

# The Wild Side

Winter 2007

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

## Let's Hear It for the Noisemakers!

By Lesley McNeff

**W**oodpeckers are one of the easiest families of birds to identify. Many people have heard the rhythmic pecking sequence that they use to establish territories and attract mates. These “wood borers” generally build nests in roughly chiseled cavities deep within a large branch or trunk.

Of the 25 species of woodpeckers found in North America, 11 of these can be found in Oklahoma and seven frequently visit backyard feeders. This is a good percentage of the overall woodpecker population. Some of these species can be difficult to distinguish from one another. The following are ID tips to help tell them apart.

### Pileated Woodpecker

This is a large, crow-sized woodpecker with a prominent red crest and a contrasting white stripe down each side of the head and neck. In flight, the white undersides of the wings are visible. Males and females are not alike: the red coloration of the crest extends on to the forehead of the male, and the male has a red “moustache” behind the bill. It is distinctive from all other common woodpeckers.

Pileated woodpeckers usually forage alone or in pairs. Typically, they search for food on tree trunks



WARREN WILLIAMS

and remain close to trees. They maintain a large territory, often in excess of 200 acres. Breeding occurs in forested areas with large trees across Canada, the eastern United States and parts of the Pacific coast. They excavate a new home each year, creating habitat for other large cavity nesters. They are found across much of eastern Oklahoma in areas with large stands of mature timber and are non-migratory. Occasionally, they can be seen at bird feeders, especially in wooded, rural areas.

### Red-headed Woodpecker

This is a robin-sized woodpecker with an entirely red head. The color of the back is entirely black with contrasting white plumage on the chest, belly and rump. The wings are also black with a bold, contrasting white patch that is visible in flight. Males and females look alike. They are most often confused with the Red-bellied Woodpecker, which lacks the bold white plumage on its breast, wings and rump.

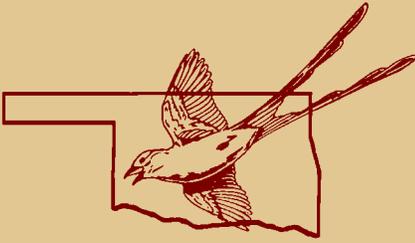
Red-headed woodpeckers typically forage alone or in small groups in mature trees. During the winter, they are often found in nut-bearing trees such as oaks and hickories and in open country across southern Canada and the eastern-



MARK DREILING

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

**Russ Horton**

Lands and Wildlife Diversity Supervisor  
405-202-5901

**Melynda Hickman**

Wildlife Diversity Biologist  
405-424-0099

**Mark Howery**

Wildlife Diversity Biologist  
405-424-2728

**Buck Ray**

Biologist  
405-424-6062

**Larry Wiemers**

Biologist  
580-256-5056

**Lesley B. McNeff**

Wildlife Diversity Information Specialist/  
Newsletter Editor  
405-522-3087

**Wildlife Diversity Program**

P.O. Box 53465  
Oklahoma City, OK 73152  
(405) 522-3087

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Please e-mail [lmcneff@odwc.state.ok.us](mailto:lmcneff@odwc.state.ok.us) with comments, article ideas or suggestions.



central United States. They can be found in the eastern 3/4 of the main body of the state. The number of red-headed woodpeckers that winter in Oklahoma varies greatly depending upon acorn production and weather. In the summer months, this species can be found statewide.

**Red-bellied Woodpecker**

This is a robin-sized woodpecker with a black and white striped back. The male woodpecker has a red "cap" extending from the top of the head and down over the back of the neck; the female has a smaller area of red on the back of the neck. It is most easily confused with the Red-headed Woodpecker, which lacks the zebra-striped pattern on its back and has an entirely red head.

It is usually seen alone or in pairs and generally forages close to mature trees and feeders on or near trees. Nesting occurs in deciduous forests in southern Canada and the eastern United States. Males will begin excavation in several locations and the female selects the site. They are found nearly statewide including the eastern third of the panhandle and all of the main body of the state and do not normally migrate. They can be found in nearly all types of forests and woodlands across the state, especially oak woodlands and streamside forests. Red bellied woodpeckers occur mostly in urban and residential neighborhoods that have mature trees.

**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**

They are robin-sized woodpeckers, with variable plumage patterns. All individuals have a long white bar on the wing, visible both when the bird is perched and when it is

flying. The back is black in adults and brownish in juveniles with many fine white horizontal bars. The chest and belly are yellowish. Adults have a red patch on the forehead, two white stripes across the head and a black patch on the front of the neck. Males have a red throat patch below the bill, while females have a white throat patch.

It is most often confused with the Hairy Woodpecker and the Northern Flicker. Both of these species lack the prominent white bar on the wing.

They are usually seen foraging alone on the trunks of trees. This woodpecker is unique in that it will peck horizontal rows of small holes in tree bark to feed on the sap and on the insects that are attracted to the sap. Favorite targets for this behavior seem to be relatively soft-wooded trees such as cottonwoods, elms, fruit trees, young hickories and some pines.

Breeding occurs across Canada east of the Rockies to southern Labrador and Newfoundland south to the northern U.S. from North Dakota to New York and Connecticut and south through the Appalachians to northwest Georgia. It can potentially be found statewide in the winter where there are appropriate trees, but is rare in western Oklahoma. Numbers of birds can vary dramatically from year to year. It is most commonly found in riparian forests along streams and rivers. They can frequently be seen in urban and residential neighborhoods during the winter months.

**Downy Woodpecker**

This is a small black and white woodpecker approximately 2/3 the size of a robin. A white stripe extends down the length of the back and each wing is predominately black with rows of white spots. The bill is short for a woodpecker: its length is approximately 1/2 to 3/4 the length of the head. The throat, breast and belly are white. Males have a small red patch of feathers on the back of the head. It is similar in appearance to the Hairy Woodpecker, but the bill length is the easiest way to tell them apart. When comparing the length of the bill against the head, the Downy Woodpecker's bill will always be shorter than its head.

It is usually seen foraging alone or in pairs. It will search for insects all over both mature and sapling trees and along very small branches. Breeding occurs in forested areas, mainly deciduous, across most of North America to Central America. Both the male and female will excavate the nest. It



WARREN WILLIAMS



is a common species that occurs statewide in Oklahoma. They are found in most forest and woodland types, as well as shrublands and young forests and occur commonly in urban and residential areas.

**Hairy Woodpecker**

This is a black and white, nearly robin-sized woodpecker. A white stripe extends down the length of the back and each wing is predominantly black with rows of small white spots. The length of the bill is about equal to the length of the head. The throat, chest and belly are white. Males have a small red patch of feathers on the back of the head. It is similar in appearance to the Downy Woodpecker.

It is usually seen alone when feeding. It will generally remain close to trees and forested areas where it forages on tree trunks and along larger tree limbs.

The breeding range is similar to the Downy Woodpecker, but the southern edge of the distribution of the Hairy Woodpecker extends to Panama, Belize and the Bahamas.

They occur nearly statewide except for most of the panhandle and the extreme southwestern corner. Hairy woodpeckers do not migrate. It's an uncommon woodpecker but is found in many types of mature forest habitat such as oak, pine and cottonwood. It is usually found in areas where there are large tracts of forest. It is uncommon in urban or residential areas except in eastern Oklahoma.

**Northern Flicker**

This relatively long-bodied woodpecker is larger than a robin. It has a black marking on

the breast as well as many small black spots on the breast, belly and sides. The feathers under the wings are marked with yellow, orange or red which is visible in flight. The back is predominately brown with fine black lines running from side to side. A bold white patch is visible on the rump in flight. Males have a black or red "moustache" on the side of the face. It is often confused with the Red-bellied woodpecker.

Flickers frequently feed along the trunks and branches of trees, but are unique in that they also forage on the ground below trees for insects and nuts. It is one of the few birds that will eat ants. During the winter months, it consumes fallen acorns. It often forages alone, but may be found in small flocks of three to ten birds. Breeding occurs in forested areas across North America and as far south as Central America. Abandoned flicker nests create habitat for other cavity nesters.

Two color forms of the Northern Flicker occur in Oklahoma during the winter months. The Yellow-shafted Flicker is found statewide but is more common in the eastern 2/3 of the state. The Red-shafted Flicker is much less common and is primarily found in the western half of the state. They occur in a wide range of habitats including all woodland and forest types as well as brushy prairies with scattered trees. Flickers are often found in residential neighborhoods during the winter. ■



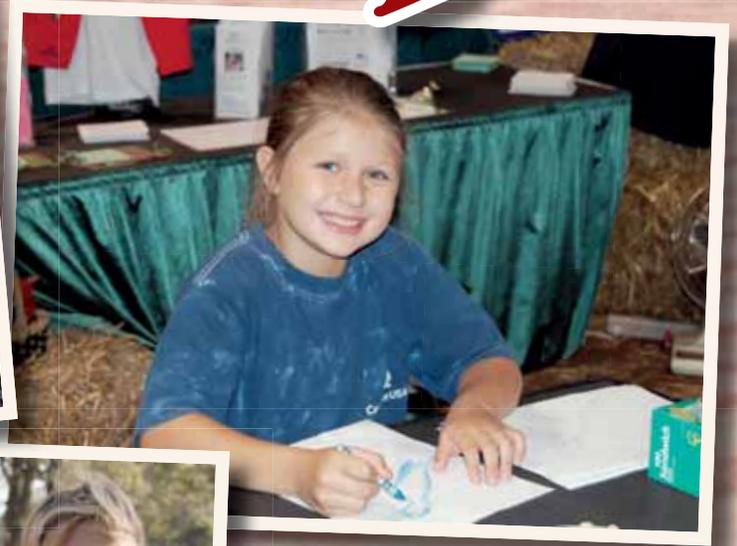
BRENDA CARROLL

the **WildSide** e-Extra

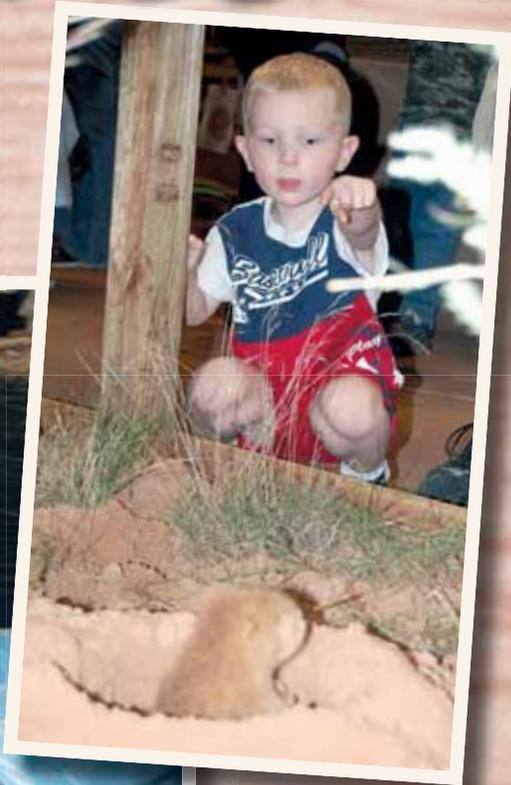
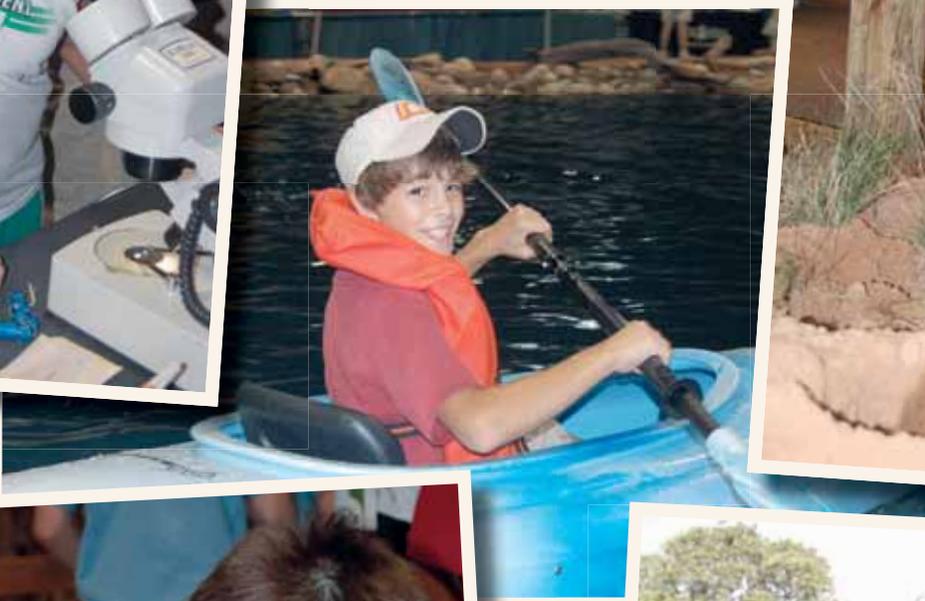


- Sign up to receive The WildSide e-Extra and stay informed about projects and programs of the Wildlife Diversity Program. Subscribe to the e-mail newsletter that keeps you in-the-know about events such as the Selman Bat Watch, Wildlife Expo and the Winter Bird Survey.
- In e-Extra, biologists share details about rare wildlife species and habitat conservation work in the state. You'll receive updates about Oklahoma's wildlife action plan and the federal State Wildlife Grants Program. These programs support biologists' efforts to conserve Oklahoma's natural places and to prevent wildlife from becoming endangered.
- Get the inside scoop on these and other special wildlife projects. Visit <http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/wildside.htm> to sign up for The Wild Side e-Extra.

# 2007 Expo



# *in Pictures*



# Bald Eagles **Fly Off** the Threatened List

The National Symbol is Flying Strong Once Again

**O**n June 28th, the bald eagle was removed from the U.S. Threatened and Endangered Species List.

In 1995, the bald eagle was nationally upgraded from endangered to threatened in all of the lower 48 states. At that time, there were around 4,450 breeding pairs. Today, bald eagle pairs in the continental U.S. number 9,789.

“Oklahoma has over 100 bald eagles that live here year-round, including 49 known breeding pairs,” said Lesley McNeff, wildlife diversity information specialist for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. “During the winter, Oklahoma is host to anywhere from 700 to 1,500 eagles statewide. The numbers peak in January and February with the highest concentration of birds located at lakes. Popular viewing sites include Kaw, Texhoma, Tenkiller and Great Salt Plains reservoirs, just to name a few.”

Between 1985 and 1990, the Department’s Wildlife Diversity Program assisted the George M. Sutton Avian Research Center with the release of 90 eaglets in eastern Oklahoma, including 59 birds in 1990 alone.

Since those efforts, bald eagle populations in Oklahoma have increased each year. While no pairs of nesting eagles existed in the state in 1990, Oklahoma currently has at least 49 nesting pairs.

The Wildlife Department hosts Eagle Watches every winter at sites around the state. These events have been taking place for more than 15 years. Bald eagle watches are coordinated by the Wildlife Diversity Program.

Although these birds have been removed from the Threatened and Endangered Species List, they are still protected by both federal and state laws. These acts generally state that the U.S. prohibits the harming, purchasing, killing, possession, and



DAVE MASLOWSKI

*The bald eagle was recently taken off the Threatened Species List.*

transportation of migratory birds, their eggs, parts, and nests, unless allowed by permit.

“This is a major conservation milestone for everyone who loves the outdoors,” said McNeff.

For more information about bald eagles, or to see opportunities for eagle viewing events in Oklahoma, go to <http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/eagleviewing.htm>. ■

## License Tag Updates

**S**oon rainbow trout enthusiasts will be showing their pride. The newest wildlife conservation license tag will feature this colorful master of streams.

Newest in a group of six tags, the rainbow trout joins the bobwhite quail, scissortail flycatcher, whitetail deer, largemouth bass and wild turkey. The new tag is due out in early 2008.

The tags can be ordered by picking up a form at your local tag office and following the instructions or visiting the Oklahoma Tax Commission. For no additional fee, anyone can personalize their tag.

Most of the proceeds go to Oklahoma’s Wildlife Diversity Program, which assists more than 600 of the state’s wildlife species and the places they live. It helps keep species from becoming endangered. The program receives no state tax appropriations and is funded mostly through voluntary contributions. ■



# Slipping and Sliding Underfoot: Amphibians and Reptiles of Oklahoma's WMAs

by Laurie J. Vitt and Janalee P. Caldwell

**W**hen we think of Oklahoma's Wildlife Management Areas, the first image is of a 5-point Buck, a record-size Large-mouthed Bass or a spectacular Tom Turkey. As nearly every hunter or fisherman will tell you, a remarkable diversity of reptiles and amphibians can be found underfoot in the WMAs. Oklahoma is situated on one of the largest habitat gradients in the United States, and as a result, habitats of the many WMAs differ geographically, and species of amphibians and reptiles differ accordingly. To the east, WMAs such as the Cookson Hills WMA contain am-

phibians and reptiles characteristic of the Ozark Mountains and the deciduous forests of the eastern United States, including Cave Salamanders and Spring Peepers. To the west, WMAs like Packsaddle and Sandy Sanders, contain a western fauna, including such gems as Long-nosed Snakes and Prairie Rattlesnakes. In the southeast, Red Slough WMA and others contain Alligators, Mudsnakes, and the bizarre Lesser Sirens (salamanders that are totally aquatic and have tiny front limbs and gills).

For the past two years, we have been surveying amphibians and reptiles of some of the WMAs in an attempt to determine species composition and relative abundance of amphibians and reptiles in these relatively undisturbed areas. At Packsaddle WMA, we found 6 turtle species in 4 families, 8 lizard species in 5 families, 21 snake species in 3 families, 8 frog species in 5 families, and one salamander species. We suspect that a

few other species occur there as well. About a dozen species were new records for Ellis County and several were well out of their known ranges. Our results are summarized on a web page that can be accessed at <http://www.snomnh.ou.edu/personnel/herpetology/vitt/WMA/index.shtml>

The web page includes a description of the area, photographs of all species and individual web pages for each species that provide information on natural history, how to observe the species, and for frogs, even their calls. We provide some useful tips on identifying species, including photographic keys to turtle and lizard heads. We are in the process of developing a similar web page for the Atoka WMA.

Why do we need to know what species of amphibians and reptiles occur in the WMAs? First and foremost, maintenance of the natural fauna and flora are an integral part of maintaining WMAs and other natu-

ral areas so that future generations can enjoy them. Moreover, monitoring the natural fauna allows us to determine if and when major changes take place, as has happened globally with disappearances of many amphibians. To date, we have not seen reductions in amphibians that have been observed elsewhere, but now we have data that will allow us to detect such changes. With the growing interest in natural history and conservation, our surveys provide a stepping stone for naturalists as well as for hunters and fisherman interested in learning about the animals that they so often see. Finally, the natural fauna of the state is part of our natural heritage and we should cherish it. Few places in the United States contain the diversity that we have, jumping, crawling, sliding and swimming around us. With 160 species and subspecies of amphibians and reptiles, Oklahoma has more of these animals than all but a few larger states in the country. ■



*The eastern collared lizard is one of Oklahoma's more easily identifiable reptiles.*

Laurie Vitt

# 2008 Winter Bird Survey

by Lesley McNeff

**T**hank goodness for the cooler temperatures; they bring the winter birds! The 2008 Winter Bird Survey will run from January 10 to January 13. You can participate by picking any two days in this time period. Watch your feeders a few times each day and record the highest number of each type of bird that visits your feeders.

One of the easiest ways to attract birds to your yard is by providing a food source. In order to attract the highest variety of species, there should also be a variety of food. The three primary groups of winter bird feeds are: seeds, fruits and suet. Some birds will take advantage of more than one type of food source, while others are quite particular in what they eat.

Another way to have birds frequently visiting your yard is to have feeders placed

at various areas and levels. This will promote better foraging behavior due to the fact that it mimics nature. When a bird has only one option for a feeding location, it is more likely to be uneasy or not even visit that locale.

Fresh water is also a resource that should not be overlooked. A source of water for drinking and bathing is a vital ingredient to attract birds, even in the winter. It should be far enough away from vegetation to allow clear sight paths, but close enough to seek refuge if it is needed.

For help identifying backyard visitors, log on to [www.okwinterbirds.com](http://www.okwinterbirds.com). This interactive birding tool identifies 52 species that frequent Oklahoma in the winter time and provides pictures, descriptions and ID tips for them. Good luck and enjoy! ■

## 2007 Most Commonly Seen Birds at Feeder Locations

Dark-eyed Junco	9,590
American Goldfinch	8,626
Northern Cardinal	6,237
Red-winged Blackbird	5,734
House Sparrow	4,787
European Starling	3,279
Harris's Sparrow	2,687
Mourning Dove	2,579
House Finch	2,076
Carolina Chickadee	1,908
Blue Jay	1,868
Tufted Titmouse	1,471
Common Grackle	973
Brown-headed Cowbird	896
Field Sparrow	893
Crow	814
White-crowned Sparrow	793
American Robin	791
White-throated Sparrow	756
Downy Woodpecker	713
Song Sparrow	665
Fox Sparrow	613
Purple Finch	581
Brewer's Blackbird	539
American Tree Sparrow	518
Meadowlark (E and W)	480
Carolina Wren	466
Eurasian Collared Dove	401
White-breasted Nuthatch	367
Great-tailed Grackle	342
Northern Mockingbird	310
Northern Bobwhite	303
Eastern Bluebird	296
Flicker (all races)	293
Rock Dove	263
Cedar Waxwing	262
Red-bellied Woodpecker	244
Pine Siskin	194
Hairy Woodpecker	162
Spotted Towhee	155
Bewick's Wren	151
Red-headed Woodpecker	104
Eastern Towhee	96
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	93
Brown Thrasher	82
Brown Creeper	81
Red-breasted Nuthatch	72
Inca Dove	64
Evening Grosbeak	57
Pileated Woodpecker	47
Rusty Blackbird	45

## Hackberry Flat WMA

by Brett Cooper

**I**f you enjoy watching shorebirds and grassland songbirds consider a visit to Hackberry Flat Wildlife Management Area. This destination is part of Loop 13 of the Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma.

Early morning and late evening are the best times for birder to visit Hackberry Flat in southwest Oklahoma. Located just outside Frederick, Hackberry Flat is a restored wetland that is operated by the

Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. The best way to view birds here is by driving the gravel roads that run along the dikes. Two observation towers provide great viewing on this flat terrain. The Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, and Snowy Plover nest in the wetland as well as such grassland songbirds as the Dickcissel, Grasshopper Sparrow and both the Eastern and Western



*A snowy plover is just one of the species you can view at Hackberry Flat.*

Meadowlarks. With its close access and more than 190 species of bird identified, this area is known as a birders paradise! More information regarding the Bird Route in Loop 13 and the Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma can be found at [www.greatplainstrail.com](http://www.greatplainstrail.com).

For information or wetland conditions visit <http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/hackberry2.htm> ■

# 2008 Winter Bird Survey Form

Survey Period is Thursday, January 10 – Sunday, January 13

Save a Stamp! Enter your results online at [okwinterbirds.com](http://okwinterbirds.com)

**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, then 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 collared dove and Inca dove were added to the list in 2003 and 2004, respectively. Play a role in tracking the presence of these new species 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 each of the eight parts of this survey:

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
 County \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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  
 Millet       Suet/Miracle Meal  
 Fruit       Sunflower  
 Mixed Seeds       Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 Milo

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 any one time during two consecutive days. DO NOT make checks or other marks.

- |                              |                            |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ___ Northern Bobwhite        | ___ European Starling      |
| ___ Rock Dove (Pigeon)       | ___ Northern Cardinal      |
| ___ Mourning Dove            | ___ Eastern Towhee         |
| ___ Inca Dove                | ___ Spotted Towhee         |
| ___ Eurasian Collared Dove   | ___ Fox Sparrow            |
| ___ Pileated Woodpecker      | ___ American 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   |
| ___ Eastern Bluebird         | ___ House Finch            |
| ___ American Robin           | ___ Purple Finch           |
| ___ Northern Mockingbird     | ___ Pine Siskin            |
| ___ Brown Thrasher           | ___ American Goldfinch     |
| ___ Cedar Waxwing            | ___ Evening Grosbeak       |

List other birds seen at feeders: \_\_\_\_\_

List other birds seen in the yard, but not at feeders: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Mail completed survey form by February 20, 2008 to:

**Winter Bird Survey, Wildlife Diversity Program,  
 P.O. Box 53465, Oklahoma City, OK 73152**

or enter results online at [okwinterbirds.com](http://okwinterbirds.com)



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

# Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma Playa Lake Loop

by Jennifer Bengé

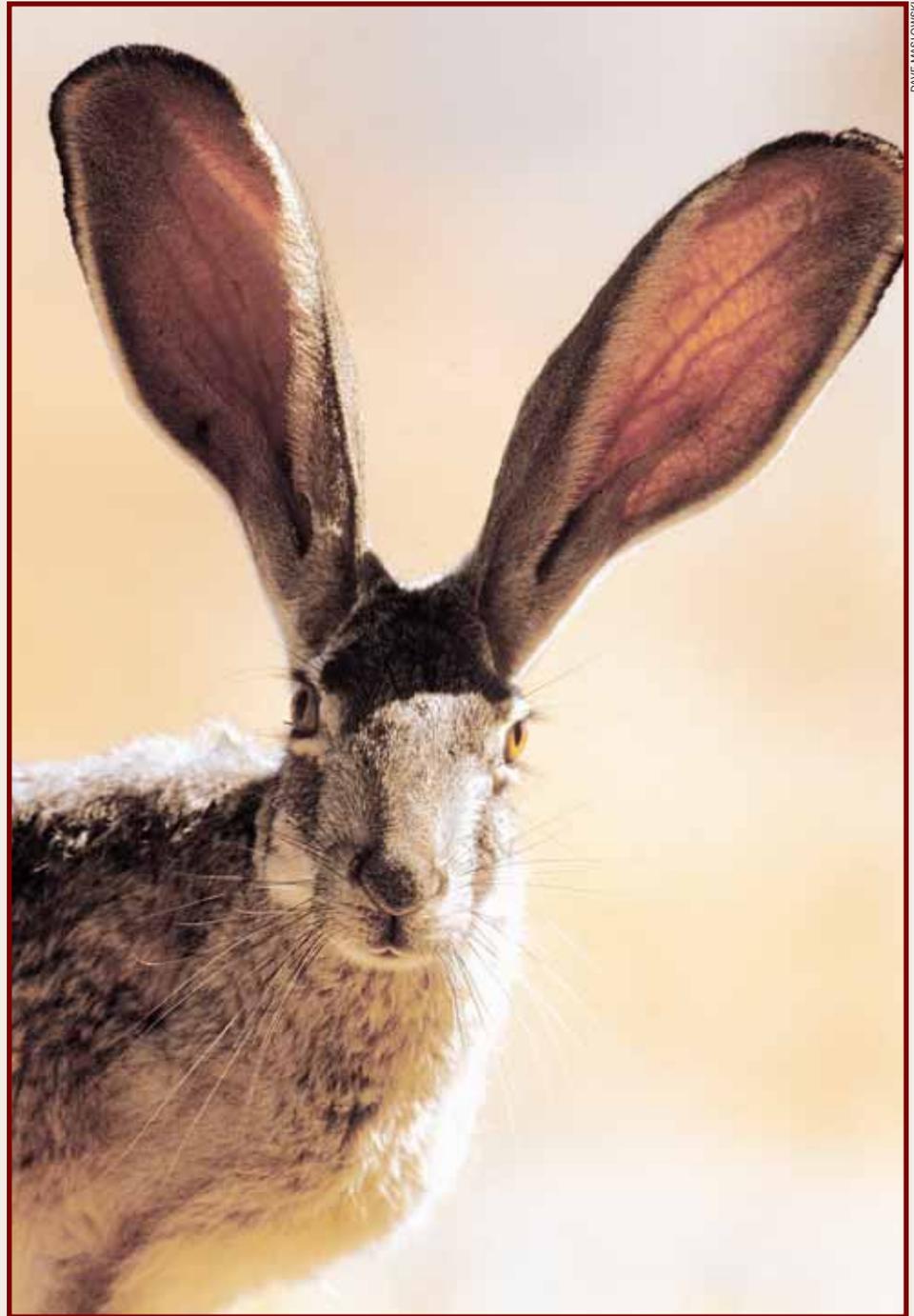
**Playa lakes** are round shallow basins that only hold water after rainfall or runoff from the surrounding prairie. Playa lakes are one of the most important and unique wetlands around. They have a natural wet/dry cycle that supports a diverse plant community, as well as specialized plankton and aquatic insects.

Because of the high productivity of playa lakes they are an essential wintering and stop over place for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds. Some of the shorebirds that can be found around playa lakes are long-billed curlews, greater yellowlegs, black-necked stilts and American avocets.

When you travel along the Playa Lake Loop you will be experiencing a type of wetland that is very unique; approximately 95% of the world's playa lakes are found in the western Great Plains.

There is much more to see on the Playa Lakes Loop than just the playa lakes. This area is home to a great variety of plant and animal life. As you travel you will want to keep your eyes open for a chance to spot prairie dog towns, burrowing owls, badgers, swift foxes, ferruginous hawks, orioles, woodpeckers, red-tailed hawks, horned lizards, white-tailed deer, coyotes, Rio Grande turkeys, peregrine falcons, black-tailed jackrabbits and porcupines to name a few.

Whether you're interested in just taking a daytime drive, going on a birding expedition or an extended trip, it is sure to be an experience you won't soon forget. ■



DAVE MASLOWSKI

*Black-tailed jackrabbits are common visitors to the playa lakes region.*

## Kaw WMA

by Brett Cooper

**Kaw WMA** is located in north-central Oklahoma northeast of Ponca City and is managed by the ODWC. Kaw has just over 16,000 acres and has a unique combination of upland and bottomland forests and tallgrass prairie. The WMA encompasses the upper two-thirds of Kaw Lake. Many different activities can

be experienced at the WMA. One extraordinary activity occurring each January is the Kaw Lake Eagle Watch. Over 60 Bald Eagles winter at Kaw Lake from November through February. These eagles are visible from numerous sites around the lake but opportunities peak in January. The Kaw Lake Eagle Watch is organized by a partnership of local groups with an interest in eagles and outdoor recreation such as the Kaw Lake Association, the ODWC, Kaw Nation, ACOE,

Payne County Audubon Society, Sutton Avian Research Center, Kaw City Chamber of Commerce, Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority and ConocoPhillips. The Bald Eagle is truly a wildlife success story and we have the opportunity to observe this success of our national symbol right in our own backyard! Contact Biologist Ron Folks at (405) 823-7936 if you would like more information regarding Kaw WMA and their wonderful Bald Eagles. ■

# Does the Cerulean Warbler Still Breed in Oklahoma?

by Vincent Cavalieri

**T**he Cerulean Warbler, once abundant across the eastern U.S., have declined rapidly due to road construction, logging, and parasitism from the Brown-headed Cowbird. A petition to list the Cerulean Warbler as an endangered species was recently denied by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The warbler eats insects and makes its cup-style nest high up in the tree on a horizontal limb far from the trunk. The song is a three part, musical, rising buzz tzeedl tzeedl tzeedl ti ti ti tzeee. They are very able fliers, moving very fast while foraging from branch to branch high up in the tree.

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation awarded a State Wildlife Grant was awarded to the Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management at Oklahoma State University, to search areas of suitable habitat within the historic range of the Cerulean Warbler in Oklahoma and to determine if the species still breeds within the state. Surveys were conducted at 75 sites in both northeastern and southeastern portions of Oklahoma using a recording of a singing male. If a Cerulean



BRIAN E. SMALL

*The cerulean warbler has experienced recent population decline.*

Warbler responded to the call an attempt was made to confirm breeding and to take habitat measurements. Six adult males and three adult females were found at four sites on north slopes in the Ouachita Mountains, near ridge tops approximately 2,300 feet in elevation. One pair was observed carrying food and was later seen with fledglings confirming breeding for this area. The plant community where Cerulean Warblers were present can be characterized as having large trees and a high percentage of shrub and ground cover. Dominant tree species on these sites include black walnut, white oak, mockernut hickory, and red maple. ■

## Birdbath Basics

by Mel Hickman

**B**irds will travel great distances for a reliable, clean water source, particularly during the hot months of summer. By maintaining a clean water source for birds you will likely attract more bird species than the seed feeders not to mention the enjoyment of watching bathing behaviors. Successful birdbaths are located in shady areas, approximately ten feet from protective cover.

The secret to attracting lots of birds is to keep your birdbath full at all times. Change the water every couple of days to keep it fresh and avoid the growth of algae. Most important, clean the birdbath regularly, to get rid of spoiled food particles and droppings, which may spread bird diseases using a solution of nine parts water to one part bleach.

Don't forget to clean and replace the sugar water in your hummingbird feeders at least every three days. Hummingbird feeders that can be taken apart and cleaned thoroughly are the best. Use hot water and vinegar to remove bacteria and fungus molds. ■



# Submit Your Hummingbird Survey Form to Oklahoma Nongame Wildlife Program

by Brett Cooper

**O**n April 1st the hummingbird feeders were hung outside and the wonderful neotropical migrants started moving into Oklahoma from Central America and Mexico. Hopefully you have seen many Ruby-throated and Black-chinned as well as the rare Rufous and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds at your feeders! As of November 1st you can take the feeders down, clean them with warm soapy water, and put them away until next spring. Remember that leaving the feeders up until November 1st will not slow the hummingbird's migration.

The survey will help biologists learn more about our state's hummingbird population and how long they reside in our state each year. Some of the questions you will be asked are when you put up and took down your feeder, how many and what species were observed, and the plants you may have that attract hummingbirds. Please submit your hummingbird survey observations to <http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/hb/hummingbirdsurvey.aspx>

Thank you for your help! ■



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*Help the Wildlife Department learn more about hummingbird patterns by participating in the Hummingbird Survey.*

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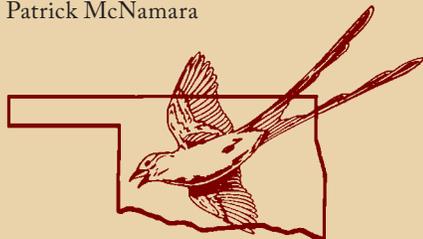
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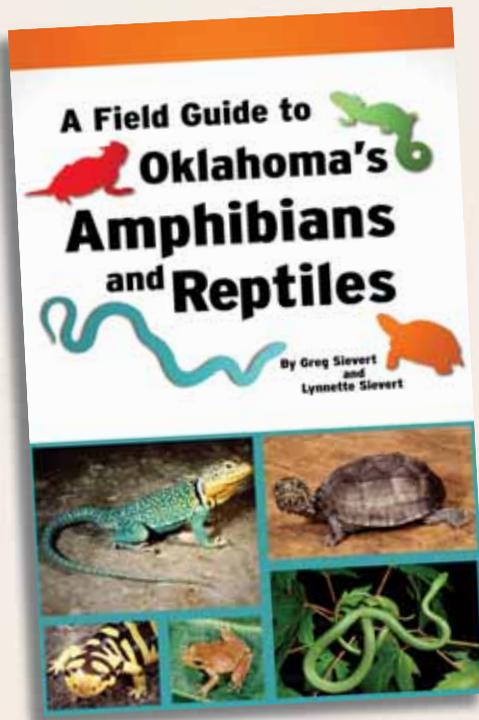
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# Wet Wonderland for Many Oklahoma Species

by Buck Ray



**T**he torrential rains of the summer months may have caused some major inconvenience and heartache for humans, but not all species within Oklahoma feel the same way. All this moisture has created a utopia for reptiles and amphibians (herps) throughout most of the state. You may have heard the unique calls of the Great Plains Narrow-mouthed Toads radiating from your garden pond or seen other signs of herps around your yard and been curious what species you've encountered.

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation recently published *A Field Guide to Oklahoma's Amphibian and Reptiles*. Given the wet wonderland we had this summer, this book is a detailed resource and can help you identify the many herps you may see. Excellent pictures and descriptions make this book a 'must have' for any outdoor enthusiast. This field guide makes it simple for families to share and educate children of all ages to the wonderful world of herps here in our great state. Visit the Outdoor Store at <http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/outstorepubs.htm>. ■

## Oklahoma Winter Bird Atlas Project

Dan L. Reinking

**B**irds in Oklahoma have been studied over the years by a variety of professional and amateur ornithologists. Recently, volunteers have conducted comprehensive breeding season surveys that culminated in the publication of the *Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas*, published in 2004 by the University of Oklahoma Press and available online or through your favorite bookstore. Hundreds of people participate in the roughly 20 Christmas Bird Counts conducted each year in Oklahoma. What has never happened, however, is a comprehensive, statewide study of winter bird distributions in our state. Thanks in part to funding from the State Wildlife Grants program, such a survey is nearing completion.

Building on the techniques and volunteer base developed for Oklahoma's Breeding Bird Atlas Project, a similar survey was initiated in December of 2003 and scheduled for completion in early 2008. During the five winters in that time frame, skilled birders have been

surveying 583 randomly selected blocks of land throughout Oklahoma. For the purpose of this project, winter is defined as the period from 1 December through 14 February, and each winter is divided evenly into early and late winter periods. Volunteers must visit each of their blocks at least once for a minimum of four hours in both the early and the late winter periods. They record all of the species they can locate within the block, as well as the numbers of each species seen.

Once all of the surveys are completed in early 2008, the information will be compiled, mapped, and analyzed to produce the *Oklahoma Winter Bird Atlas*, a book summarizing current winter bird distributions in the state. Projects such as the breeding and winter bird atlases provide a current and comprehensive summary of bird distributions, but are also meant to be repeated at 15 or 20 year intervals, and thus serve as a valuable benchmark to monitor range and population changes over time. ■

# Shorebirds in the Mixed-grass Prairie Region of Oklahoma

by Craig Davis & Gene Albanese



Conducting a bird survey around a typical wetland in the mixed-grass prairie region.

**I**n the mixed-grass prairie region of Oklahoma, shorebirds rely on a variety of wetlands and other habitats such as river and lake edges, sewage lagoons and sheetwater in crop fields as stopover sites where the birds can replenish depleted energy and nutrient reserves. These stopover sites are very critical

to shorebirds because they act as “stepping stones” for the birds to continue and complete their migration. Without these “stepping stones”, shorebirds may not have successful reproduction and ultimately may not be able to survive their long migrations. Since the early 1970’s, several populations of North American shorebird species have cumulatively declined by more than 70 percent. These declines have resulted in a heightened awareness by state, federal and international organizations to develop conservation strategies for these imperiled birds on both a regional scale and hemispheric scale.

Recently, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation awarded a grant through the State Wildlife Grants program to the Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management and the Oklahoma Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at OSU. This grant aims to obtain information on the

distribution and ecological needs of shorebirds during their migration through the mixed-grass prairie region of Oklahoma. It will also describe how different landscapes influence shorebird distribution, abundance and habitat use within this region. The goal of this project is to provide conservation and management recommendations to the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation personnel and other conservation organizations.

During spring and fall migration, shorebird surveys will be conducted at sites throughout Alfalfa, Blaine, Canadian, Garfield, Grant, Kingfisher, Logan, Major, Oklahoma and Woods counties. At each site, habitat types used by these birds will be recorded. A Geographic Information System will then be used to determine how landscape and local variables affect shorebird distribution and abundances within this region. This study was initiated in July of 2007 and will continue for two years. ■

## Arcadia Conservation Education Area Improvements Scheduled

by Colin Berg

**T**he Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation has held a lease on 720 acres of Corp of Engineers property on the south side of Lake Arcadia for thirteen years. Several improvements have been added to the area including education pavilions, restrooms, parking and access improvements around the fishing pond. A 4,000 square foot research facility was also constructed two years ago.

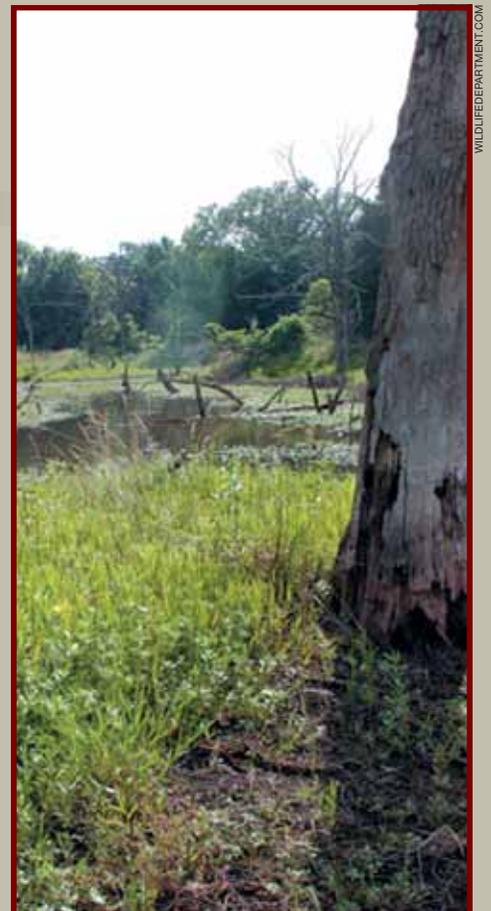
However, the best is yet to come. Recent action by the Wildlife Commission assures that the area will see significant improvements in the future. Plans for the coming year include construction of a multi-purpose 5,000-6,000 square foot education center. It will have an open floor plan and will be used for aquatic education, hunter education, archery in the schools training and conservation education training workshops, as well as meetings and conferences. Besides the multi-purpose building, additional improvements to the roads,

construction of a parking lot and opening of the boat ramp for public use are planned.

Current activities underway include vehicle parking sites for walk-in fishing access, cedar removal, signing the area, a nature trail and gazebo and the continued implementation of a prescribed fire plan to manage the habitat. The Oklahoma Master Naturalists are conducting bird, butterfly and small mammal inventories on the site. For more information about these inventories, please visit <http://www.okmasternaturalist.org/index.html>

Watch for additional information regarding the Arcadia Conservation Education Area as work progresses in the coming months. ■

*The Arcadia Conservation Education Area encompasses some of central Oklahoma’s characteristic land features and habitats.*



*Black-bellied whistling ducks are noisy birds that prefer habitats such as Red Slough.*

## Red Slough WMA

by David Arbour

**T**he rainfall has been excellent at Red Slough this year resulting in a bonanza of birds and other wildlife. Visitors to the slough wishing to see birds would have the best luck by walking west from the middle and north parking lots along Mudline Road. A  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile walk west of the north parking lot will bring you to the heron rookery on Otter Lake where currently several thousand herons and egrets are nesting. Also nesting here with them are anhingas and 3 species of ibis. If you visit early in the morning or late

*There are 3 wildlife observation platforms on this route and there is a loop you can walk around the lake.*

in the evening you will have a chance of seeing a Common Moorhen or hearing a King Rail. During mid to late summer, Wood Storks and Roseate Spoonbills can be found in this area. A  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile walk west from the middle parking lot will bring you to Bittern Lake which is a hotspot for both species of bitterns. Common Moorhens and occasionally Purple Gallinules can be found here also. There are 3 wildlife observation platforms on this route and there is a loop you can walk around the lake. During the early morning and late evening hours watch for Black-bellied Whistling Ducks flying overhead. Anywhere you walk or drive at Red Slough watch for the Painted Bunting and Prothonotary Warbler, both of which are fairly common here. ■

# The Black Kettle Loop

by Brett Cooper

**T**he Black Kettle Loop, number ten of thirteen loops that together make the Great Plains Trail of Oklahoma, lies in a very diverse ecosystem. This area consists of an upland mixed-grass prairie with gently to steep rolling hills containing plants such as little bluestem, shinnery oak, sand sagebrush and sand plum. Sand plum is currently being studied for age and growth models and to determine any relationships influencing bird species. Black Kettle Wildlife Management Area lies within this loop and has a much more

diverse combination of topography, vegetation and animal life. Many of the streams in this area contain Oklahoma's largest darter species, the logperch. The high soaring Mississippi kite is also an abundant species here in the summer.

The Washita National Wildlife Refuge lies on the northwest portion of Foss reservoir. Many different species of amphibians, reptiles and mammals have been observed on the refuge. A total of 271 bird species have been sighted at or near the refuge since 1966 including least bitterns, lesser prairie-chickens

and whooping cranes. Other species sighted in or near the refuge that are rare or uncommon include burrowing owl, ash-throated flycatcher, ladder-backed woodpecker, loggerhead shrike, Bell's vireo, American pipit, Cassin's sparrow, rufous-crowned sparrow, painted bunting and bullock's oriole.

Since it is an area that is very diverse in wildlife as well as topography, this has just been the tip of the iceberg. For more information on the Black Kettle Loop, visit [wildlifedepartment.com/wildlifetrails.htm](http://wildlifedepartment.com/wildlifetrails.htm). ■



BILL HOFF

*A fierce predator, the loggerhead shrike is sometimes spotted in the Black Kettle Loop.*

# Wildlife Diversity Program

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