



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

Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma

View Wildlife In America's Heartland

A road-based, wildlife viewing trail is coming to a highway near you in summer 2005-- the Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma. The trail, consisting of 12 – 13 loops, tells the story of the Great Plains. From buffalo and massacres to dust bowls and sod houses, the people of the region have always relied upon the land for survival.

The trail will highlight the unique landscapes, history, wildlife and charming small town hospitality found throughout the western half of the state. From its strong Native American heritage to its natural icons like the Wichita Mountains, Black Kettle National Grasslands, Black

Mesa, Little Sahara, Alabaster Caverns and Great Salt Plains, western Oklahoma exhibits a sense of American history that has all but vanished elsewhere in the country.

The trail's formation is a tale of synchronicity. Traveling back in time four years, the state of Oklahoma received a federal grant from a new program called the Wildlife and Conservation Reinvestment Act, a pre-cursor to State Wildlife Grants. The Wildlife Department envisioned using the funds to develop a wildlife trail but knew the project would need strong community support to succeed.

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Western Oklahoma Offers Opportunities To See:

- 220 Bird species
- 79 Mammal species
- 92 Reptile & Amphibian species
- 57 Fish species
- 80 Butterfly species

The trail is projected to increase domestic travel in Oklahoma by 2 percent. A 1 percent raise would increase state revenue by \$114 million.

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Winter Bird Survey 2004 Results

When the air turns brisk and snow blankets the ground, birds begin congregating at backyard buffets of black-oil sunflower seed, suet cakes and other treats. Humans, who cater these feasts, enjoy watching the playful, feisty, and sometimes gluttonous, visitors. Many Oklahoma bird-feeder caterers take bird viewing one step further and contribute to science by participating in the annual Winter Bird Survey.

Oklahoma residents help state biologists track the upward and downward trends in bird appearances at winter feeders. Bird populations vary from year to year, and by gauging changes, the survey helps biologists recognize if fluctuations are normal, point to range expansions or contractions, and warn of potential conservation problems.

Participant Jana Wilson of Choctaw has contributed to the survey for eight years. She enjoys

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A Thought From the Editor

There are no playa lakes in Missouri, the state I moved here from one and a half years ago. I first learned about playas this past summer while working with fifth through seventh graders who were attending a Playa Lakes Festival in Goodwell, Oklahoma. I became intrigued. These ephemeral wetlands are intricately connected to wildlife diversity and our own survival in northwest Oklahoma and throughout the entire Great Plains.

After spending a few days with the children and biologists, I asked one group of children what a playa was. They told me. I then asked if they had known that before the festival. None of them had. While you didn't have the opportunity to learn about playas then, Debbie Slobe, communications team leader for the Playa Lakes Joint Venture, gives you that chance on page 7.

Seeing and hearing signs of wildlife activity during a recent hike rekindled the excitement of watching and learning about the critters that live next door to us all. It reminds me of the important research we're beginning

through the state wildlife grants program and keeps me excited about our state's Wildlife Conservation Strategy discussed on this page. Some weekends I'm tempted to sit by the fire and enjoy a good book or movie, but the birds flocking to my porch feeders entice me towards the outdoors once again. They're calling you, too. You can capture those moments and become more familiar with your outdoor neighbors during the Winter Bird Survey period. You'll find the survey form on page 8.

2005 looms on the horizon, and the Wildlife Department strives to increase your opportunities to connect with nature. By the end of the next year, the Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma will be ready for your perusal. All you'll need is a vehicle, camera and binoculars - optional, though recommended - and a desire to experience the wildlife and cultural heritage of Western Oklahoma.

Our world is an animated one — look out and enjoy it. *-Jenny Thom*

[Great Plains Trail Continued]

about the status of the lesser prairie chicken. They were also desperately looking for a way to create economic stimuli using the area's abundant natural resources, according to Trapper Heglin, coordinator for the organization.

The collaboration of the two groups was a perfect match. The federal grant helped formalize the grassroots organization into what is today known as the Oklahoma Wildlife and Prairie Heritage Alliance. The Alliance's reach includes a broad spectrum of regional stakeholders, including landowners, business owners, state and federal agencies, non-governmental agencies and conservation organizations. One project of the Alliance is the oversight of the Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma. The Wildlife Department is helping with the design process, but it is the local communities that are making the trail a reality.

Look for more about the trail in the Spring/Summer issue of "The Wild Side." In the mean time, quench your curiosity and enthusiasm by reading more at www.owpha.org.

Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy

Why it's being developed and what it will accomplish

By Mark Howery

The Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy lays a framework for conserving Oklahoma's diversity of wildlife species and their habitats. Each state wildlife conservation agency in America is developing a similar document, and the finished products will demonstrate a strong need for a stable source of wildlife conservation funding for rare and uncommon species not eligible for funding under existing programs for endangered species, game species and sport fish.

The U.S. Congress has required this Strategy's development as part of the State Wildlife Grants (SWG) program, which emerged in 2001 as a result of the untiring, seven-year effort of the Teaming With Wildlife coalition. Although not a permanent program, Congress will decide whether or not to reauthorize SWG in 2006, it represents the beginning steps necessary to address conservation needs for 86% of the nation's wildlife.

Over the past four years, the Wildlife Department has received approximately \$2.9 million in State

Wildlife Grants funding. The Federal 2005 budget includes nearly \$800,000 in SWG funding for Oklahoma. The Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy will help guide how the state spends SWG funding.

The Strategy presents the Wildlife Department with an opportunity to integrate the perspectives of public and technical experts on wildlife conservation needs and priorities. A wide range of conservation partners, including state and federal conservation agencies, nonprofit organizations and individual landowners, will benefit.

The Strategy identifies a list of wildlife species considered to be in greatest need of conservation. It also includes information on the distribution and abundance of these species, as well as the extent and condition of their habitats. Through this information-seeking process, biological information gaps were identified that need to be addressed in order to successfully integrate the habitat needs of the diverse array of birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates in

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Golden Alga In Oklahoma

By Ferrella March

Golden alga (*Pyramnesium parvum*) is a naturally occurring type of algae found worldwide in both marine and freshwater systems. It is a tiny single celled organism with yellow-green or golden-brown pigments. A golden alga bloom produces a toxin, which given the right environmental factors, is capable of killing fish and other gill-breathing organisms such as mussels. Golden alga is not harmful to humans, other wildlife or livestock, however.

The first documented case of golden alga in North America occurred in Texas in 1985 and has since been documented in nine other states, including Oklahoma. It first occurred in Oklahoma in January 2004. Wildlife Department biologists investigated a fish kill in a tributary to the Red River and verified the presence of golden alga. Then in August, the Altus City Lake experienced a fish kill as a result of a golden alga bloom.

Biologists are currently working to understand golden alga and the factors that lead to a toxic bloom. Golden alga blooms typically occur in saline (salty) water, during winter months when water is cooler, when nutrient

levels in the water are high, and in water with less healthy green algae. Affected waters often appear golden in color and may froth with foam.

The Wildlife Department organized the Oklahoma Golden Alga Response



Nine states have documented golden alga blooms since the plant first appeared in 1985.

Team (OGART) to proactively respond to the economic, recreational and ecological consequences of golden alga blooms. Members of OGART represent Oklahoma state agencies, other states, federal agencies and academia. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is an important member and has been instrumental in preparing Oklahoma for the potential spread of golden alga. For more information, go to www.wildlifedepartment.com/nuisancespecies.htm.

The Wildlife Diversity Program is responsible for monitoring, managing and promoting Oklahoma's wildlife species not fished or hunted.

The program is found within the Natural Resources Section of the Wildlife Department.

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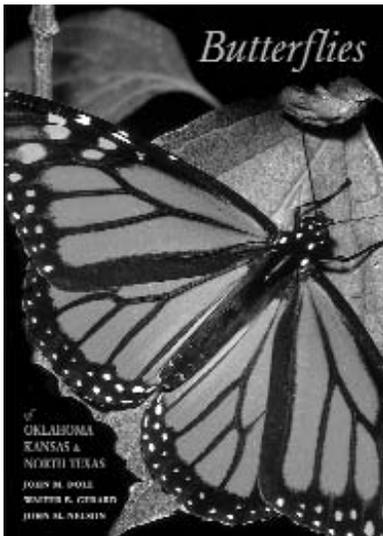
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This newsletter published free for Oklahoma's wildlife and outdoor enthusiasts.

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ideas or suggestions.

Butterfly Guide Book: A Perfect Source To Learn To ID, Attract and Raise Butterflies



“Butterflies of Oklahoma, Kansas and North Texas” introduces readers to 100 butterfly species found in the southern Great Plains. In addition to identification, this complete yet compact, user-friendly guide includes butterfly gardening, photography, viewing hotspots and survival information.

Biologist Melynda Hickman found the guide straightforward and unique.

“It identifies 75 percent or more of the species in this region, and the identification tips are the most useful I’ve ever read. This book is an excellent introduction to the amazing butterfly diversity of the southern Great Plains,” she said.

Hickman thinks butterflying is fast becoming as popular as birding. This 282-page, 5” by 7,” colored guide fits easily into daypacks, car consoles and glove compartments. It’s available through the outdoor store for \$16 plus \$4 shipping. To order, use the form on the back of this newsletter or go to the *Outdoor Store* at www.wildlifedepartment.com.

[Winter Bird Survey Continued]

Goldfinch	5280
House Sparrow	4045
Cardinal	2834
Starling	2730
Dark-eyed Junco	2470
Mourning Dove	1909
House Finch	1578
Red-winged Blackbird	1497
Carolina Chickadee	1409
Blue Jay	1349
Tufted Titmouse	1072
Harris' Sparrow	1035
Crow	679
Common Grackle	653
Brewer's Blackbird	584
Field Sparrow	579
Downy Woodpecker	488
White-crowned Sparrow	473
Purple Finch	461
Eurasian Collared Dove	461
Robin	459
Brown-headed Cowbird	454
Song Sparrow	378
White-throated Sparrow	309
Carolina Wren	277
Red-bellied Woodpecker	272
White-breasted Nuthatch	265
Northern Bobwhite	235
Mockingbird	223
Tree Sparrow	214
Cedar Waxwing	214
Bluebird (eastern)	208
Meadowlark	198
Flicker	194
Pine Siskin	174
Great-tailed Grackle	172
Rock Dove (pigeon)	158
Rusty Blackbird	148
Red-headed Woodpecker	108
Hairy Woodpecker	89
Fox Sparrow	81
Bewick's Wren	67
Pileated Woodpecker	59
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	54
Brown Creeper	42
Brown Thrasher	31
Spotted Towhee	23
Eastern Towhee	17
Evening Grosbeak	0

*as reported by 406 households

are our friends and much of our entertainment.”

The Wilson Family isn't alone in their bird-feeding fondness. Participation in last year's survey increased from 146 to 406 households, with a 13 percent increase in the number of new people recording winter-feeder trends.

Observer Jack Bass of Sapulpa has been feeding the birds since 1973. Last winter, he saw and reported the fewest birds ever. He was not the only participant to wonder where they all went. On average, each feeder saw three fewer birds than during the winter of 2003. The decrease is related to last winter's brief and mild visit. If the ground is free of snow and ice, local avian are able to find more naturally occurring food and consequentially, show up in fewer numbers at feeders.

Oklahomans continue to ensure winter birds have plenty of feasting locations regardless of snowfall. With a total of 36,751 birds reported, it's evident that birds dine at feeders even when food is available elsewhere.

The most abundant species seen continues to be the American goldfinch. The goldfinch has repeatedly ranked first or second since the survey began in 1987. The house sparrow rose from its fourth-place position in 2003 to the second most plentiful in 2004. Another non-native bird, the starling, rose from eighth place to fourth.

Upon first glance, it appears the populations of these suburban-dwelling residents may be rising. However, an increase in suburban survey contributors (27 percent to 35 percent) helps to explain the higher incidence of house sparrows and starlings reported.

Heralding the Arrival of Doves

Survey results indicate a popula-

tion increase for several dove species in Oklahoma. Like the Eurasian collared dove, which was added to the survey last year, reports indicate the upward swing of another new species - the Inca dove. Feeder locations from seven counties reported a total of 32 Inca doves as write-ins.

Gene Potts lives in Albany near the Red River and the Texas border. He wrote the Wildlife Department about "unusual" doves feeding in his yard. They were much smaller than either the mourning or the Eurasian collared dove. Scalloped plumage gave them an almost scaly appearance. When they flew, he could see conspicuous chestnut colored wing patches. They made soft *cooo-cooing* sounds. Potts had Inca doves.

"I first saw them early last winter after the pecans fell. All kinds of birds were eating the pecans, and I noticed these little doves with red wing spots," Potts said.

Potts fed the Inca doves pecans all winter. They disappeared during the spring, but he reported seeing them again in August scavenging through corn stubble on his property. He also has seen a flock of eight to ten at a neighbor's home and said other neighbors are seeing them as well.

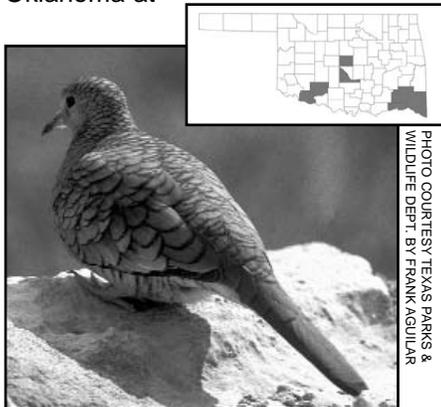
"I only see them around people — that must be their ace in the hole," he said.

David Arbour, a naturalist at Red Slough Wildlife Management Area, says Potts is right.

"Inca doves are adapted to urban areas. They eat seeds and fruits. Bird feeders help them survive and yard plantings are attractive to them. They are especially fond of nesting in privet thickets, particularly overgrown ones," Arbour said.

They are usually seen in pairs, but during the winter gather in large flocks. Arbour has seen clusters of twenty Inca doves stacked two rows high. The top row of birds literally perches atop the bottom row to conserve heat. He's seen photos of them huddling in three-row pyramids.

Inca doves used to be a Mexican species until the early 1900s when they began spreading into Texas and other states such as Arizona and New Mexico. Arbour has found breeding colonies throughout Arkansas. He occasionally finds Inca doves around Red Slough and reports they are well established in Oklahoma at



Inca Dove

Eagletown and Broken Bow. The first reported nest in Oklahoma was discovered in Hugo three years ago.

The birds are becoming more plentiful because they are occupying an empty ecological niche created by man according Arbour.

“Man has created an environment with exotic plantings and bird feeders that these suburban birds can move into and take over without having anything else to compete with,” he said.

Wildlife Department Biologist Mark Howery expects Inca doves to soon fill the entire Red River Valley area and continue expanding north.

“I’ve received reports of multiple sightings from Norman, Purcell and Oklahoma City. These are early colonies, though, not established populations,” he said.

A recent sighting by Forrest Berrett of Moore indicates they may be starting to establish colonies in central Oklahoma. Berrett regularly watches them feeding on wild bird seed in his neighbor’s back yard, but he first noticed them in August when two swept across the path of his pick-up truck.

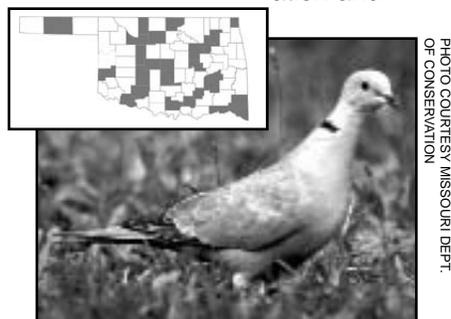
“You can tell they’re doves, but

they look different — they catch your eye,” Berrett said. “The feathers reminded me of fish scales, and when I saw the red, I knew I was seeing something new to Oklahoma.”

Astounding Increase in Eurasian Collared Doves

Populations of Eurasian collared dove have made a striking increase. A scattering of six survey participants first reported seeing a total of 13 Eurasian collared doves in 2002. Eight different locations reported being visited by the dove in 2003. In 2004, participants in 26 counties noticed the dove and reported a total of 453 individuals.

This is impressive, considering biologists suspect Eurasian collared doves have been in Oklahoma little more than a decade, if that long. The species is known for its rapid proliferation and



Eurasian-collared Dove

adaptability. During the 1900s, the dove spread from the subcontinent of India throughout Europe. Sometime in the early 1980s, it was released in the Bahamas and made its way to the Florida Coast. Finding a niche wherever people are present, it has been spreading northwest throughout the southern half of North America.

Some of the increase in 2004 reports of Eurasian collared doves can be attributed to awareness. Constance Parish of McAlester (Pittsburg County) thought she had seen an albino mourning dove in 2003. After reading about the dove in last year’s Winter Bird Survey results, Parish realized what she had seen.

Gene Potts had heard the Eurasian collared dove calling in Bryan County for several years but had not seen it until last year.

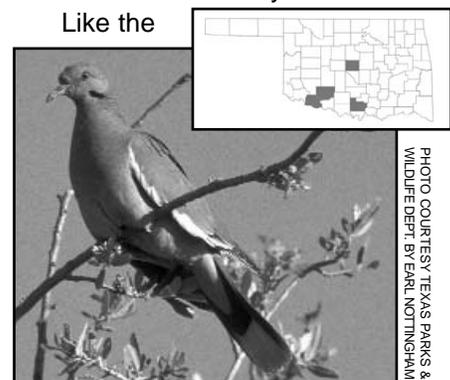
“I kept hearing these calls, and I thought it was what they call a rain crow [yellow-billed cuckoo]. Then I was talking to a neighbor, and he showed me it wasn’t a crow making the call but this white dove bird. When I read the article in ‘Outdoor Oklahoma,’ I realized what I had been seeing and hearing for the past three to four years,” he said.

Further north in Oklahoma County, Forrest Berrett saw the Eurasian collared dove for the first time this year.

“At first I assumed it was a released pet until I saw another one gathering grass and carrying it to a tree for a nest,” he said.

Another New Dove?

The Eurasian collared dove and Inca dove may soon find themselves sharing space with yet another dove species beginning to appear in Oklahoma — the white-winged dove. The white-winged dove is expanding north out of Texas and appearing in low numbers in Oklahoma and Arkansas. A total of five birds were reported from four counties as write-ins on the 2004 survey.



White-winged Dove

Eurasian collared and Inca, the white-winged inhabits manmade niches and also feeds on grain and wild seeds, as well as cactus fruits and blossoms. Similar in size to a mourning dove - although slightly larger and stockier with a shorter tail

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Great Plains Playa Lakes: Oklahoma's under-recognized, invaluable natural resource

By Debbie Slobe and Matt Pelikan

Scattered across the western Great Plains - eastern New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming, western Kansas, Nebraska, and Oklahoma, and the Texas Panhandle - lie some 50,000 ephemeral, or short-lived, wetlands known as playa lakes. Many people don't recognize them as wetlands, because playa lakes hold water only after rainfall or runoff events. Most of the time they are dry, which explains why many people don't recognize them as wetlands.

But the natural wet-dry cycle of playa lakes supports a diverse and productive plant community, and playa ecology features specialized amphibians and invertebrates that have evolved ways to flourish under the highly variable conditions that characterize these wetlands. The fertility of playa lakes makes them a precious resource for waterfowl and other birds that migrate and winter across this region.

The western Great Plains is a land of few people and extreme conditions. The topography, while flat to rolling, gradually slopes up toward the Rocky Mountains. Winter is cold and summer hot. Even though rainfall is sparse, especially during spring, thunderstorms can dump inches of rain in an hour.

When rain does fall, much of it ends up in playa lakes - shallow, usually round basins with clay floors that lie in the lowest points of watersheds and collect runoff from surrounding uplands. Playas are not large (their average size is only about seventeen acres, though they range from an acre or less to more than a hundred acres in size), and even with their vast numbers they occupy only about two percent of the total prairie landscape.

But playa lakes are a habitat nearly unique to this region: ninety-five percent of the world's playa lakes lie on the western Great Plains, and they are by far the most numerous type of wetland in this area. Their unusual geology and vast numbers make playas crucial to both the natural and human communities in this region.

Research has found that playa wetlands, acting like shallow funnels, are the primary source of recharge for the Ogallala Aquifer, a 174,000-square-mile formation that lies under portions of eight states: Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming. These states have depended on the aquifer for agricultural, municipal, and industrial water for more than a century. But pumping has depleted the aquifer's water supply faster than natural recharge can replenish it.

Natural recharge of the aquifer occurs throughout much of the landscape but is focused through playa wetlands, which are thought to be responsible for 85 to 95 percent of all recharge to the aquifer throughout the western Great Plains. This is valuable information for landowners and natural resource managers who hope to conserve water, maintain ground-water purity, and sustain the agricultural economy of the region.

One would think that with so much value provided by playa lakes, everyone would know that they exist and grasp their ecological importance. But playa lakes remain widely misunderstood, even by area residents who regularly referred to them as buffalo wallows, mud pits, evaporation pans, and other misleading names.

Hooker, Oklahoma resident, Aymee Hofferber of the civic organization Hooker Main Street, actively encourages playa conservation and regional ecotourism. Until quite recently, however, she too thought of playas merely as nameless "ponds and puddles that suddenly appeared after a hard rain." Or, in other words, "another obstacle to hinder farmers."

Havens for Birds

Whatever people call them, there is no question that these wetlands are oases for birds in a generally arid region. Playas are probably the most important wetland habitat type

Conservation Concerns

While there are many landowners working with conservation organizations such as the Playa Lakes Joint Venture to mitigate threats and protect playa lakes, undesirable impact by certain agricultural practices on the wetlands persists. Natural resource managers estimate that seventy percent of playa lakes have been altered from their natural state by pitting, plowing, or sedimentation. Of these, sedimentation is the single largest threat to the wetlands, especially for playa lakes that are surrounded by tilled lands. Water runoff from rain and irrigation carries soil into the playa basins, gradually filling them. Sediment build-up reduces the volume of water playa lakes can hold and increases the rate of water loss to evaporation, limiting the wetlands' value to wildlife and their ability to recharge the aquifer.

In Oklahoma, the PLJV and ODWC have teamed up to create a leasing program for landowners who wish to protect playa lakes. The program pays landowners to restore playa lakes and establish grassland buffers around them. The PLJV also provided seed funding for the new Oklahoma Wildlife and Prairie Heritage Alliance (OWPHA), a grassroots coalition made up of local landowners, businesses, natural resource managers, and educators dedicated to assisting private landowners in taking advantage of conservation grants and programs available to them. The PLJV and OWPHA are currently working on a \$100,000 project to restore playa lakes in Beaver and Texas Counties in the Oklahoma Panhandle.

for birds in the western Great Plains. Playas are used by more than two hundred species ranging from sandhill crane to least sandpiper to snowy egret.

Mallards and northern pintails often stage or winter on playas in astonishing numbers. About twenty species of waterfowl use playa lakes as transients or winter residents. Playa lake vegetation furnishes an especially nutritious diet for wintering ducks, and if water is present, these wetlands provide essential roosting areas, as well. Canada and snow geese also migrate and winter in the playa lakes region in relatively large numbers.

Spring surveys conducted from 1997 - 2000 by the Natural Resources Conservation Service on eighty-eight playa lakes in southwestern Kansas and the Oklahoma panhandle found 142 bird species associated with the wetlands, including American avocet, black-necked stilt, Wilson's phalarope, and burrowing owl. Grassland birds such as meadowlarks and grasshopper sparrows frequently nest on grassy fringes of playas, and raptors of many kinds are attracted to playas. If basins hold water during summer, waterfowl, rails, and other wetland birds may nest there.

Although most playa lakes (as many as ninety-nine percent, by some estimates) are located on private land, often adjacent to farms, grazing lands, and feedlots, some of these wetlands are readily birded from public roads. Playas managed by state wildlife agencies and local governments are open for public use.

At present, though, opportunities for direct access for birding on playa lakes are relatively few because the majority of the wetlands are inaccessible to the public. Landowners concerned about the potential for lawsuits have ample protection in Oklahoma, however, thanks to lobbying efforts of multiple conservation groups.

This past year, the state legislature passed a sweeping tort reform bill that generally limits landowner's liability towards visitors that recreate on private land.

Be encouraged that birders interested in accessing playas on private land will likely see more opportunities in the future. In the mean time, birders should contact the county Natural Resource Conservation Service field office or area wildlife manager for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. Both organizations are in contact with landowners implementing habitat conservation projects and may know of some who are currently hosting visitors.

Vital to the hydrology of an arid region, Great Plains playa lakes represent a natural resource that is as valuable

as it is little-known. Any given playa may be small, but each one hosts a vibrant and unusual natural community. Taken together, these abundant wetlands are a dominant feature in the natural history of the birds of the region.

Playas deserve to be better understood, both by area residents and visitors interested in unusual opportunities for viewing and appreciating wildlife.

Contributing writers are Matt Pelikan, editor of "Winging It," a newsletter of the American Birding Association, and Debbie Slobe, communications team leader for the Playa Lakes Joint Venture. The Playa Lakes Joint Venture is a partnership of state and federal wildlife agencies, conservation groups and private industry dedicated to protecting playa lakes for the benefit of birds, other wildlife and people in the High Plains. Joint Venture partners include: the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature

Conservancy, Pheasants Forever, ConocoPhillips and state wildlife agencies of Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. Since its inception in 1989, PLJV partners have raised in excess of \$50 million to conserve more than 100,000 acres of wildlife habitat. For more information on playa lakes, visit the PLJV Web site: www.pljv.org.



The Ogallala Aquifer is a 174,00 square-mile formation spanning sections of eight states. Water from the aquifer helps irrigate the region's agricultural fields. Researchers have recorded declines in the aquifer's water table since 1940. Scientists charted the water table from January 1992 to January 1997 and recorded a decline of 1.35 feet per year. Playa and water conservation practices, will hopefully slow this decline to maintain the resource for the future.

2005 Winter Bird Survey

Survey Period: Thursday, Jan. 13 - Sunday, Jan. 16

The Winter Bird Survey is a project of the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation.

Directions:

- 1 - Choose two consecutive days within the 4-day survey period to watch and tally birds seen at bird feeders around your home.
- 2 - Count birds at least four times on each of the two days.
- 3 - Record the greatest number of species feeding together at one time. If you see six goldfinches at 10 a.m. but later see a group of 12, record 12.
- 4 - Only count birds seen at or around your feeders - flybys don't count!

Tips:

- Always provide numbered responses. If you can't make an exact count, record your best estimate.
- The Eurasian collard dove was added to the list last year. This year's newest addition is the Inca dove. Play a role in tracking these new species' presence throughout the state.
- Birds are listed taxonomically rather than alphabetically on the form.
- Results published in the Wildlife Diversity Program's newsletter, "The Wild Side," and the November/December issue of "Outdoor Oklahoma."

Complete all eight parts of this survey:

1. Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ Zip _____
 County _____ Phone # _____

2. Have you participated in this survey before?

- No
- Yes, How many years? _____

3. Mark the statement that best describes the area within a 200-yard radius of your yard. Only choose one.

- A. Suburban area with small to moderate-sized trees.
- B. Suburban area with many large and mature trees.
- C. Neighborhood bordering or near rural area.
- D. Rural in an agricultural area.
- E. Rural in a forested area.

4. Check the following descriptions that best fit the area where your feeder is located.

A. Evergreen Cover:

- Little or none
- Moderate
- Abundant

B. Winter Food Plants:

- Little or none List types: _____
- Moderate _____
- Abundant _____

C. Is water readily available (bird bath, pond, etc)?

- Yes
- No

D. What other features are offered for birds?

- Brushpile
- Dense shrubbery
- Roost boxes
- Snags

5. Check the type of feeder(s) in your yard.

- Corn
- Thistle
- Suet/Miracle Meal
- Millet
- Fruit
- Sunflower
- Milo
- Mixed Seeds
- Other _____

6. Describe your ability to identify winter birds:

- Excellent (identify most)
- Good (identify some)
- Fair (identify only a few)

7. Write the greatest number of birds seen at your feeders at any one time during two consecutive days. Use numbers, not checkmarks.

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ___ Northern Bobwhite | ___ Starling |
| ___ Rock Dove (pigeon) | ___ Cardinal |
| ___ Mourning Dove | ___ Eastern Towhee |
| ___ Inca Dove | ___ Spotted Towhee |
| ___ Eurasian Collared Dove | ___ Fox Sparrow |
| ___ Pileated Woodpecker | ___ Tree Sparrow |
| ___ Red-headed Woodpecker | ___ Song Sparrow |
| ___ Red-bellied Woodpecker | ___ Field Sparrow |
| ___ Yellow-bellied Sapsucker | ___ White-throated Sparrow |
| ___ Downy Woodpecker | ___ White-crowned Sparrow |
| ___ Hairy Woodpecker | ___ Harris' Sparrow |
| ___ Flicker (all races) | ___ House Sparrow |
| ___ Blue Jay | ___ Dark-eyed Junco |
| ___ Crow | ___ Brewer's Blackbird |
| ___ Carolina Chickadee | ___ Rusty Blackbird |
| ___ Tufted Titmouse | ___ Red-winged Blackbird |
| ___ Red-breasted Nuthatch | ___ Common Grackle |
| ___ White-breasted Nuthatch | ___ Great-tailed Grackle |
| ___ Brown Creeper | ___ Meadowlark |
| ___ Carolina Wren | (eastern & western) |
| ___ Bewick's Wren | ___ Brown-headed Cowbird |
| ___ Bluebird (eastern) | ___ House Finch |
| ___ Robin | ___ Purple Finch |
| ___ Mockingbird | ___ Pine Siskin |
| ___ Brown Thrasher | ___ Goldfinch |
| ___ Cedar Waxwing | ___ Evening Grosbeak |

List other birds seen at feeders: _____

List other birds seen in the yard but not at feeders: _____

8. Return Survey by February 7, 2005:

Mail To: Winter Bird Survey, Wildlife Diversity Program,
 PO Box 53465, Oklahoma City, OK 73152

Or Enter Results Online at: www.wildlifedepartment.com

[Winter Bird Survey Continued]

- it is recognizable by bold, white wing patches and a drawn-out, variable, *who-cooks-for-you* call.

Naturalist Arbour said "they're showing up where collared doves are and mixing with them. While the two species may compete for habitat, they don't appear to be interbreeding."

Arbour says there is no fear of either species interbreeding with the much smaller Inca dove.

"Incas are in a class all of their own. Although the white-winged, Eurasian and Inca doves are filling a similar niche, they don't appear to be in major competition with one another," he said.

Mark Howery has spent a lifetime following Oklahoma's birds and feels these immigrants pose no threat to native bird species either.

"The effect on resident bird populations is unknown, but in north

Texas where they've been established for two decades, these species have settled around neighborhoods and farmsteads – areas highly modified by people. They're not settling in the prairies or deep in the woods. They're not competing with most of our native bird populations," he said.

Some wonder why these species are spreading across Oklahoma neighborhoods. The expansions may be related to natural climate trends. Oklahoma winters have been relatively mild over the past decade. While milder seasons do play a role in bird survival through the winter, it also seems to be the nature of these doves to proliferate and expand their ranges. As Arbour pointed out, as long as there are suburban areas, there will be a niche for these human-attuned doves.

It may be a few years before

white-winged doves become prevalent in Oklahoma, but the Inca dove is close on the tail feather of the Eurasian collared dove. The Inca dove has been added to the 2005 Winter Bird Survey. Biologists have not added the white-winged dove to the survey, but participants are encouraged to note any feeder occurrences.

Contribute to scientific history. Help biologists follow the Eurasian collared, white-winged and Inca dove as they spread through the state. Relax in a seat by the window and grab your Winter Bird Survey form. Choose two days during the Jan. 13 - 16 survey period to watch, enjoy and record the birds visiting your feeders this winter.

[Conservation Strategy Continued]

Oklahoma.

Because the quantity and quality of habitat are the primary factors that limit most wildlife populations, the Strategy identifies groups of wildlife species that depend on similar habitat conditions. It also includes actions necessary to conserve and to restore those habitats. To measure the effectiveness of the conservation actions after they are implemented, the Strategy incorporates monitoring activities, which will help modify and improve future revisions to the Strategy.

With the overwhelming majority of Oklahoma's land and water resources privately owned, wildlife conservation is a joint effort of private land managers and public agencies. Because everyone has limited resources, it is important to work together in partnerships where overlapping interests and efforts are mutually beneficial.

Wildlife management area biologists, ranchers, farmers, timber companies, utility companies, sportsmen's club and individual landowners are just some of the many land stewards who are taking steps to ensure that today's wildlife resources will be around for future generations. The Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy serves as a forum to bring together diverse landowners in a multi-species approach to wildlife and habitat conservation.

What Has Happened With The Strategy?

- Established an Advisory Group in January 2004.
- Held five regional public meetings in March 2004 to collect conservation issues, actions and priorities.
- Contacted technical experts in wildlife conservation and land management in April and May 2004 for their input.
- Held a wildlife conservation workshop in July 2004 to integrate the conservation needs of species with habitats
- Released first draft version of the Oklahoma Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy in December 2004 for public comment and review through January 31, 2005.

What Will Happen Next?

- Comments received by January 31, 2005 will be incorporated into the second draft of the Strategy to be released in March 2005.
- A series of public meetings to obtain feedback on the second draft of the Strategy is tentatively scheduled for April 2005.
- A third draft of the Strategy is anticipated during early summer 2005 and will be available for public review.
- Submit finalized Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for evaluation in summer 2005.

How Can I Be Involved?

- View the first draft of the Strategy at www.dynamicsolutionsgroup.com/OK and provide comments to bruce.h@dynamicsolutionsgroup.com.
- Attend a public meeting in April (watch the newspaper for details or sign up to receive electronically the state's Weekly Wildlife News at www.wildlifedepartment.com/outdooroklahoma2.htm).



Locations statewide provide more than 50 opportunities to see bald eagles in the wild. Most events are free and held on weekends in January. View event descriptions, locations, dates and times by logging onto www.wildlifedepartment.com or call (405) 521-4616 for a free Eagle Event brochure.

You can also get brochures in Oklahoma City at the Bass Pro Shops Customer Service Desk or by visiting Martin Nature Park. Tulsa area residents can find brochures at the Wildlife Department's regional office at the Oklahoma Aquarium in Jenks and at Oxley Nature Center in Mohawk Park.

The Choosing Of A National Symbol

There were differing opinions among the members of a 1776 Congressional Committee charged with selecting a design for the nation's seal. Surprisingly, the founding fathers didn't set out with the bald eagle in mind. The original design featured Lady Liberty but was not approved by Congress. Returning to the drawing board, the committee hired Philadelphia artist, William Barton, who created a design much like the one we use today, except that it featured a golden eagle.

The trouble was, golden eagles flew over European nations, and America was still at war with England. The bald eagle, however, only exists in America and Canada. The nation's symbol, as seen today with a bald eagle, was approved on June 20, 1782.

The decision had been a controversial one. Benjamin Franklin had concerns about the bald eagle's image. Eagles are strong fishers, but they are also scavengers. Franklin spoke freely about his preference for the turkey.

But the bald eagle was chosen, and the symbol represents a legacy of which Franklin would be proud. As little as 30 years ago, bald eagles faced extirpation throughout America's lower 48 states. Eagle populations of today have increased seven-fold. The population is doing so well, the species has been downgraded from endangered to threatened in the lower 48 states. For 21st Century Americans, bald eagles represent American strength, endurance, and concern for the natural world.

Two questions still remain. If Mr. Franklin's choice had prevailed, would Americans still use the phrase, "you turkey!" and would it have become an insult to say to someone, "you eagle?"

Black-tailed Prairie Dog Removed From Candidate Endangered Species List

By Julianne Hoagland

On August 12, 2004, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service removed the black-tailed prairie dog from the Candidate List for endangered species listing. An updated evaluation of the best available scientific information led to the determination that the species is not likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future.

Before that review, the best scientific and commercial information available to the Service indicated that the impacts of disease, chemical control and other lesser factors were substantial enough to warrant listing of the black-tailed prairie dog as a threatened species.

Since 2000, however, state agencies, federal agencies, tribes, and other parties have focused on obtaining previously unrecorded data regarding the black-tailed prairie dog. The Service used this information to re-evaluate the species' status.

Previous scientific focus was on a few large black-tailed prairie dog populations impacted by sylvatic plague. It had been assumed that population loss-

es at these sites were indicative of losses across the species' entire range. Based upon the new findings, these assumptions no longer appear appropriate. On the contrary, recent information illustrates that prairie dogs have resiliency to short-term, site-specific population declines.

State agencies employed improved survey techniques after the prairie dog was determined to be a candidate for listing and now estimate approximately 1,842,000 acres of occupied habitat in the United States. This represents a substantial revision in the estimated abundance of black-tailed prairie dogs from 2000, when the best available information indicated 676,000 acres of occupied habitat. New information also shows that the black-tailed prairie dog is more able to persist over time in light of ongoing impacts.

The increase in the Service's knowledge of additional occupied habitat played a supporting role in the decision to remove the species from the candidate list.



Is Your Wildscape Sign Looking A Little Too Wild? Replace It!

Since the establishment of the Wildscapes Certification Program in 1995, 475 Oklahomans have received certification for landscaping while keeping the habitat needs of wildlife in mind. For some of our earliest members of the Wildscape family, your outdoor sign may now be slightly worn and in need of replacement. If you would like to receive a brand-new sign, send your request by e-mail to mhickman@zoo.odwc.state.ok.us or by postal mail. Please be sure to include your name and street address.

Recent Additions To The Wildscapes Network

Habitat Level

Cert.#	Name		
409	Gail Brooks	414	Todd Jackson
410	Ronald Miller	415	Tambra Gifford
411	Karen King	416	Caroline Payne Young
412	Jackie Pogu	417	Lynn Dickason
413	Jerry C. Noel		

For more information about the Wildscaping Program, visit www.wildlifedepartment.com/landscaping.htm

Warmest Thanks To Our Generous Donors

Tax-deductible donations to the Wildlife Diversity Program help conserve native Oklahoma wildlife and contribute to public education efforts. You can take care of wildlife at tax time by checking Schedule 511-H, Line 1 of your State Income Tax Return or mail a direct donation to the Wildlife Department. Many thanks to our most recent donors listed below.

ScissorTail Supporters (\$10 - \$39)

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Joe & Shirley Ecker	Harrah	Barbara Kennedy	Oklahoma City	Joseph J. Ferina	Marietta
		Larry C. Barnett	Choctaw		

Got Calcium?

By Melynda Hickman

All animals need certain vitamins and minerals to be healthy. Calcium is needed by all vertebrates to grow, lay eggs, lactate and grow antlers. Phosphorus is used in muscle contractions, nerve actions, metabolism of fats, amino acids and carbohydrates. In your Wildscape you can provide both of these important minerals by placing bones, antler sheds, crushed mollusk shells and crushed egg-shells throughout your garden.

Bones, such as cow skulls, and antlers can be placed aesthetically in your garden to provide calcium and phosphorus for animals that "gnaw" such as small rodents, flying squirrels, woodchucks and rabbits.

Birds "chew" their food in their stomach-like gizzard. To aid in the grinding, birds swallow small hard materials (grit) such as sand, ashes, ground egg-shells and ground oyster shells. To provide crushed egg-shells, rinse the egg shells in plain water (no soap). Bake the egg shells for 20 minutes at 250° to kill *Salmonella* bacteria. Let egg shells cool, then crush them into pieces smaller than a dime. Place the crushed egg shells or mixed with seed on the ground or on a tray feeder.