

The WildSide

09.24.13

Mark Howery

Greetings Wildlife Enthusiasts!

Habitat is key to wildlife conservation and viewing opportunities. Autumn has officially begun, so it's time to start transitioning your landscape to benefit wildlife during the cooler months and beyond.

"Now is a great time to plant trees, shrubs and vines that provide winter berries for birds to eat," said Melynda Hickman, wildlife diversity biologist and Wildscape Certification Program coordinator. "Planting now will establish sound roots, so when the plants leaf out in the spring, the energy stored will allow the plants to grow out well. They will need to be watered pretty well for the first two to three years and then they will be fairly low maintenance."

The benefit to providing winter foods through trees, shrubs and vines is that they perform double duty.



"If planted to create a vertical layering effect, the plantings can provide important shelter and cover for the birds in addition to providing food," said Hickman.

White oak is a tall tree that provides benefits to wildlife. Photo by Mark Howery.

Each January, the [Wildlife Diversity Program](#) enlists citizens across the state to participate in the [Winter Bird Feeder Survey](#). Survey participants are asked to provide information about their backyards and neighborhoods. Some descriptive information requested is the amount of evergreen cover and the amount of winter food plants provided in the area where feeders are located. Sixty-one percent of participants in 2013 described the area surrounding their feeders as having moderate to abundant winter food plants.

"This information serves to help us better understand what habitat elements, in conjunction with the backyard feeding stations, attract the widest variety of winter birds," Hickman said. "Without a doubt, water availability is also essential to attracting such birds as the eastern bluebird, northern mockingbird, American robin and cedar waxwing. This is often reflected in survey results."

Visit our wildlifedepartment.com to learn how to [create a certified wildscape](#). In the meantime, below is a short list of good winter food-producing plants for Oklahoma.

Tall - Moderate Trees (top layer)

Hackberry
Mulberry
Oaks
Chittamwood



Plant American beautyberry in the fall to provide food for birds during the winter months. Photo by Mark Howery.

Small Trees (middle layer)

Washington Hawthorn
American Holly
Deciduous Holly
Persimmon
Rough-leaf Dogwood

Shrubs (lowest layer)

American Beautyberry
Rusty Blackhaw
Sumac species
Strawberry-bush
Winterberry

Vines

Greenbriar
Coral Honeysuckle
Virginia Creeper
Bittersweet
Trumpet Vine



Coral honeysuckle is a vine that can be planted in the fall. Photo by Mark Howery.

An extensive plant list can be found in the Wildlife Department's publication "*Landscaping for Wildlife: A Guide to the Southern Great Plains*." Visit okwinterbirds.com for more information on winter birds in Oklahoma or connect with us online.



Enjoy,

Rachel

Rachel Bradley
Wildlife Diversity Information Specialist



The Dirty Dozen

By Rori Buresh, wildlife diversity intern

The Oklahoma Invasive Plant Council (OkIPC) has developed a list of the worst invasive plant species in Oklahoma; it is called "[The Dirty Dozen](#)." The completed list is now available for biologists, policymakers, educators, landowners and anyone else interested in species that threaten Oklahoma's native habitats. It is OkIPC's hope that the list will be

useful in focusing awareness and attention on this threat to Oklahoma's natural diversity for those concerned with protecting wildlife resources, as well as landowners wanting to protect the value of their land. Keep this baker's dozen on your radar!

The [Dirty Dozen](#) highlights thirteen species of both a terrestrial and an aquatic nature. Some species included are yellow bluestem, sericea lespedeza, Russian thistle, saltcedar and hydrilla. Characteristics that make these plant species invasive include effective dispersal, plentiful seed production, long seed viability and tolerance to Oklahoma's various environmental conditions.

Eastern redcedar is the only species native to Oklahoma on the Dirty Dozen list. Eastern redcedar is on the invasive list because of the encroachment of these trees into native prairies that historically contained very few trees. This is a

result of poor land management and fire suppression.

Hydrilla, a popular aquarium plant, has been termed the most damaging aquatic weed in the US. It is known to entirely take over and transform diverse plant communities into monotypic habitats. It has already become established in Arbuckle Lake, Lake Murray and Sooner Lake in Oklahoma.

To prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species, clean, drain and dry your boats and other watercraft. Never release plants into public waters. Prevent the spread of terrestrial invasive plants by removing any dirt or seeds from shoes, recreational equipment and vehicles. Be mindful of exotic species found around your area and do not move exotics to areas with native vegetation.



Sericea lespedeza. Photo by Jay Pruett.



Johnson grass. Photo by Jay Pruett

The OkIPC is currently working on a watch list of invasive plants that are beginning to be seen in the state that could potentially become Dirty Dozen contenders. To see the complete Dirty Dozen list, visit the [OkIPC website](#).



Eastern redcedar female with berries. Photo by Jay Pruett.

BioBlitz! 2013 Registration Now Open

Registration for the 2013 [Oklahoma BioBlitz!](#) is now open! Reserve your spot today and experience a rapid, 24-hour biodiversity inventory at [Camp Simpson](#) in Johnston County from Oct. 11-13.

Participants become citizen scientists as they attend their choice of bird walks, reptile and amphibian walks, dragon fly walks, and examine soil invertebrates and bees with local experts.

[Register online](#) today and email prill@ou.edu to be on the mailing list. The cost is \$8 for students and \$15 for non-students. Registration includes a t-shirt, camping spot at event site, Friday night meal, Saturday light breakfast and 24 hours of biodiversity!

Last year, 292 expert and citizen biologists found 866 species at Foss State Park and Washita National Wildlife Refuge during BioBlitz!

BioBlitz! Oklahoma is a project of the Oklahoma Biological Survey and the University of Oklahoma. It began in 2001 at Sutton Urban Wilderness Area in Norman. Since then, it has moved around the state to places such as Boiling Springs State Park, Great Salt Plains State Park and Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge, Kaw Lake and Camp McFadden. The locations are announced a year in advance during the BioBlitz! closing ceremony.

Go like them on [Facebook](#) for more information!



BioBlitz! is a great way for families of all ages to become Citizen Scientists. Photo by Rachel Bradley.

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Adds
Two Mussels to the Endangered**

Species Act

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) listed the Neosho mucket as endangered and the rabbitsfoot as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Both species are freshwater mussels found in river systems in the eastern half of the United States, including those in Oklahoma.

The Neosho mucket's historic geographic range has always been small. It is limited to the Verdigris River and Grand/Neosho River systems in northeastern Oklahoma, southeastern Kansas, southwestern Missouri and extreme northwestern Arkansas. It has been eliminated from about 62 percent of its historic range and currently occurs in only nine isolated stream and river segments. The only Neosho mucket populations in Oklahoma occur in the Illinois and Spring rivers.

The rabbitsfoot has disappeared from about 64 percent of its historic range. However, most of the decline has occurred in populations east of the Mississippi River. Rabbitsfoot populations remain in 51 stream and river segments, but the FWS is concerned that only 11 populations (22 percent of its existing populations) are likely to remain viable in the future. The remaining 40 populations may be at risk because 23 populations (45 percent of the existing populations) appear to be extremely small. There are 17 populations (33 percent of the current populations) showing limited reproduction with little evidence of sustainability. The rabbitsfoot is currently found in Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Tennessee, but it is no longer found in Georgia and West Virginia.

In listing the two mussels, the FWS evaluated factors that could lead to their extinction. Threats to these mussels include loss and degradation of stream and river habitat due to impoundments, channelization, chemical contaminants, mining and sedimentation. Freshwater mussels require clean water; their decline often signals a decline in the water quality of the streams and rivers they inhabit.



M. C. Barnhart

The Neosho mucket is now listed as federally endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Photo by M. Chris Barnhart, FWS.

The FWS's final rule listing the Neosho mucket and the rabbitsfoot appears in the Sept. 17, 2013, Federal Register. The protection for these mussel species under the ESA becomes effective 30 days after the rule is published in the Federal Register. The ultimate goal of the ESA is the recovery of these listed species, so that they no longer need the protective measures of the ESA. The next step is development of a recovery plan that provides a guidebook for the FWS and its conservation partners to address threats to the species' survival and recovery. When completed, the recovery plan will be available on the FWS's [website](#).



It is illegal under the ESA to kill, harm or otherwise "take" a listed species, or to possess, import, export or conduct interstate or international commerce without authorization from the FWS. The ESA also requires all federal agencies to ensure actions they authorize, fund, or undertake do not jeopardize the existence of listed species.

The rabbitsfoot is now listed as federally threatened by the FWS. Photo by Georgia Parham, FWS.

SEAFWA Registration/Lodging Scholarship Available for College Students

The [Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation \(ODWC\)](#) is sponsoring the 67th Annual Conference of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA) in Oklahoma City from Oct. 13-16. The ODWC Conservation Scholarship Program is offering scholarships that will pay for Oklahoma students' **registration and lodging** to this year's conference.

The [SEAFWA](#) annual conference provides a forum for presentation of information and exchange of ideas regarding the management and protection of fish and wildlife resources throughout the nation but with emphasis on the southeast region. Representatives from state and federal agencies, citizens organizations, universities and private wildlife research groups present their latest findings relative to resource management, both through scientific research and actual case histories. Fisheries and wildlife scientists present peer reviewed papers at their respective sessions. Agency enforcement personnel exchange information on tactics and mutual problems, and agency attorneys discuss the latest developments in wildlife law and other pertinent legal issues. Information and education personnel address relative communication, marketing and public relations matters. The conference provides a well-

balanced exchange of ideas and information of significant benefit to the conservation community in its efforts to manage fish and wildlife resources.

Scholarship Guidelines

Applicants must be registered as a full-time Oklahoma college student pursuing a career in the field of natural resources conservation with a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 or higher (4.0 scale). Selections are based on a first-come basis without discrimination to race, sex, religion, age or national origin. Approved fields of study are listed below:

- - **Geographic Information Systems**
 - **Forest Resources**
 - **Fisheries and Wildlife Biology**
 - **Environmental Science**
 - **Environmental Studies**
 - **Forestry**
 - **Wildlife Ecology and Management**
 - **Wildlife Management**
 - **Education**
 - **Conservation Management**
 - **Biology**
 - **Criminal Justice**
 - **Zoology**
 - **Botany**
 - **Animal Science**
 - **Recreation and Park Administration**
 - **Agriculture**
 - **Criminal Science**
 - **Fisheries Management**

Scholarship Conditions

The scholarship covers the student's registration fee of \$150 and lodging for the 2013 SEAFWA Conference. Applicants must submit an application along with their most recent official transcript and a letter of recommendation from their academic adviser attesting to the applicant's declared major, cumulative hours and cumulative GPA. Applications must be received by 4:30 p.m. Friday, Sept. 27. The

scholarship is paid directly to SEAFWA. **To receive an application**, contact Rachel Bradley by email at info@odwc.state.ok.us or by calling (405) 521-3855.

In Other Words

Reminder! There will be no Wildlife Expo at the Lazy E Arena this year. The Wildlife Expo will return on Sept. 27-29, 2014.

[Hunter Education](#) is now offered [online](#) for children 10 years and older. However, classroom courses will still be offered statewide.

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



Deciduous holly is a great tree for feeding birds. Photo by Mark Howery.

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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