Eastern bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*) and mountain bluebirds (*Sialia currucoides*) can both be observed in Oklahoma year round.

Eastern bluebirds can be seen in all seasons and areas of the state. They have benefitted from the efforts of many adoring fans with the placing of hundreds of nest boxes throughout the state. The eastern bluebird has blue wings and tail with an orange breast. You will see these colorful birds around open woodland and woodland-edge habitats. They are cavity nesters and usually produce two to three broods per year. In Oklahoma the eastern bluebird populations have increased since 1966 according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey.

Mountain bluebirds are a rare visitor to our state. Nests have been observed in Cimarron County and winter observations have occurred further south and west in the state. The male is a pale blue overall with a small white area on the lower belly and the female is usually grayish to brownish in color. The mountain bluebird can be observed in woodland edges and shortgrass prairies. This species has also increased from 1966 according to the Breeding Bird Survey.

Watch for these two bluebirds during the winter and think about where you will put up your new nestbox so you can participate in our Bluebird Nestbox Survey next year. ■



New Trout License Plate

If you have ever thought about how you can be help wildlife conservation in Oklahoma, here is your chance to shine. The newest wildlife conservation license plate that features a rainbow trout is now available for purchase.

Newest in a group of six tags, the rainbow trout joins the wild turkey, bobwhite quail, scissortail flycatcher, largemouth bass and whitetail deer.

The license plates can be ordered by picking up a form at your local tag office and following the instructions or visiting the Oklahoma Tax Commission in Oklahoma City. At no additional cost, anyone can have their license plate personalized.

Proceeds go to Oklahoma's Wildlife Diversity Program, which assists more than 600 of the state's wildlife species and the places they live. It helps keep species from becoming endangered. The program receives no state tax appropriations and is funded mostly through voluntary contributions. Do your part to help Oklahoma's wildlife and purchase a wildlife conservation license plate. ■

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Dinosaurs at Tinker Air Force Base?

Not all that long ago, anyone could go out onto the open prairie and catch as many Texas horned lizards as they could fit in their pockets. With human expansion, as well as the conversion of native rangeland into cropland, industrial areas and housing, these small living dinosaurs are disappearing from their former habitats.

But there is some good news: in 1990, biologists at Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City discovered a colony of around 50 Texas horned lizards. The colony is located at the far southwest corner of the base in an area bordered on two sides by housing and also contains gravel trails used for wildlife viewing and fishing access.

Raymond Moody, a natural resource biologist employed by Tinker Air Force Base, has been studying Texas horned lizards since 2002.

"The area of land that we found the lizards in is about 210-acres," said Moody. "It is the last stand of native rangeland on the base, but we are currently working to convert more land back to native plants."

Texas horned lizards prefer grassy, southwest facing slopes with enough bare ground for brisk movement. At Tinker, they can sometimes be found on the trails in the area for thermoregulation (warming and cooling their bodies), due to the temperature of the gravel paths.

Aside from habitat loss, another factor that



Transmitters are glued to backs using silicon. It has been shown that silicon does not affect the lizards.

has been said to assist in their decline is having many predators. Birds such as loggerhead shrikes, red-tailed hawks, Mississippi kites, Swainson's hawks and roadrunners along with various snakes and even mice prefer to dine on Texas horned lizards.

Most of the birds that prey upon the lizards are federally protected. They have booming populations due to decreased prescribed burning. When an area is not subjected to prescribed burning, it usually leads to trees becoming abundant and serving as perches for the birds.

Another problem that has led to their decline is the spread of Brazilian fire ants.

Brazilian fire ants are aggressive and strongly territorial and have begun to eradicate harvester ant colonies. Harvester ants make up about 70 percent of Texas horned lizards diet.

Beginning in 2002, biologists at Tinker AFB began to study Texas horned lizards on the base. In order to study Texas horned lizards, one must be able to locate them first. The lizards are easily camouflaged in their environment, therefore they are difficult to see. Usually,

they will stay motionless as someone approaches to avoid drawing attention to themselves.

Once caught, the lizards were tagged with tiny micro-chips and outfitted with transmitters weighing 0.6 grams. These transmitters were glued to their backs using silicone. Silicone has been proven to not affect the lizards when they molt, plus it is easier to remove than other substances. The transmitters have batteries that will last around eight weeks. GPS is used to show which areas the lizards frequent. Using satellite imagery, vegetation and ant population studies and GIS, biologists are then able to link factors such as food supply and habitat type to where the lizards are located.

Once lizards were in hibernation, wire mesh cages were placed above them for location purposes in the spring. At the end of hibernacula, biologists will catch all of the lizards that have transmitters on them and take them into the lab for measurements. These measurements included changes in weight, growth, behaviors and habitat types. The lizards are then released for another warm season.

Texas horned lizards are listed as a species of special concern in Oklahoma. In Texas, they are listed as threatened. This means that lizards may not be harmed, harassed, collected or kept as pets. Prior to becoming a protected species, the sale of Texas horned lizards as pets helped to greatly reduce their numbers.

"We have an obligation to keep the population healthy," said Moody. "It is cheaper to study Texas horned lizards now than to re-establish them in the future." ■



A group of Texas horned lizards after they have come out of hibernation.



The swift fox can be found in five of Oklahoma's 77 counties.

Swift Fox Track Survey

By Mark Howery, ODWC

During the fall, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) conducted track surveys in the Oklahoma panhandle to monitor swift fox populations. Since 1994, ODWC has been a partner, along with state fish and wildlife agencies in nine other Great Plains states, in the Swift Fox Conservation Team. This team has focused on the conservation of the swift fox across its geographic range and periodically monitors its population. The swift fox is fairly common in the three panhandle counties of Oklahoma as well as adjacent parts of Harper and northern Ellis counties. This is a secretive, nocturnal

fox that is difficult to observe, however in the late 1990s, the team developed an effective monitoring program that is based upon searching for the fox's tracks along dirt and gravel roads. In October, roadside track surveys were conducted in 45 townships scattered across the panhandle. Assisting with the survey were Max Crocker and Buck Ray. Swift fox track lines were located at 54 sites in 42 townships. In most cases, swift fox tracks were located in rangeland habitat or areas where

rangeland, winter wheat and fallow fields were intermixed. In addition to the 54 swift fox detections, we located tracks representing

This is a secretive, nocturnal fox that is difficult to observe.

at least 149 coyotes, 238 black-tailed jack-rabbits, 24 striped skunks, 16 badgers, nine raccoons, and one red fox. Also noted were numerous tracks of deer, pronghorn, Ord's kangaroo rat and cottontails. ■



The hispid pocket mouse is just one mammal that was found during the survey period.

Small Mammal Preferences

By Dr. Ron Van Den Bussche, OSU

Relatively little is known about the status and habitat preferences of small, non-game mammals in western Oklahoma. The most complete record of mammal distributions in Oklahoma was compiled using historic surveys that occurred up to 100 years ago or examination of collections at various natural history museums that reflect

of distributional information, the objective of this study was to conduct a survey of non-game mammals on 14 Wildlife Management Areas in western Oklahoma, documenting their presence and habitat affinities.

We conducted a three-year survey of non-game mammals at 14 Wildlife Management Areas in western Oklahoma. Each wildlife

management area was surveyed for three consecutive nights with 400 traps per night, each of the three years. Based on this survey and 50,400 trap nights, we collected 6,893 non-game mammals but

Due to the lack of thorough mammal surveys, there is little known about the presence, distribution, and abundance of many non-game mammals in the state.

survey efforts conducted at specific localities in Oklahoma. Due to the lack of thorough mammal surveys, there is little known about the presence, distribution, and abundance of many non-game mammals in the state. In fact, for many species, our knowledge is insufficient to accurately assess their status, and decisions as to whether a species is threatened, rare, or endangered are based largely on biological “guesswork”. Because of this lack

more importantly, we documented new county records for 24 species of mammals represented by 96 specimens collected from 12 counties in western Oklahoma. These data substantially increase our knowledge on the distribution of small, non-game mammals in western Oklahoma. Moreover, several of the new county records represent westward increases of small mammals historically found in central and eastern Oklahoma. ■

Great Plains Trail Loop 8

By Brett Cooper, OSU Zoology Graduate Student



Loop 8 of the Great Plains Trail: The Gloss Mountains encompasses some very unique and beautiful landscapes in Oklahoma. The loop starts just east of Cleo Springs on U.S. Highway 412, and runs west to the Bouse Junction and ties back into Highway 412 just north of Fairview on State Highway 60.

The Gloss Mountains have also been known as the Glass Mountains in the past. The geology of the area consists of rainbow colored high mesas that are often called Oklahoma’s Painted Desert. These mesas rise 50 to 175 feet from the valley floor. White rings are visible containing gypsum that is used worldwide for plaster applications. These deposits were left by ocean brine when an inland sea was present millions of years ago.

Vegetation in the area consists of native grasses such as sideoats grama, little bluestem and buffalograss. Woody species include mesquite, sand plum, both smooth and winged sumac, hackberry and western soapberry, along with the invasive species eastern red cedar.

Loop 8 has hiking trails at Gloss Mountain State Park and also an off the beaten path scenic route through Griever Canyon with the Cimarron River less than one mile away. Many animal species indigenous to western Oklahoma will be present in the area including badger, roadrunner, black-tailed jackrabbit, rock wren, armadillo and black-tailed prairie dog. Winter bird species to watch for include chestnut-collard longspur, mountain bluebird, prairie falcon and ferruginous hawk.

This is a very diverse and scenic area of the state. Please visit www.okmajordev.org or www.wildlifedepartment.com/wildlifetrails.htm for more information on the Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma or Gloss Mountain State Park. ■

Birds of Prey in Northwest Oklahoma Grassland Raptors of **Special Concern**

By Dr. Gary D. Schnell, OU

Migratory birds have been protected in the United States since 1918. In 1972, most raptors were added in to the federal protection. Even with laws established to protect certain species, their numbers still are dwindling down. Some raptors (predatory birds) in the Oklahoma panhandle are experiencing such decline. Work is being done to provide a current picture of the breeding status of several raptor species of greatest conservation need, including monitoring reproductive success and correlating nesting success data with patterns of local land use. This should help provide management recommendations for site-specific and regional actions that may improve the status of these species on the southern High Plains.

In 2006, the University of Oklahoma and the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History concentrated field work on areas in and around the Rita Blanca National Grassland in southern Cimarron County. Biologists focused on locating the nests of the ferruginous hawk, loggerhead shrike, Swainson's hawk and Chihuahuan raven.

Initial field surveys were carried out in late April and early May, when most species were settling on nests or territories. Follow-up surveys were carried out in mid-May and early June, with a final check in late June and early July.

Results from the survey suggest an overall decrease in the abundance of ferruginous hawks, loggerhead shrikes and Swainson's hawks. Conversely, the number of Chihuahuan raven nests increased in 2007 relative to 2006. In addition, there are indications that the common raven has recently expanded its breeding range and is now nesting in small numbers within the shortgrass prairie and agricultural zones in central Cimarron County.

The data also suggest that reproductive success was about 50 percent for both ferruginous hawks and Chihuahuan ravens, with a much higher success rate for Swainson's hawks. Reproductive success often was difficult to determine due to access to nests on private land and to nests being too high to monitor. The scarcity of loggerhead shrikes is of concern, since only a single breeding pair was found despite many days driving a good proportion of the roads in Cimarron County. ■



BILL HORN

The Swainson's hawk has shown a recent decline in numbers.

Hummingbird Survey—Your Watchful Eyes and Survey Participation are Needed

By Melynda Hickman, ODWC



Hummingbirds have been a backyard favorite for many Oklahomans. Sugar-water feeders specifically designed for hummers can bring them close to your home for witnessing their iridescent beauty and amazing feeding antics. The hummingbirds' familiarity with humans and their feeders provides the means by which the Oklahoma Wildlife Diversity Program can learn more about the hummingbird population and how long these migrants reside in Oklahoma each year. To participate in our survey, you must first hang up and maintain your feeders beginning April 1 through November 1. Next, print off the survey form www.wildlifedepartment.com/hummingbirdsurvey.htm and record the first and last date hummingbirds were seen at the feeder and the species that used the feeder. Return the survey form by December 15th or submit the results online. The survey has helped biologists to determine that black-chinned hummingbirds are raising chicks in Oklahoma! Reports over the last several years have confirmed it's nesting in western Oklahoma and possibly extending its range further eastward in Oklahoma.

This is a great opportunity for you and your family to be a part of science! ■

The Endangered Red-Cockaded Woodpecker

The red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) is a federally endangered species that has a very restricted habitat. This species nests only in old growth pine stands which, in Oklahoma, occur in the southeast. The major habitat problems for the species are that much of these old growth pine forests have been converted to other habitats, are in short cycle logging rotations or have been degraded by hardwood encroachment due to years of fire suppression.

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is working to increase the number of red-cockaded woodpeckers in Oklahoma through landscape-scale habitat restoration and site specific management.

In Oklahoma, the red-cockaded woodpecker is found only on the McCurtain Wilderness Area. Here, habitat restoration work includes thinning midstory vegetation to promote pine regeneration and conducting controlled burns at three-year intervals to control hardwood development. Management work at clusters (sites that contain active nesting and roosting cavities) include cavity maintenance and cleaning, installation of artificial nesting cavities and banding of nestlings and juvenile. Also, if a cluster is found to contain only a single bird, a mate is secured from a donor population in another state and released at the site. At recruitment stands, (sites with good habitat but no active clusters), up to four artificial cavities are installed and maintained to promote the establishment of new clusters.

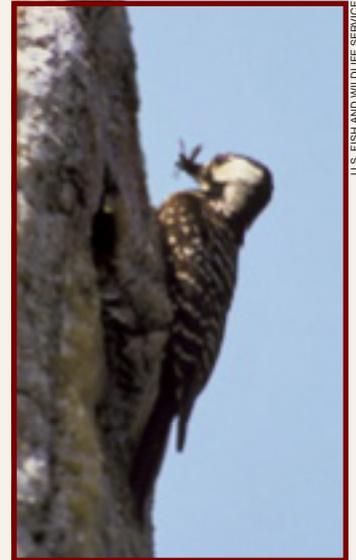
John Skeen, a southeast region senior biologist with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has worked with red-cockaded woodpeckers since 1992.

The red-cockaded woodpeckers that live together as a group in a cluster consists of one pair of breeding adults and one or more helpers, which are usually sons from the previous breeding seasons. However, about ten percent of helpers are females.

"Red-cockaded woodpeckers are not sedentary," Skeen says. "Individuals often move from one group to another. When one of a breeding pair is lost, frequently a helper from an adjacent cluster fills the vacancy. Juvenile females that disperse in the fall sometimes travel great distances in search of proper habitat and a cluster vacancy. Recently a female was trapped on the Wilderness Area that had been banded the previous year at a site in Arkansas, approximately 212 air miles away. The foraging range of a cluster is usually 250 to 300 acres but varies with the quality of the habitat."

Currently, there are about 15 groups of birds present on the McCurtain County Wilderness Area, Skeen says.

"Their future in Oklahoma and throughout its range depends upon restoring the old growth pine-hardwood forest on a landscape scale and maintaining the forest with periodic controlled burns." ■



Cooper Wildlife Management Area

Detected Bird Species

By Jeff Kelly, OU

Cooper Wildlife Management Area is located in Woodward and Harper counties. Through funding from a State Wildlife Grant, research is being done to determine bird species that are present on the WMA.



Bell's vireo



Painted bunting

Fifty-three species of birds were detected on Cooper WMA, May-July 2006 and 2007.

Species	Scientific Name
American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>
Baltimore Oriole	<i>Icterus galbula</i>
Bell's Vireo	<i>Vireo bellii</i>
Bewick's Wren	<i>Thryomanes bewickii</i>
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	<i>Polioptila caerulea</i>
Brown-headed Cowbird	<i>Molothrus ater</i>
Blue Grosbeak	<i>Guiraca caerulea</i>
Brown Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma rufum</i>
Carolina Chickadee	<i>Poecile carolinensis</i>
Cassin's Sparrow	<i>Aimophila cassinii</i>
Carolina Wren	<i>Thryothorus ludovicianus</i>
Clay-colored Sparrow	<i>Spizella pallida</i>
Chipping Sparrow	<i>Spizella passerina</i>
Cliff Swallow	<i>Petrochelidon pyrrhonota</i>
Common Grackle	<i>Quiscalus quiscula</i>
Chuck-will's-widow	<i>Caprimulgus carolinensis</i>
Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>
Dickcissel	<i>Spiza americana</i>
Downy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides pubescens</i>
Eastern Bluebird	<i>Sialia sialis</i>
Eastern Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>
Eastern Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella magna</i>
Field Sparrow	<i>Spizella pusilla</i>
Great Horned Owl	<i>Bubo virginianus</i>
Greater Roadrunner	<i>Geococcyx californianus</i>
Grasshopper Sparrow	<i>Ammodramus savannarum</i>
Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Picoides villosus</i>
Lark Sparrow	<i>Chondestes grammacus</i>
Loggerhead Shrike	<i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>
Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Mississippi Kite	<i>Ictinia mississippiensis</i>
Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>
Northern Bobwhite	<i>Colinus virginianus</i>

Species	Scientific Name
Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>
Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>
Painted Bunting	<i>Passerina ciris</i>
Red-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>
Red-headed Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes erythrocephalus</i>
Ring-necked Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>
Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	<i>Tyrannus forficatus</i>
Swainson's Hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>
Western Kingbird	<i>Tyrannus verticalis</i>
Wild Turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>
Western Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>

We located 99 nests representing 13 species of birds on Cooper WMA, May 2006–July 2006.

Species	Scientific Name
Brown Thrasher	<i>Toxostoma rufum</i>
Cassin's Sparrow	<i>Aimophila cassinii</i>
Dickcissel	<i>Spiza americana</i>
Field Sparrow	<i>Spizella pusilla</i>
Grasshopper Sparrow	<i>Ammodramus savannarum</i>
Lark Sparrow	<i>Chondestes grammacus</i>
Eastern Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella magna</i>
Western Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella neglecta</i>
Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>
Northern Bobwhite	<i>Colinus virginianus</i>
Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>
Red-winged Blackbird	<i>Agelaius phoeniceus</i>

Canton WMA

by Brett Cooper, OSU Zoology Graduate Student

The Canton Wildlife Management Area is located northwest of Canton, Oklahoma and encompasses almost 15,000 acres around Canton Lake. The habitat in the WMA is quite diverse with an oak cross timbers type in the west to sandsage grassland with sandplum in the eastern portions. Many species can be seen on the WMA including white-tailed deer, northern bobwhite, osprey and the southern bald eagle. The wetland portions of the WMA provide the opportunity to view waterfowl as well.

The Canton Lake area also includes a refuge for the black-tailed prairie dog, a Category II species of special concern in Oklahoma. That means the species is possibly threatened but little evidence exists to document the current population levels. The black-tailed prairie dog is interesting in



RUSSELL GRAVES

Black-tailed prairie dogs are an important species of the short and mixed-grass prairies.

that it is diurnal and does not hibernate like the other prairie dog species. The prairie dog is a keystone species that is present in short and mixed-grass prairies. A keystone species is a species that other species depend on for their survival. It aerates the soil and maintains the prairie, providing food and shelter for more than 170 different animals.

Loop 9 of the Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma also runs adjacent to the Canton WMA. Several eastern and western bird species can be observed here in the winter as well as southern bald eagles, American white pelicans and wood ducks.

For more information on the Canton WMA, please visit wildlifedepartment.com. ■

BEN DAVIS



Conducting prescribed fires is an essential habitat management tool for grassland birds.

Prescribed Fire and Grassland Bird Response

by Melynda Hickman, ODWC

Many grassland birds depend upon very specific habitat requirements. The amount of woody cover will greatly affect how much grassland birds will use a particular area. If proper management is not used, woody plants can move into an area and eventually crowd out the grasses and forbs that some bird species depend upon. It has been proven that when plants that birds depend upon are reduced, the birds will move elsewhere or disappear altogether.

There are many tools that can be used to manage grasslands. Grassland management tools can vary from grazing and mowing to spraying herbicides and prescribed fires. Spraying is commonplace; it has the least amount of manpower involved, but is the most costly. Conducting prescribed fires is much cheaper, but always involves more manpower.

Grassland bird conservation depends upon the recognition that their preferred ecosystem evolved under high fire frequency. Prescribed fires have quickly been removed from grasslands, and thus the number of birds has declined. In order to restore the number of grassland birds present, treatments must be performed on their habitats. ■



BEN DAVIS

Ouachita Wildlife Management Area

By Brett Cooper, OSU Zoology Graduate Student

The 131,000 acre McCurtain Unit of the Ouachita Wildlife Management Area is owned by the U.S. Forest Service and managed in as a part of the Ouachita National Forest. Its wildlife resources are managed in cooperation with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. The McCurtain Unit is divided into two subunits - the Broken Bow Subunit around Broken Bow Reservoir and the Tiak Subunit located southeast of Idabel. This area is one of the most scenic landscapes in the state with management tailored for special emphasis on renewing the historic role of fire and increasing the abundance of older hardwood and pine stands thus creating a more open canopy that promotes growth of native grasses.

The Broken Bow Subunit has 50,000 acres that are dedicated to the restoration and recovery of the red-cockaded woodpecker. The McCurtain County Wilderness Area located in northern McCurtain County around Broken Bow Reservoir is the last known population of this woodpecker in Oklahoma. This habitat has also been shown to favor white tail deer, prairie warbler, northern bobwhite, wild turkey and Bachman's sparrow.

Bachman's sparrow inhabits open woods with a grass and shrub understory. Nationwide, their population has been declining about two percent annually since 1966 according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. A small population can be found in the Broken Bow Subunit.

Other bird species that can be observed on these areas include the colorful summer tanager, indigo bunting, great crested flycatcher and yellow-throated warbler during the summer months. Pine warblers, chipping sparrows, brown-headed nuthatches and pileated woodpeckers can be seen here year-round. The region also supports a diversity of amphibians, reptiles and mammals including green anole, five-lined skink, Ouachita map turtle, slimy salamander, gray treefrog and eastern chipmunk.

There are many more activities and sites that can be enjoyed at the Ouachita WMA and McCurtain WMA, so please visit the website for more information. ■



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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

The bald eagle visits Oklahoma in large numbers during the winter.

Eagle Watches in Oklahoma

Many people don't realize that Oklahoma is one of the top ten states in the nation for eagle viewing. Each winter, as northern lakes freeze over, thousands of bald eagles migrate to warmer, southern waters. Usually eagles will take up residency from November through February. Oklahoma is especially attractive to these magnificent birds. During severe winters in the north, 750 to 1,500 eagles may gather here. A resident population of more than 100 bald eagles also lives here year-round. In the summer of 2007, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service de-listed the bald eagle from its threatened species list.

This past winter, 17 areas across the state held organized eagle watches. With perfect conditions present, many of the events were completely full of participants.

Since eagles can be year-round residents of the state, keep a watchful eye out for one at a body of water near you. ■

Wildlife Diversity Program Donations, December 2006 to November 2007

WILDLIFE DIVERSITY CONSERVATOR (\$200+)

Betty Bryant Shaull
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Betty Smith
Dixie Haney
Susan Masters
John Price



Goddard Youth Camp

Deep in the Arbuckle Mountains lies a camp that is quite unique. So unique, in fact that it has been termed a “National Environmental Education Landmark.” Each year about 5,000 students, grades K through 12, spend anywhere from one day to one week learning about nature at Goddard Youth Camp. They study the environment, water resources, plants, animals, rocks, fossils and much more. Goddard Youth Camp is located approximately seven miles south and three miles west of Sulphur, along the south shore of the Lake of the Arbuckles.

Since 1966, Goddard Youth Camp has provided children a chance to learn through four separate and distinct trails, each with its own trail guide. This guide specifies stops to make and meets the Oklahoma state education requirements.

“I enjoy my job more than I can even explain,” Goddard Youth Camp Director Wayne Edgar says. “Being able to introduce children to a new side of nature and see them appreciate the outdoors and wildlife is the most rewarding part of any given day.”

Every September, Edgar leads a workshop to assist educators in developing a teaching guide for their own class’ use. “We have termed this weekend an ‘outdoor learning boot camp’ and limited it to just adults,” Edgar said. “The camp’s seasoned staff will not teach you, but provide you the knowledge to teach yourself how to present your lesson plans.”



Educators learn how to identify various plant species.

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation is developing a similar area at Arcadia Lake in central Oklahoma. This area, known as Arcadia Conservation Education Area, was previously introduced in the Winter 2007 edition of *The Wild Side*. Curriculum is currently being developed to coincide with a nature trail. ■

Oologah WMA

By Brett Cooper, OSU Zoology Graduate Student

Situated in Nowata and Rogers Counties in northeastern Oklahoma is the Oologah Wildlife Management Area. The Oologah WMA covers 12,941 acres of grassland and forest where you will have the opportunity to see a wide variety of plant and animal life.

The river bottoms of the Oologah WMA are home to several species of oak trees along with pecan and willow trees. As you travel closer to the lake you will also see locust, button bush, hackberry and elm, along with many native grasses.

Whether you are hiking or driving through the Oologah Wildlife Management Area you will want to keep your eyes open for the various species of wildlife that call this area home. There is a wide variety of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians that can be seen in this area if you are looking. A few of the animals that you might encounter



here are bobwhite quail, white-tailed deer, cottontail rabbits, coyotes, bobcats, raccoons, doves, waterfowl, songbirds, opossums, bats, foxes, squirrels, chipmunks, hawks, eagles and many more.

If you are camping overnight or driving through on a day trip, the Oologah Wildlife Management area is a great place to see some of Oklahoma’s native wildlife in a beautiful setting. For more information, please visit wildlifedepartment.com ■

Volume 2 • Issue 4 • April 2008

Action Update

state wildlife grants

Birds of Prey In Northwest Oklahoma Grassland Raptors of Special Concern

Migratory birds have been protected in the United States since 1918. In 1972, most raptors were added in to the federal protection. Even with laws established to protect certain species, their numbers still are dwindling down. Some raptors (predatory birds) in the Oklahoma panhandle are experiencing such decline. Work is being done to provide a current picture of the breeding status of several raptor species of greatest conservation need including monitoring reproductive success and correlating nesting success data with patterns of local land use. This should help provide management recommendations for site-specific and regional actions that may improve the status of these species on the southern High Plains.

The Ferruginous hawk is just one grassland raptor that is listed as a species of special concern. In 2006, the University of Oklahoma and the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History concentrated field work on areas in and around the **Rita Blanca National Grassland** in southern Cimarron County. Biologists focused on locating the nests of the ferruginous hawk, loggerhead shrike, Swainson's hawk and Chihuahuan raven.



The Ferruginous hawk is just one grassland raptor that is listed as a species of special concern.

Initial field surveys were carried out in late April and early May, when most species were settling on nests or territories. Follow-up surveys were carried out in mid-May and early June, with a final check in late June and early July.

Results from the survey suggest an overall decrease in the abundance of ferruginous hawks, loggerhead shrikes and Swainson's hawks. Conversely, the number of Chihuahuan raven nests increased in 2007 relative to 2006. In addition, there are indications that the common raven has recently expanded its breeding range and is now nesting in small numbers within the shortgrass prairie and agricultural zones in central Cimarron County.



Get Ready for the Hummers! Hummingbird Enthusiasts Needed for Survey

Hummingbirds are a backyard favorite for many Oklahomans. Feeders specifically designed for hummers can bring them close to your home to witness their indecent beauty and amazing feeding antics. The hummingbirds' familiarity with humans and their feeders provides the means by which the Oklahoma Wildlife Diversity Program can learn more about the hummingbird population and how long these migrants reside in Oklahoma each year. To participate in our survey, you must first hang up and maintain your feeders beginning April 1 through November 1. Next, print off the [survey form](#) and record the first and last date hummingbirds were seen at the feeder and the species that used the feeder. Return the survey form by December 15th or [submit the results online](#). The survey has helped biologists to determine that Black-chinned Hummingbirds are raising chicks in Oklahoma! Reports over the last several years have confirmed it's



The Wild Side e-Extra

You may not know, but *The Wild Side* is now offered in a monthly electronic form that is still free-of-charge that is delivered to your email inbox. Anyone can sign up by emailing their full name, zip code and whether or not you hunt or fish to lmceff@odwc.state.ok.us

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Oklahoma Sportsmen's Heritage Day

By Ragon Gentry, Oklahoma Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus



LESLEY B. MCNEFF

The winner of the turkey calling competition is presented with her prizes.



LESLEY B. MCNEFF

A young man tries his hand at the fishing simulator that the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation set up.

The Oklahoma Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus hosted the first ever Outdoor Sportsmen's Heritage Day at the State Capitol on Tuesday, March 18th. Caucus leaders and members of the Oklahoma Legislature were joined by representatives of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, major retailers and conservation organizations. The event was open to the public. Kids participated in some fun activities like laser shot and simulated fishing and they learned more about Oklahoma's outdoor heritage of hunting and fishing.

The Oklahoma Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus was founded in 2005 and joined the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses (NASC) the same year.

In the Sooner State, 602,000 outdoorsmen spend \$2.8 million dollars per day and support 20,000 jobs, ranking Oklahoma 21st in the nation for total resident sportsmen. ■



LESLEY B. MCNEFF

Purple Martin Houses

By Ben Davis

Spring is upon us, which means neighbors are now arriving from the south. These “neighbors” are not people, however, but neo-tropical migrant birds who typically winter in Central and South America before returning in mid-February to Oklahoma for the summer months. One of the loveliest neo-tropical migrants is the Purple Martin. With a little planning and effort, Okie residents can make sure these beautiful blue-gray colored neighbors enjoy the area enough to stay long-term—by building a Purple martin house.

Martins are members of the swallow family that nest in colonies near human buildings. Since martins like people, place houses within 100 feet of human activity. Martins feed on insects, so they need a clear view of open space in which to feed. Keep houses at least 40 feet away from buildings, trees and other obstructions. Houses should be placed between 12 to 14 feet off the ground.

American Indians used to attract purple martins to their villages by hanging gourds. All these years later, gourds are still a great way to provide shelter for martins. Well-maintained gourds can last up to 30 years. To prepare gourds, soak them for 15 minutes in a copper sulfate solution (one pound copper sulfate dissolved in five gallons of water). After they are dried, paint them with white oil-based paint to minimize heat. The entrance hole should be 2-1/4 inches in diameter, and three to six quarter-inch drainage holes should be drilled into the bottom.

Houses made from PVC pipe material and masonite also are available. PVC structures are inexpensive to construct and very durable but can be difficult to clean. Wood houses should be 1/2-inch to 3/4-inch thick to insulate against heat and cold.

Several boxes may be set up in the same yard. When “fully” occupied, a house will have a percentage of compartments vacant. The occupancy rate can be increased by using porch dividers between “apartments.”

Martin houses should maintain

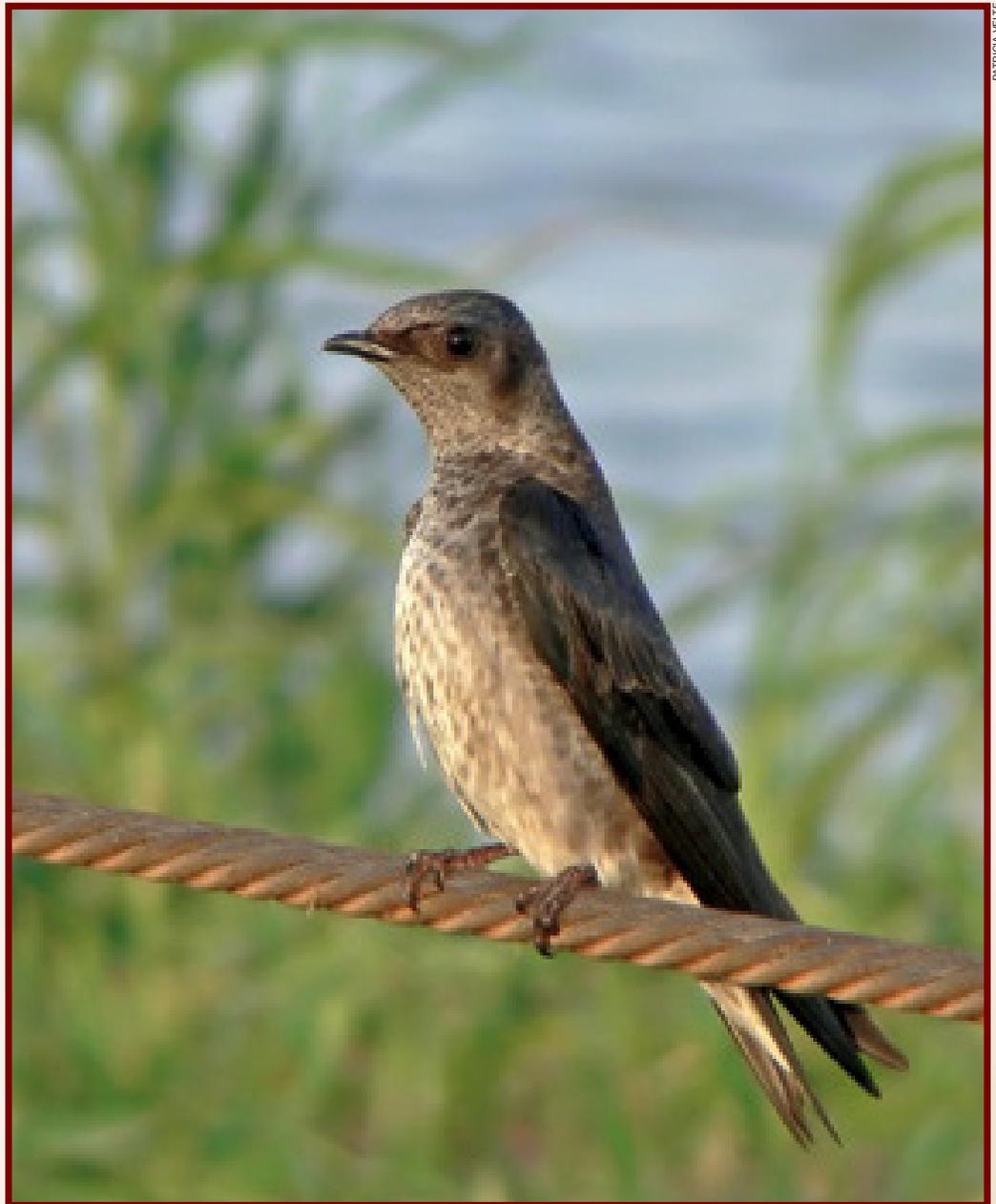
a relatively cool temperature. Since martins prefer to nest in open areas where they are exposed to direct sunlight, painting houses white to reflect heat and providing proper ventilation will help prevent excessive heat build-up. Ventilation is also important, so make sure the structure has small holes drilled in each compartment.

It sometimes takes several years to attract martins to a new site. If the house is

not used in the spring, just leave it up until after fall migration. Young birds may discover it as they head south. And once they

American Indians used to attract purple martins to their villages by hanging gourds.

discover it, more martins will follow. With just a little work, your own home will soon be part of a thriving community of lovely purple martins. ■



PATRICIA VELTE

Purple martins are just one of many species of neo-tropical birds that summer in Oklahoma.

Wildlife Diversity Program

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

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Oklahoma City, OK 73152

(405) 522-3087

wildlifedepartment.com

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Outdoor Store Order Form

Item	Description	Price (includes s/h)	Quantity	Subtotal
A	Landscaping for Wildlife: A Guide to the Southern Great Plains and helpful tables of this 224-page guidebook will help you attract wildlife to your yard.	\$17.50		
B	Butterflies of Oklahoma, Kansas and North Texas: A 282-page field guide to 100 species with full-color pictures and range maps; identifying butterflies in the field has never been easier!	\$18		
C	A Field Guide to Oklahoma's Amphibians and Reptiles: Explore all 160 species and subspecies of snakes, lizards, turtles, frogs and salamanders in Oklahoma through full-color photos, range maps and wildlife facts.	\$16		
D	The Bat House Builder's Handbook: A 36-page guide with bat house plans, mounting suggestions and tips.	\$7.50		
E	Attracting Birds: This 20-page booklet is packed with information detailing types of feeders, seeds, winter foods, watering and more.	\$2		
F	Birds of North America: A 360-page illustrated bird identification handbook.	\$13		
G	Oklahoma's Rain Forest Connection Poster: This 17" x 22" full-color wildlife poster features some of Oklahoma's most popular nongame wildlife species.	\$2		
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