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David Arbour



Dear Wildlife Enthusiasts,

This time of the year is known for reflecting and sharing tradition. I'm sure we've all had our fair share of ups, downs and run-arounds this past year, but we should take time to be thankful for what we have around us. Whether your family enjoys sitting by a fire telling stories, taking a hike after a big meal or even participating in the holiday antlerless deer gun season, it's always a great memory. And this winter, the Wildlife Department asks you to start (or continue) the tradition of giving back to wildlife by participating in the 2013 Winter Bird Feeder Survey.

We're calling all new and experienced birders of all ages to help the beautiful, migrant songbirds survive the winter. The Department encourages citizens to provide food, water and cover (maybe using your old holiday tree) for our winged friends. It's easy and cheap, and the birds are fun to watch.

The Winter Bird Feeder Survey is conducted to help biologists get data from a greater portion of the state, and a variety of ecosystems as they monitor the birds in Oklahoma each year.

Each year, the Department publishes a Winter Bird Feeder Survey guide in the November/December issue of the award-winning magazine, [Outdoor Oklahoma](#). This issue

serves as a "how to" for participating in the Winter Bird Feeder Survey and provides results from last year's survey.

This a great activity for people of all ages and skill levels to stay in tune with wildlife activity, especially since many are sometimes trapped indoors due to Oklahoma's unpredictable winter weather. The survey is so easy, and it provides people an outlet to expose children to wildlife and do something positive for the resources around us.

To participate in the 2013 Winter Bird Feeder Survey or to simply learn more about winter birds in Oklahoma, visit okwinterbirds.com to download a survey form. Be sure to follow the download directions so you can easily return your survey.

For questions, please contact Melynda Hickman, wildlife diversity biologist and survey coordinator, by calling (405) 990-4977 or by email at mhickman@zoo.odwc.state.ok.us.

Share your family's wildlife traditions and stay on top of the latest wildlife news by connecting with us on Facebook and Twitter.



Wishing you and yours the best as you celebrate the holidays!

Enjoy,

Rachel

Rachel Bradley
Wildlife Diversity Information Specialist



A Sleepy State

Each summer and early spring there is a dramatic rise in wildlife activity and sightings. Snakes, turtles and bats are among the species that are seen in far greater numbers as the weather warms in Oklahoma. Some species migrate south, while other species go into a sleepy state of hibernation. But many wonder what truly happens during this sleepy state.

Hibernation is a condition in which animals go into a deep, sleep-like state and experience a drop in body temperature, breathing rate and heart rate during this process. It is used to withstand harsh conditions, such as extreme temperatures. Animals that hibernate store body fat during the summer in preparation, and then the stored fat is slowly consumed while in hibernation.

Species hibernating in Oklahoma:

The [cave myotis](#) is one of about a dozen species of bats that hibernates in Oklahoma. During hibernation, hundreds of bats will gather together in clusters on the ceilings and walls of caves. For hibernation, they normally choose humid portions of caves and sites where the temperature remains constantly cool. These may be adaptations to conserve moisture

and avoid disturbance.

After the first heavy frost, a [groundhog](#), or woodchuck, retires to its burrow and seals the entrance to its hibernation chamber. While in hibernation, it lives off its fat reserves much like other hibernating species. Its heart rate may drop from 100 beats per minute to only four beats per minute, while the body temperature drops as much as 50 degrees. The length of hibernation varies by latitude, as woodchucks in the northern portion of their range hibernate for a longer period.

Groundhogs leave their chambers between February and early March, but in southern states such as Oklahoma, it is possible for groundhogs to emerge by Groundhog Day.



Cave myotis in hibernation. Photo by Lynda Loucks.

The [western diamond-backed rattlesnake](#) prefers to hibernate in dens with large numbers of other snakes. Although it may not be popular among those who fear snakes, it serves a vital role in the ecosystem. It primarily preys upon small rodents, thus keeping rodent populations down. Therefore, it can primarily be found in dens where small mammals such as prairie dogs, rabbits, gophers, ground squirrels, mice and rats can be found. It is often mistaken for other snakes but can be easily identified by its diamond-shaped head and markings on its body and its black and white banded tail. It is one of the largest snakes in North America. It typically will not attack unless it feels threatened.

The pickerel frog is pretty uncommon in Oklahoma, appearing in a portion of about 10 counties in the [Ozarks](#) and the southeastern corner of the state. It can be easily defined by the two rows of rectangular or squareish spots and the yellow or golden color on the underside of the hind legs and groin region. Its skin secretions are toxic and may irritate or even kill other species; therefore, most frog-eating predators will not eat a pickerel frog. It is a nocturnal frog found near wet meadows, woodland ponds, small streams and around caves. As it hibernates in the winter,

it can be found under rocks or mud near the mouths of springs or caves in the Ozarks.

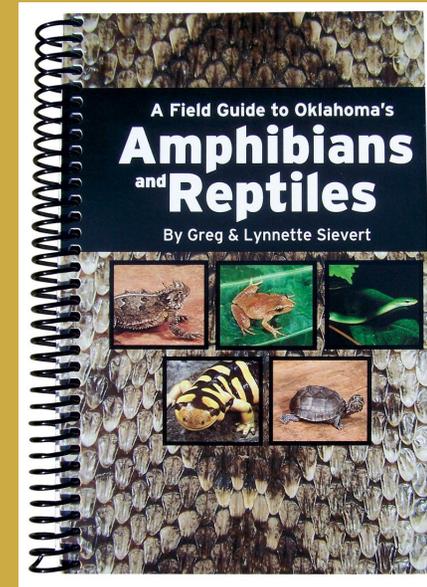


Pickerel frog found at Cookson Wildlife Management Area. Photo by Rachel Bradley.

Holiday Gift Guide for the Wildlife Enthusiast!

Looking for a last-minute gift for a special someone? Check out the [Outdoor Store](#) on Wildlife Department's website for field guides, a Wildlife Management Area Atlas, habitat donor patches and hats, and much more! Don't forget, you are also eligible for a free, one-year subscription to our award-winning magazine, *Outdoor Oklahoma*, with any purchase of a publication.

The proceeds from nongame publications goes to help fund the [Wildlife Diversity Program](#). The Wildlife Diversity Program is dedicated to those species that are not hunted or fished, and species with special conservation concern.



Easily Confused

Sometimes, no matter how often or how little you have been birding, the day comes when circumstances keep you from easily identifying birds. It gets more difficult as we rely on windows as viewing areas in the dead of winter - thank goodness the leaves are less abundant. Here are some tips to better identify the quite similar [pine siskins](#) and [American goldfinches](#) during the [Winter Bird Feeder Survey](#) as they can easily be confused.

"Pine siskins and American Goldfinches are closely related birds and have very similar diets and behaviors," said Mark Howery, wildlife diversity biologist for the Department. "Like all finches, both species feed almost entirely on seeds throughout the year. Both species raise only one brood of chicks each year - usually in mid-summer, and they are frequent visitors to backyard birdfeeders during the winter. Both species are small - about the size of a chickadee, but their plumages are subtly different."

Fortunately, they have a few distinct physical characteristics. The Pine Siskin has a narrower bill, which may help it pick smaller seeds out of seed cones. Pine siskins also have fine brown streaks all over their backs, heads, sides and bellies, much like the larger House Finch. In contrast, the American Goldfinch has plain beige or



American goldfinch. Photo by David Arbour.

dull greenish plumage in the winter, but during the spring its plumage changes to a vibrant yellow color for the breeding season. The wing color is different between the two species as well - the Pine Siskin has brown wings with two thin, yellow wingbars, but the American Goldfinch has black wings with a white stripe. The tails of both finches look like someone snipped a piece out of their middles. Finch tails have a notch appearance rather than a rounded or square shape because the outer feathers are longer than the inner feathers.

To attract goldfinches and pine siskins to backyard feeders, we recommend that you use thistle seed or black oil sunflower seeds. Both seeds have a high energy content and a shell that a finch bill can easily crack open.

Finches feed heavily on wild seeds, but the production of this food source can vary dramatically from year to year based upon weather conditions. Because of their erratic food supply, most finches, but especially the Pine Siskin and Purple Finch, have adapted to this by becoming somewhat nomadic. Each winter, their migration paths and wintering grounds shift to the regions of the country with high seed supplies.

"Based upon reports from birders who have been seeing them since November, this will be a very good year to spot Pine Siskins in Oklahoma," said Howery. "This could be the best winter so see them in five or six years. Because we are in the same drought pattern that most of the country is experiencing, the abundance of Pine Siskins this year will probably be a stronger indication of how scarce food supplies are this year rather than a sign that our seed supply is higher than average."

Keep your eyes out this winter and be sure to get your feeders ready now in a good viewing area.



A pine siskin has yellow-barred wings to easily tell it apart from an American goldfinch. Photo by David Arbour.

A Majestic View

There are few sights more picturesque than catching a glimpse of a majestic [bald eagle](#) soar through the sky. If you have yet to catch a clear viewing, you are in luck.

The Oklahoma eagle watches are coming soon.

June 28, 2007 is a historical date for the bald eagle as it soared off of the endangered species list under the [Endangered Species Act of 1973](#). Oklahoma is now home to about 90 to 110 resident breeding pairs.

Depending on weather conditions, Oklahoma can get about 750 to 1,500 migrant eagles throughout the state beginning in late October. The best viewing time is from late December to mid-February, as the coldest weather hits and the birds are encouraged to move south.

Check out the best viewing areas across Oklahoma and where to catch a viewing tour on wildlifedepartment.com.



Bald eagle perching. Photo by David Arbour.



A majestic bald eagle soars over Oklahoma waters. Photo by David Arbour.

In Other Words

-Participate in a Christmas Bird Count this year! These counts have been conducted for over 100 years

in Oklahoma. The first counts begin on Saturday, Dec. 15 and run through Jan. 5. For a complete list of Oklahoma counts and to find one nearest you, go to www.okbirds.org.

-Plan your outdoor holiday activities with the Wildlife Department's [Outdoor Calendar](#).

-Ring in the new year at [Opening Night](#) - Oklahoma City's favorite family-oriented New Year's Eve celebration, and visit the Myriad Botanical Gardens.



American goldfinch in winter plumage. Photo by David Arbour.

-Free admission Mondays are here at the [Oklahoma City Zoo](#)! Enjoy the zoo for free each Monday in December, January and February.

-Looking for wildlife activities in the Oklahoma City metro area? Visit Martin Park Nature Center's [Facebook page](#) for updated events and news. Martin Park Nature Center is in northwest Oklahoma City.

-Visit the [Oxley Nature Center](#) in the Tulsa metro area for many close-to-home adventures such as botany walks, earth science walks, butterfly walks, night walks and a variety of workshops for individuals and families.

Have an outdoor-related event you would like featured in *The WildSide*? Send your event to info@odwc.state.ok.us.

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.

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