

SPRING/SUMMER 2004



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

U.S. Senators and Congressmen Take a Stand For Wildlife

Sens. James Inhofe and Don Nickles, along with Reps. Tom Cole and Brad Carson, are among 160 senators and congressmen taking a stand for the nation's wildlife. These Oklahoma Congressmen support the continuation of the State Wildlife Grants program into 2005.

Sens. Inhofe and Nickles support the President's budget proposal of \$80 million for State Wildlife Grants. The President's budget is a \$10 million increase above last year's funding.

"I feel this program is a valuable investment in prevention," Senator Inhofe said. "It saves our citizens money and the frustration of litigation often invoked by regulatory programs."

One-quarter of the House and over half of the Senate support a larger funding increase. Reps. Cole

and Carson were among a bipartisan group of 52 senators and 111 representatives that signed letters to key congressional leaders urging \$100 million for the program.

"I am a firm supporter of preventative care for wildlife... State Wildlife Grants is smart environmentally and economically."
- Congressman Carson

"I am a firm supporter of preventative care for wildlife," Congressman Carson said. "We can save taxpayers millions of dollars by intervening when species are in decline, instead of waiting for situations to become dire. State Wildlife Grants is smart environmentally and economically."

Created by Congress in 2001, the State Wildlife Grants program is the nation's core program for preventing wildlife from becoming endangered in every state. A funding-match requirement leverages federal funding from state and private sources, often doubling the impact of every dollar of federal funding.

In its first few years, the program

has already helped restore degraded habitat, reintroduce native species, and encouraged the effective stewardship of private lands.

Congress decides each year if the program will continue and the amount to allocate. Over the past four years, Oklahoma has received \$3,730,732 through State Wildlife Grants and has 30 new conservation projects as a result.

The program is supported by Teaming With Wildlife, a broad-based coalition representing more than 3,000 groups including sportsmen, environmentalists, wildlife management professionals and outdoor-related businesses. Included in this coalition are 175 groups from Oklahoma.

Information on the State Wildlife Grants program and the Teaming With Wildlife campaign is available at www.teaming.com.

Catch the Flight of One Million Bats This Summer

Ever wondered what it's like to see and hear one million bats fly?

There's only one place in Oklahoma to find out - a Selman Bat Watch!

Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights in July from 6 - 10 p.m., watch as a colony of Mexican free-tailed bats swirl into the twilight sky to dine on 10 tons of insects nightly!

\$9 Adults, \$5 Children [Groups (12 or more people) receive a 10% discount]
Seating is limited, so register today! Deadline is June 28.

You must register to attend; no registrations accepted by phone.

Download a registration form at
www.wildlifedepartment.com or contact us at (405) 424-0099

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Editor's Thought

An Extinction of Experience

For many Americans that live in a rural area or grew up in a family that treasured the outdoors, there is an innate connection to wildlife and the world in which wildlife species live. Some biologists worry about the affects of an urbanized America on this relationship.

I attended a Watchable Wildlife Conference last fall, and a speaker brought up this question: Is a disconnect forming between Americans and the natural world? The speaker, Bob Hernbrode with the Colorado Division of Wildlife, thinks so.

Hernbrode worries that species are becoming extinct from the "radius of our reach." He is as concerned about the extinction of plant and animal species as he is concerned about the extinction of peoples' experiences with wildlife and the outdoors.

"What is the extinction of a Condor to a child who has never seen a jay?" he asks.

Offering a relatively simple solution, he answers, "Give people the tools and opportunities to see wildlife and the rest [conservation] will fall into place."

Organizations have a role in disseminating these tools, as do individuals. Every time you take your family, a child or a friend outdoors to hike, camp, hunt, fish or watch birds, you are helping people identify emotionally with the natural resource.

When you give your time to outdoor organizations or share your conservation concerns with Congressmen and community leaders, you are helping solidify a relationship between people and nature.

Your role is powerful and your reach is wide in this effort to preserve the outdoor experience for future generations.

- Jenny Thom

Fresh Face In Natural Resources Section

Warm introductions are in order for Natural Resources' environmental biologist Ferrella March.



"It's rewarding to know I'm making a positive impact on maintaining the health of the state's resources," Ferrella said.

Ferrella coordinates with other agencies on environmental issues and

conducts environmental reviews for areas of potential development in order to address the presence or absence of threatened and endangered species. She also investigates fish kills to determine if the kill was a result of natural causes or pollutants. She is currently working with investigators from other agencies to determine the cause of the golden algal bloom in Lake Texoma.

Ferrella's previous experience working for the Oklahoma Water Resources Board in the Water Quality Standards Section makes her a great fit for this position.

Ferrella holds a bachelor's degree in Biology from the University of Central Oklahoma and is currently obtaining a masters degree from the University of Oklahoma studying larval insect (chironomidae) communities of Lake Texoma.

Conference Will Follow-Up Public Meetings

Important input was received at the statewide public meetings for the development of Oklahoma's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS). The strategy will ultimately lay a framework for the most effective use of State Wildlife Grant funding.

Focusing on future conservation needs of Oklahoma's fish and wildlife resources, public meeting attendees' top issues were habitat, wildlife management, problem species, land access, Department staffing and funding, research into habitat needs and population status, and user conflicts.

That was stage one. Stage two will be conducted at a Wildlife Department sponsored conference July 13-15. Wildlife professionals from across Oklahoma will gather in Stillwater to address solutions to the needs raised in the public meetings and to determine additional needs and solutions for managing species of greatest conservation need. Anyone with an interest in Oklahoma's wildlife is invited, and individuals with a knowledge of specific species, habitats or conservation actions are especially encouraged to attend.

For more information log onto wildlifedepartment.com. To register for the conference, send an e-mail to spencer.a@bresnan.net.

Accounts from the wild side...

Have you ever asked a birder how he became interested in birding? Some birders, like biologist Mark Howery, have had an intrinsic connection with birds their entire lives. Others can trace the connection to a specific event.

"As far back as I can remember I had an interest in animals," Mark recalls. "I got attached to birds somewhere between quail hunting with my dad and feeding birds in the backyard."

A chance encounter at the end of her driveway turned newsletter reader Carol Selman of Newalla, OK onto birds. As Carol was driving the long, curving drive to her home in the country, she "spotted two birds right at the edge of the road."

"One bird was a dull green and appeared unimpressed by the other, more brightly colored, little bird dancing around it in circles," she recalled.

The flicking of the male's blue, green and red feathers reminded Carol of "a brave young Indian all dressed up in his finery. His wings spread as he turned right and then left.

"I had never heard of, let alone seen, a painted bunting," Carol mused, "What a thrill! I later learned that another name for this beauty is 'Nonpareil,' which means, without equal. This was the event that got me really interested in birding."

The articles on pages 6 - 9 illustrate a couple of places in Oklahoma to find yourself surrounded by a dizzying array of avian species. Whether you're an avid birder or looking to be bitten by the birding bug, you'll want to discover these places for yourself.

Fishes of Oklahoma Exhibit at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art 2nd Floor Gallery, May 6 - Oct. 27, 2004

The Oklahoma City Museum of Art, along with sponsors Bass Pro Shops and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, present an a'luring exhibition.

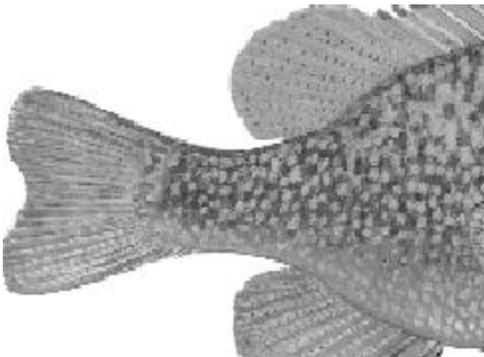
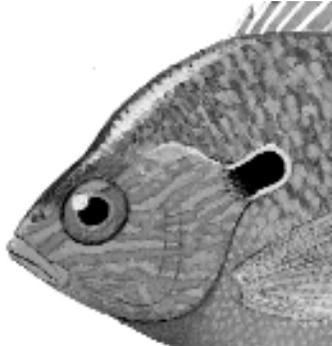
Fishes of Oklahoma: Illustrations by Rudy Miller exhibits seventy-three original, vibrant acrylic paintings of fish found throughout Oklahoma. The exhibition, which opened May 6 at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art, will run through October 17.

Artist Rudy Miller retired early from a productive career as a Professor of Ichthyology at Oklahoma State University in 1990 to pursue his passion, painting, full-time. As an illustrator of scientific works, including his own, Miller has developed a reputation for precision and accuracy.

"This gifted ichthyologist is both a skilled draftsman and scientist," said Chief Curator Hardy George, Ph.D. "He brings together these disciplines in his extraordinary acrylics."

The exhibit heralds the second edition publication of Miller's collaboration with author Henry Robinson, *The Fishes of Oklahoma*. This 300-page full-color book,

published by the University of Oklahoma Press, will be available this summer.



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.

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with comments, article ideas or
suggestions.*



Sounds Of Spring: A Celebration of Oklahoma's Frogs and Toads

- by Julian Hilliard

This springtime, like countless seasons before, most of Oklahoma's species of frogs and toads will celebrate the warm, wet evenings with loud socializing in preparation for reproduction. Many people, myself included, have fond childhood memories of spring evenings with a background chorus of frog calls, encouraging in us an indelible love of the natural world.

Spring comes early to the wet, wooded areas of eastern Oklahoma when spring peepers (*Pseudacris crucifer*) call by the hundreds from small pools and creeks. Calling may begin as early as January or February. The combination of short, high-pitched calls sound like the jingling of tiny bells.

Often heard along with the 'peepers,' are the calls of dwarf American toads (*Bufo americanus*). In large numbers, their long drawn-out trill produces a mesmerizing, dream-like effect. Like other members of the genus *Bufo*, the female dwarf American toad produces well over a thousand small black eggs in two long strands. These soon hatch, releasing tiny black tadpoles or "toad poles," which constitute the future of the species.

In central Oklahoma, the first frog calls heard are usually those of our two leopard frog species, the Southern leopard frog (*Rana sphenoccephala*) and the Plains leopard frog (*Rana blairi*). Both of these species commonly reproduce in early spring. The males call females to their pools with a chuckling, croaking call.

Many frog species create several different sounds, but the general term, advertisement call, is used to describe the classic female-attracting call made by male frogs and toads.

A very different advertisement call, heard from April through July, comes from central Oklahoma's gray treefrog (*Hyla versicolor*). Males of this species produce an

As a frog calls, air from the lungs travels over the vocal cords and into the vocal sacs. Vocal sacs are pouches of skin that fill with air to amplify sound like an echo chamber; they are only found on males. This spring peeper measures .75" - 1.5" but can advertise over great distances due to its large vocal sacs.

attractive short trill from high in trees located near shallow water. This advertisement call also acts as a territorial call warning rival males to stay away unless they want a fight.

Research into the vocalization of frogs and toads has shown that certain patterns of seasonal temperature change tell male frogs to begin advertising for a female. As evening approaches during the right time of year, a drop in temperature inspires calling, as well as movement toward a potential breeding pool. Because frogs and toads are cold-blooded, variations in temperature can affect the speed and tone of the calls produced. This humorous phenomenon can be so pronounced, in fact, that even experts may have difficulty distinguishing frog calls when temperatures are unseasonable.

Despite all of this springtime calling, a few Oklahoma frog species call and reproduce nearly year-round, even multiple times per year. Blanchard's cricket frog (*Acris crepitans*), for example, can be heard statewide, making its distinctive "banging marbles" chirp after a rain in all but the coldest weather. This is also true of the familiar bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*), which is well-known for preying heavily on other species of frogs and for its ability to

reproduce rapidly.

Learning to identify local species of frogs and toads by their calls is fun and fairly easy these days with the Internet and other resources at our disposal. I recommend visiting sites such as www.naturesound.com/frogs/frogs.html and <http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/topics/frogCalls.html> To purchase recordings of frog calls, check out local birding stores, book stores and music stores.



The American toad shown as an adult (above) and as a tadpole (below). Photos courtesy Missouri Department of Conservation.



MISSOURI DEPT OF CONSERVATION

-- Julian Hilliard, a former Wildlife Department biologist, is currently a professor of biology and anatomy at Oklahoma City Community College

State Wildlife Grant Projects in Oklahoma

State Wildlife Grant projects are possible in part due to your support. As a recent cost-share program, the federal government partially reimburses the Wildlife Department for project dollars spent. When you purchase a wildlife conservation tag, products or make a donation, you are supporting the Natural Resources Section, its Wildlife Diversity Program and State Wildlife Grant projects. THANK YOU! Take a look at four of the 30 projects made possible through this new funding source.

"To cherish what remains of the Earth and to foster its renewal is our only legitimate hope of survival."

—Wendell Berry: a strong defender of family, rural communities and traditional family farms



Assisting Declining Species

Since 1966, more than half of all songbirds and other birds that migrate to the tropics have declined. Wildlife don't recognize state boundaries, so effective conservation efforts must look beyond them, as well. The Wildlife Department is a member of a multi-state partnership of state and federal wildlife agencies working to develop conservation plans for habitats that are

important for rare or declining migratory birds. Healthy habitats should result in secure, regional bird populations - thus illuminating the potential for these species to appear on the list of endangered or threatened species. This regional partnership is part of a larger bird conservation initiative spanning three countries - Canada, Mexico and the United States - called the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.

Combining Extant Data

The University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University are creating a digital atlas that will show the present and historic distribution of stream fish statewide. Years of research and data from both institutions will be combined into this valuable research and educational tool.

Promoting Nature Tourism Efforts

The Department is assisting in the development of the Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma. The trail is a highway-based, wildlife-viewing trail running through the western half of the state. The trail consists of 12 loops selected on the dual merits of wildlife-viewing and tourism opportunities. It aims to draw visitors to Oklahoma's wildlife, history, culture and recreational opportunities. The trail should be operational by 2005. The project is managed through the Oklahoma Wildlife and Prairie Heritage Alliance with guidance and support provided by the Wildlife Department.

Assessing Aquatic Communities



The Ouachita Mountains of Oklahoma and Arkansas support four species of crayfish found nowhere else in the world. The small geographic range and small overall population makes these crayfish vulnerable to habitat changes and puts them at risk

for decline. Fortunately, crayfish respond well to conservation programs. They are tolerant of fluctuations in water quality and have low extinction rates. The Crayfish Survey Project will document the current distribution and status of these species and identify the most effective conservation measures to keep these species locally common and secure.

THE STATE/FEDERAL WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP

State and Federal Government have had a strong partnership in the conservation of hunted, fished and threatened and endangered species. State Wildlife Grants extends that support to all wildlife.

A condensed history:

In 1937 Congress approved The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, popularly known as the Pittman-Robertson Act. This Act

provides funding for wildlife that are hunted and has been very successful in recovering populations of deer, turkey and other game animals.

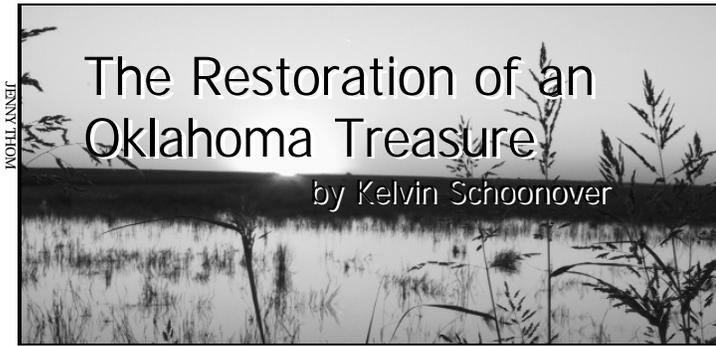
In 1950, recognizing the decline in recreational fish species due to habitat loss and over fishing, Congress passed The Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act. The Act provides federal aid to states and has been instrumental in increasing pop-

ulations of largemouth bass, striped bass and saugeye.

The Endangered Species Act of 1973 is a program for the conservation of threatened and endangered plants and animals and the habitats in which they are found. This Act is responsible for saving the bald eagle, American alligator and peregrine falcon from extinction. The list of threatened and endangered species grows every year. It was a list of 126

species in 1973 and contains 1263 species today.

These federal programs cover the needs of 14 percent of the nation's wildlife. A permanent federal act does not exist to address the needs of the remaining 86 percent. Through yearly appropriations, State Wildlife Grants is beginning to fill the funding gap in wildlife conservation.



In 1994 the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation embarked on a journey to restore a historically significant wetland in southwest Oklahoma known as Hackberry Flat. Ducks Unlimited recognized it as one of the most important wetland restoration projects in North America.

Hackberry Flat Wildlife Management Area (WMA) covers 7,120-acres in Tillman County. The WMA includes a 3,700-acre, semi-permanent, depressional wetland. It was drained

in the early 1900's for farming. Prior to its draining, area homesteaders witnessed flocks of waterfowl, cranes and shorebirds so thick they darkened the sky over the area. Today reclaimed from nearly a century of intensive farming, Hackberry Flat once again offers its rich fertile soils to countless numbers of migratory birds.

I remember seeing an Outdoor Oklahoma program on Hackberry Flat sometime in 1994 while attending college and thought, "how great would it be to get to work at and be a part of such a place?" I found out in February 1995 when I was fortunate enough to be hired as a wildlife technician to help with the restoration project.

The infamous phrase, "If you build it, they will come," from the movie "Field of Dreams," seems to fit the restoration of Hackberry Flat. We constructed approximately 35 miles of dikes, six miles of water distribution canals and 90 water control structures to help obtain the most diversity of wetland habitats for wildlife. I marveled as I watched the enormous magnetic draw a restored Hackberry Flat had on migratory birds.

Annual wet/dry cycles provide the nutrient base for life at Hackberry Flat. Moist soil management strategies implemented at Hackberry help mimic these natural cycles by flooding or drawing down a wetland, thus creating saturated, exposed soils that promote the growth of annual wetland vegetation. Invertebrates such as zooplankton, insect larvae and crustaceans feast on the decaying vegetation and thrive in the water and mud, providing an endless supply of food for migrating birds. After construction, and with the major components in place, the phrase, "just add water" comes to mind.

Located in the central flyway, Hackberry Flat is one of several important "gas stations" for migratory birds. It is nestled between Quivira National Wildlife Refuge and Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Management Area in Kansas, Salt Plains Wildlife Refuge in northern Oklahoma and the Texas gulf coast to the south. Birds stop here to rest and refuel during annual migratory treks.

Hackberry Flat's 7,120 acres offer a wide diversity of avian life for all birding enthusiasts from beginners to professionals. Of the 42 groups of birds listed in the National Audubon Society's "The Sibley Guide to Birds," 23 groups are represented at Hackberry Flat with a total of approximately

189 species reported. A majority of these species can be seen during the spring migration from March 15 to May 15 with April being the best overall month.

As the shallow water in the wetlands warm up, insects emerge by the thousands just in time for the peak of migration. Good numbers of waterfowl, shorebirds and wading birds are using the area at this time, as well. Some will stay to nest, others will make their way north to ancestral breeding grounds.

Many species of songbirds use the 3,420 acres of upland habitats found in the WMA, including Eastern and Western meadowlark, dickcissel, vesper sparrow, Le Conte's sparrow, and longspur sparrow, to name a few. Several raptors associated with upland habitats frequent the area. They include Swainson's hawk, American kestrel, Cooper's hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, rough-legged hawk, ferruginous hawk, Harlen's red-tailed hawk, merlin and prairie falcon.

At Hackberry, birders have the awesome opportunity to watch large flocks of shorebirds – so thick they look like plumes of smoke - rise from a mudflat while a peregrine falcon stoops from its lofty height to knock a sandpiper from the air.

Without a doubt, the large concentrations of waterfowl and shorebirds during their spring migration are the biggest attractions for birders.

Nearly all waterfowl species that use the central flyway, about 30 in total, have been reported at Hackberry Flat. Species such as Northern pintail, green-winged teal, cinnamon teal, American wigeon, Northern shoveler are common with mallard and blue-



winged teal reported nesting. Rare waterfowl visitors include trumpeter swan, black-bellied whistling-duck, and greater scaup.

Shorebirds are an interesting group of birds whose habitat is limited for the most part to wetlands, mudflats, coastlines, and reservoirs. They range in size from the tiny, sparrow-sized least sandpiper to the crow-sized long-billed curlew.

Before I came to Hackberry Flat, the shorebird section in my field guides set off warnings in my head, "Stop don't go in there; you'll get lost!" This is not so now. Hackberry Flat offers excellent viewing opportunities for shorebirds, and I soon found my way.

Of the 34 or so species of shorebirds that migrate throughout Oklahoma, 33 species have been reported at Hackberry Flat. Not only were American avocet, black-necked stilt and Wilson's phalarope nesting at Hackberry within the first year of the restoration project, that was the first documentation of nesting for those species in southwest Oklahoma. The sighting record for one day is 24 species - not bad for a day of bird watching in one of the hottest and driest areas of Oklahoma.

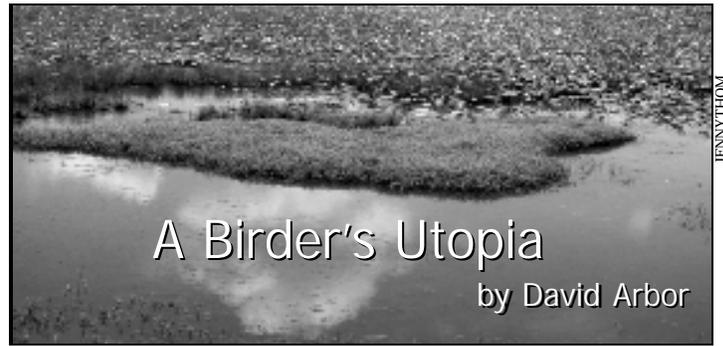
One of the greatest advantages to birding at Hackberry is its accessibility. Even the most remote areas are not much further than a half mile from a road, and most of the roads are gravel. Visitors are able to bird and view wildlife from their vehicles. Those that want to hike around are welcome to walk the 30-plus miles of dikes for a closer look at the area. Walking increases the chance of seeing secretive species such as sora, king rail, marsh wren, American bittern and least bittern.

Hackberry Flat WMA is south of Frederick, OK. From Frederick, take SH 183 south one mile, east three miles, south again for six miles, then east one mile. Now enjoy! For more information on bird watching at Hackberry Flat, contact Kelvin Schoonover at (580) 335-5262 or visit the web at wildlifedepartment.com.

- *Wildlife Biologist Kelvin Schoonover is Area Manager at the Wildlife Department's Hackberry Flat WMA*



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JENNY THOM

A Birder's Utopia

by David Arbor

It is June and daybreak finds you standing beside a wetland rich with wildlife. A slight breeze flows across the water, gently stirring the emerging rushes and sedges. A steady stream of great and snowy egrets, little-blue herons and whit ibis fly overhead as they leave nearby, nighttime roosts. The wetland before you fills as they land. Amidst a chorus of cricket frogs and occasional bullfrog call, you hear the territorial "kek" of a king rail from within the nearby rushes. King rails are secretive, chicken-like, marsh birds that are more often heard than seen.

As you walk along the edge of the wetland you soon flush up a small, buff-colored, heron-like bird that was hidden in the emergent vegetation. You raise your binoculars as it flies away and identify it as a least bittern - another secretive marsh species.

Continuing on, you approach an observation platform overlooking the wetland. From the elevated position on top of the platform, you scan for wildlife. Across the open water, in the middle of the marsh, a bird walks on floating vegetation. With the aid of a spotting scope you find yourself admiring the most beautiful bird of the marsh - the purple gallinule. The morning sun illuminates its red and yellow bill and bright blue and green plumage as it uses its extremely long toes to continue walking along the top of the water via vegetation.

A painted bunting, another breathtakingly beautiful bird, calls from a shrubby field across the levee behind you. You focus your attention on that habitat and hear the burry calls of the Bell's vireo and the "wichity-wichity" calls of the common yellowthroat.

Looking across this shrubby field to the next wetland unit through the spotting scope you notice a small flock of very large, white waders feeding in open water. Closer scrutiny reveals that these birds have bald, grayish heads, and extremely large, heavy bills. You watch them swing their partially open bills back and forth in the shallow water as they feed. A few take off into the air and you muse to yourself that they look like prehistoric pterodactyls. They are wood storks and are post-breeding dispersals from their nesting grounds in southern Mexico. They nest down there in late winter and spend their summers at this wetland, tak-



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ing advantage of these food-rich waters.

Feeding next to the wood storks are an array of common herons and egrets. One heron with a strange feeding behavior catches your attention. It is a little smaller and slimmer than the other herons and has a white belly and extremely long bill. Long, buff-colored plumes hang down its back. It actively runs about and spreads its wings out and forward in what is called “canopy” feeding. This is the tricolored heron, a species more commonly found further south on the Gulf Coast. It occurs in this area as a rare breeder in small numbers.

Turning back to the wetland next to the observation platform, you try to relocate the gallinule again. You soon relocate her closer to the emergent vegetation edge and notice five, downy chicks following her around. The chicks seem wary about coming too far out into the open.

Nearby, a close relative of the gallinule, a common moorhen, swims in open water along the edge of the floating vegetation, picking insects off the surface of the water. As you watch it, you hear loud whistling calls and look up to see two ducks approaching. In flight, large white wing patches and long necks catch your attention. After they land you notice that they have rufous bodies, black bellies and bright, red bills. They look out of place here, like exotics escaped from a zoo or someone’s pri-



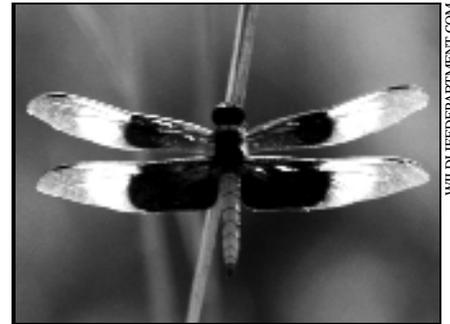
BOTH PHOTOS: CHARLES MILLS



vate waterfowl collection. Indeed, these black-bellied whistling ducks are tropical in origin. They have been expanding their range northward through Texas from Mexico over the past century and now occur here in summer as rare breeders in small numbers. Their presence adds something special to the wetlands. Seeing them alongside Neotropical cormorants, another tropical species now occurring here, it feels like you’re birding in a wetland in south Texas or even further south.

Leaving the platform and continuing your walk down the levee, you marvel at the numbers and diversity of dragonflies working over the marsh. Darners, skimmers, clubtails, and even pennants, many very colorful, swarm back and forth.

Thanks to them, mosquitoes are fairly rare here during the day. Walking the levee, you notice small top-minnows called mosquito fish darting out from the shoreline on the water’s surface into deeper, open



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water as you pass. Suddenly you catch a glimpse of white and look up to find a least tern hovering beside you over the water. As you watch in amazement it dives down and catches one of the mosquito fish you just flushed out from the shoreline. Interior least terns are an endangered species and occur here in fair numbers. They nest nearby on the sand islands of a large river.

It is mid-morning now and you are a couple miles away visiting another wetland unit and adjacent reservoirs. High in the sky above you Mississippi kites are soaring and diving after dragonflies. From a moist thicket of young willows and shrubs comes the sneezy “fitz-bew” call of the willow fly-catcher as it proclaims its territory. The species breeds here

in small numbers, which is unusual as they are about 200 miles south of their normal breeding range. Scanning through the rushes growing in the shallow end of one of the small reservoirs, you spot a juvenile American bittern sitting in wait for the return of its parents with food. This species is also far south of its normal breeding range and yet here it

is!

You have spent the morning at a very special place. By

now, I'm sure you are wondering where this birding utopia is. Texas? Louisiana? Would you believe it is right here in Oklahoma? Red Slough Wildlife Management Area (WMA) covers 7,800 acres in McCurtain County. The WMA lays on the Gulf Coastal plain along the Red River in extreme southeastern Oklahoma. The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Ducks Unlimited cooperatively manage the area.

Over 270 species of birds have been found at Red Slough WMA. Nowhere else in North America can you find northern species such as willow flycatcher and American bittern breeding side by side with southern and tropical species such as purple gallinules, black-bellied whistling ducks, and Neotropic cormorants. For more information about Red Slough, a map, and directions for getting there, visit our website at:

www.fs.fed.us/oonf/cons_ed/red_slough/red_slough/. You can also link to the site through the Department's website at www.wildlifedepartment.com/redslough.htm

- David Arbor is a naturalist at Red Slough

- Red Slough received national recognition in 2001 when it was awarded the prestigious "Taking Wing" Award for Habitat by the USDA Forest Service. The award was established in the mid-80s to improve wetland habitat for waterfowl on national forests and grasslands.

Oklahoma Wildlife Federation Activity

After a couple years of inactivity, the Oklahoma Wildlife Federation is back to work renewing memberships and striving for sound wildlife management and conservation strategies in Oklahoma. A top action item on the Federation's agenda is State Wildlife Grants. Executive Director Andy McDaniels recognized this legislation as being in-line with the Federation's "common sense in conservation" ideals.

"As the nation's core program for keeping species off the endangered species list, State Wildlife Grant funding is an issue that's easy to get behind," McDaniels said. "It's positive for Oklahoma and it's positive for the Wildlife Department. We'll support it as long as it takes to make this a permanent funding source."

The Federation's history of support for the Wildlife Department dates back half a century. In the 1950s, the Federation led the way to a state constitutional amendment that gave the Wildlife Department status separate from the state legislature. It was actively involved with the Department in the 1960s during the reintroduction of wild turkey and white-tailed deer to the state. It played an important role in the formation of the Nongame Program, today known as the Wildlife Diversity Program, in the 1980s; and it's Schoolyard Habitats Program – working in conjunction with the Department's education program, Project WILD – is shaping future conservationists, sportsmen and wildlife enthusiasts.

For more information or to become a member, e-mail okwildlife@msn.com or call (405)308-5490.

BAT FACT: A colony of 150 big brown bats can protect local farmers from up to 53 million root worms each summer.

The Wildscapes network is 448 locations strong! The following property owners are recognized for landscaping with the needs of Oklahoma's wildlife in-mind!

Garden Level	
Cert. #	Name
40	Clara Muret
Habitat Level	
Cert. #	Name
407	Jeremy Dykes
408	Gary & Barbara White

2004 BioBlitz September 10 & 11

What do biologists, bugs, mammals, reptiles, fish, plants and clocks have in common? The fourth annual BioBlitz! Be a part of the action as groups race against the clock to uncover as much biological diversity as possible in 24-hours. The 2004 BioBlitz happens September 10 and 11 in Dripping Springs State Park, Okmulgee County. To volunteer or find out more information, log onto www.biosurvey.ou.edu. The registration form will be available July 1.

Survey Results Will Be Revealed In the Fall/Winter 2003 Newsletter

The winter was relatively mild and Winter Bird Survey participants noticed the affect this had on the species and quantity of birds visiting their yards in January. Regardless, if there were feeders, there were birds! Look to the Fall/Winter newsletter for the 2004 survey results and learn if Eurasian Collared Dove reports increased from last year.

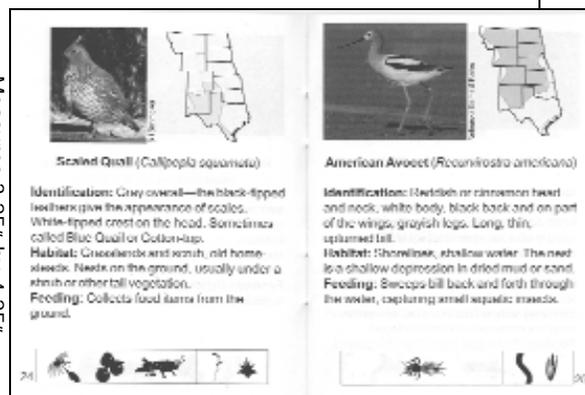
Quick Reference Bird Guide - FREE with a \$10 Donation

Wonder what birds you're seeing on road trips throughout the prairies? A "Pocket Guide to Prairie Birds," produced by the Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory, may help. Its small size makes it easy to bring along whenever you go out.

The guide shows 86 species of commonly seen birds and birds that represent specific habitats throughout the western prairie region of the United State. Emphasis is on adult birds in the breeding season.

Color-coded range maps indicate the season a bird can occur and icons show the main component of diet and primary habitats.

Measures 3.25" by 4.25"



YOURS FREE WITH A \$10 DONATION

OR buy for \$1.50 through the Outdoor Store. See order form on last page.

"Wildflower Spotters" Needed To Report Blooms

Look for "Wildflower Spotter" reports, similar to "Storm Spotter" reports, on the evening news this spring. The Oklahoma Native Plant Society is teaming up with Channel 9 (KWTV) in Oklahoma City and Channel 8 (KTUL) in Tulsa to share wildflowers in bloom across the state.

You could be a "Wildflower Spotter." All you need is a camera and e-mail. Send wildflower pictures in jpeg or tiff format to kimshannon@ou.edu.

Be sure to note the date and general location of the spotting. For example: Payne County just west of Stillwater on Hwy 51. When you see wildflowers along a highway, check to see if there is a sign indicating the area is part of the Transportation Department's Roadside Wildflower Program, and state that in the e-mail.

The reports won't work without spotters, so remember your camera when you get ready for outings. You may see your photograph on the evening news.



Thanks Extended to Supporters of the Wildlife Diversity Program

The Wildlife Diversity Program extends appreciation to the Oklahoma Bluebird Society for its \$1,000 donation. Members of the society have been instrumental in the Department's Oklahoma Nestbox Project, which has fledged 44,970 Eastern bluebirds since 1985.

The Program would also like to thank an important partner, the Oklahoma City Zoological Park. The Zoo donated \$5,000 to be used towards the short grass prairie breeding bird survey, the bat inventory, and Texas-horned lizard analysis.



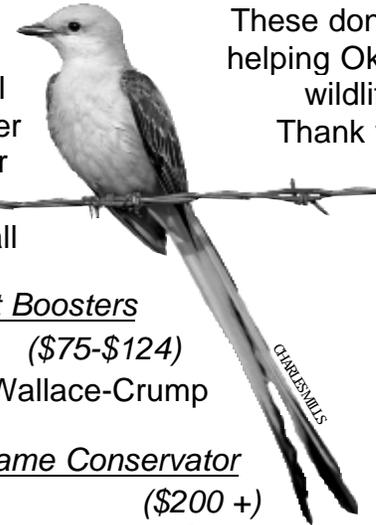
PAUL MOORE

Ron Suttles, left accepts a donation from Bert Castro, executive director C.E.O. of the Oklahoma City Zoological Park, at the Department's Commission meeting in April.

ScissorTail Supporter

(\$10-\$39)

James Krahl
Delores J. Metzger
Cynthia L. Millar
Allan J. Mui
Nancy J. Presnall



These donors are helping Oklahoma wildlife. Thank you!

Bat Boosters

(\$75-\$124)

Ann Wallace-Crump

Nongame Conservator

(\$200 +)

Oklahoma Bluebird Society
Oklahoma City Zoological Park

Citizens Share Wildlife's Needs With Oklahoma's Congressmen

Four Oklahoma citizens traveled to Washington, D.C. in February to discuss State Wildlife Grant Funding with Congressmen. The group represented Oklahoma during a conservation rally on Capitol Hill that brought together citizens from every state.

All rally participants met with their respective members of Congress to let them know the positive impacts State Wildlife Grants is having on their state and to ask for an increase in funding for 2005. This was Spike Henderson's first time to meet with Oklahoma's Senators and Representatives.

"I've been hunting, fishing and enjoying the outdoors all my life, so it was exciting to encourage our Congressmen to get behind funding that will improve the health of all the state's wildlife," Henderson said.

This wasn't the first time Hal McKnight, owner of Wheeler-Dealer bicycles in Oklahoma City and an active advocate for habitat restoration, has made the trip to Capitol Hill.

McKnight is passionate about the lands and water in

Oklahoma and feels State Wildlife Grants are essential to understanding those resources by making biological studies possible, he said.

"It's a tight fiscal year, and the final budget won't be

approved until September, but with the momentum created by this rally, an increase looks promising," McKnight said.

McKnight never minds giving his personal time to speak out for what he believes.

He said, "It's important for Congress to hear the desires of the people, and it's important to remember that every voice counts.

"I encourage anyone who believes in this to email Congress. Tell them this funding is important for the future

health of wildlife in our state and nation."

State Wildlife Grants is the nation's core program for keeping species off the Endangered Species List. For more information about the grants, go to

www.teaming.com.



Drew Owen, Andy McDaniels, Hal McKnight, Spike Henderson (left to right) met with each of Oklahoma's Congressmen to discuss increased funding for State Wildlife Grants