



Oklahoma City Audubon Society

OKC-AUDUBON.ORG

April, 2011

The Evolutionary History of Birds

Birds are charismatic and familiar parts of our natural world, and their fossil past is equally eloquent and well documented. We will explore the gradual transition from the Raptors of Jurassic Park to the chickens and chickadees we know today.

Our speaker is Brian Davis a graduate student at the University of Oklahoma. He is a native Oklahoman who grew up back east and went to school at the College of William and Mary in Virginia. He has a Masters in Zoology from the University of Oklahoma, and will be defending his dissertation and completing his PhD next month on the evolution of early fossil mammals. He became interested in birds only recently, after reading "The Big Year" in 2007. His wife is also a graduate student. They have two boys: Ben, 4, can identify more birds than the average undergraduate, and Owen, 2, will hopefully be right on his heels.

Come join us and bring a friend for a good evening of camaraderie, birds, & great refreshments. Our meetings are held September through June on the third Monday of each month. Meetings begin at 7 p.m. at the Will Rogers Garden Center, I-4 and NW 36th Street. Visitors are always welcome.



Cookie Patrol

Refreshments for the April meeting will be provided by Bill Diffin, Nealand Hill, Marion Homier & John Cleal.

Have you overlooked paying your 2011 dues???

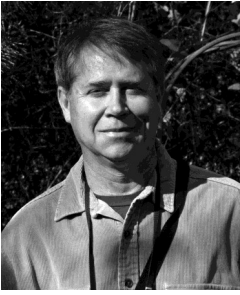
It's not too late but please renew soon before your membership lapses!

Dues for 2011 are \$15 and can be paid at the April meeting. If you'd like the convenience of paying by credit card online, we have a secure payment option for you. Simply go to the Oklahoma City Audubon Society website and use our secure PayPal shopping cart system.

Here's our address to the form: <http://okc-audubon.org/?p=121>

President's Perspective

By Bill Diffin



You might be aware that South Jenkins, a favorite birding location in Norman, was recently the scene of a wildfire. I understand that the woods was largely spared, and most of what burned was the grassy hill west of the woods and east of the marsh.

The fire was man made but accidental. Dick Gunn made a post on the OKbirds listserv lamenting the impact of the fire, and that prompted a discussion on whether the fire was a bad thing or an overdue natural process. After all fire is a part of nature. Studies of tree rings and archaeological sites have revealed that woodlands burned more frequently before white settlement. My purpose here is not to weigh in on the good or bad consequences of the South Jenkins fire but simply to point out the importance of the subject. Development is relentlessly shrinking natural areas, and the areas that remain are used ever more intensively by .

The question as to how the remaining islands of natural habitat should be managed is becoming more and more critical. Many natural processes, for example floods, droughts and fires, are destructive in the short term. But nature has designed for these events and is often dependent on them to maintain an ecosystem. After a destructive event, natural processes restore productive habitat through multiple stages of recovery. The question is: Can natural processes of recovery be counted on to work on the much smaller scale of landscapes remaining now and in the future? In the past, part of the resilience of ecosystems derived from their large size. It was difficult for a single natural event to wipe out the entire population of a species. That is not always true any more, and in the future many ecosystems will have to be intensively managed in order to preserve them against permanent damage by natural events. A case in point is the South Jenkins Yellow-throated Warblers. Two years ago a pair nested in the woods, the first breeding record in Cleveland County, and they returned last year. The YT Warblers had been sighted there again this year before the burn. The fire could have eliminated them. Fortunately, sightings afterwards indicate that they survived and may remain loyal to the location.

According to the World Wildlife Fund, there are 867 unique terrestrial ecoregions on the planet. This is

an amazing number and speaks to a diversity which might be a little surprising to one not familiar with the topic. Back in 2002 I became interested in the details of habitats in Central and South America as a result of some cacti I was given. Researching on the internet, I came across an application called WildWorld, a joint project of National Geographic and the WWF. There was a world map showing all the ecoregions in contrasting colors as if they were states. Selecting an ecoregion brought up a landscape photo and a description including signature plants and animals, climate, topography, status and threats. The joint project ended, and the original WildWorld application is no longer available. However, it has descendants that live on in various forms. The following web location provides access to a list of the ecoregions -- you click on a geographic realm on the map to bring up a list, and then click on one of the alphanumeric identifiers to get a description -- <http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildworld/profiles/> is the website. Wikipedia also has a list of the ecoregions at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_terrestrial_ecoregions (WWF) website. The Wikipedia list is easier to interpret in one respect -- it has more detailed location information. The problem is that Wikipedia does not have articles on all the ecoregions, and what articles exist are often less detailed than one desires. However, an article usually contains a link in the reference section to the WWF description.

It would be interesting to visit all these regions and see the characteristic birds, plants and animals. We have a few world travelers in our midst who have probably seen a wide cross-section. A more attainable goal for many of us would be to understand how our seasonal Oklahoma resident and migrant birds live when they are not here. Knowing their preferred habitats might give valuable insight into their occurrence and behavior in Oklahoma. It would also reveal some of the reasons for their uniqueness as species and their long term conservation needs. Wandering through the ecoregion list looking up the descriptions and then following up with further searches on the signature species is quickly addictive. Most recently, I looked up the "mopane/brachystegia" areas that Dick Gunn mentioned as sites of deliberate burns in one of his posts on the South Jenkins fire. It turns out that there are multiple Afrotropic ecoregions characterized by Mopane or Miombo(brachystegia), but two examples are AT0702 Angolan Mopane woodlands, and AT0719 Southern Miombo woodlands.

Rare Sighting

Nancy Vicars confirmed the rare sighting of a Great White Stork in Oklahoma County on Sunday, April 10, 2011. It brought a beautiful baby girl, named Ella Marie (after her Great-Great Grandmother) Jacobs to their family.

Oklahoma City Audubon Society March 21, 2011 Minutes

President Bill Diffin called the meeting to order and asked if there were any guests. Diane Landoll and Claire Curry were visitors. Doris Wheeler is a new member.

President Diffin asked for any corrections to the February minutes as published in the March newsletter. Terri Underhill made a motion to approve the minutes. Matt Jung seconded the motion. Motion approved.

Treasurer Nancy Vicars presented the March Treasurer's Report:

Cash on Hand 2/21/2011	\$6,106.07
Deposits	381.17
Disbursements	<u>(329.20)</u>

Cash on Hand 3/21/2011	\$6,158.04
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Treasurer's Report was approved as read.

Committee Reports:

Jimmy Woodard stated the next field trip is March 26, to South Jenkins in Norman. The trip will be lead by Dick Gunn.

April 9th field trip will be at the Oklahoma City Zoo. Nadine Varner will lead the group on a special Behind the Scenes tour.

Additional field trip schedules are listed on the back page of our newsletter under Field Trip Schedule.

The club picnic and Nightjar walk will be located at Lake Draper in May or June. Nancy Reed volunteered to make reservations at the Lake Draper pavilion.

New Business:

Bill Diffin stated the club would have an exhibit table at Martin Park Earth Fest on April 16. Bill Diffin, Nealand Hill and Terri Underhill volunteered to work the exhibit.

President Diffin would like to support student speakers by

passing the hat for donations. The hat was passed for tonight's speaker.

Old Business:

Nancy Vicars has not received payment on some membership dues. She is accepting membership dues from anyone that who like to make a payment.

Sharon Henthorn and her husband took a birding trip to the Lower Rio Grand Valley. She brought her pictures for anyone who would like to view them.

Warren Harden had a "fall out" of birds last Sunday. He asked if anyone else had the same experience.

Adjourn for snacks.

Warren Harden announced the speaker for April is Brian Davis. Brian's topic will be on the History of Birds. Lynn Barber will be the May speaker. She holds the title of seeing the most birds in one year.

Warren introduced tonight's guest speaker, Diane Landoll. Diane presented a very interesting study on Scissor-tailed Flycatcher.

Nancy Reed, Recording Secretary

Oklahoma City Audubon Society

Officers 2011

President	Bill Diffin	722-3778
Vice President	John Shackford	340-5057
Secretary	Nancy Reed	799-1116
Treasurer	Nancy Vicars	732-9885
Parliament	Ted Golden	354-3619
Programs	Warren Harden	364-3491
Recorder	Esther M. Key	381-9170
Conservation	Larry Mays	392-2131
Field Trips	Jimmy Woodard	365-5685

Newsletter Editors:

	Pat Velte	751-5263
	Carla Brueggen	495-3259
Publicity	Doug Eide	495-8192
Historian	Nealand Hill	388-6759
Refreshments	Jim Vicars	732-9885
Webmaster	Pat Velte	751-5263

The Oklahoma City Audubon society is neither a chapter of nor affiliated with National Audubon.

For Oklahoma City Audubon news between newsletters and meetings, be sure to log onto:

OKC-Audubon.org

MARCH MESA TRIP

Nadine and I headed out Thursday evening, March 24 on a trip to the mesa country. We headed up the Northwest passage where we saw a lone Scissortail in Dewey County(FOS). We made it to Evans Chambers Lake in Beaver County around 7PM for a brief stop. The temps had fallen and the winds had picked up so the birding was brief. We did find our FOS Tree and Rough-wing Swallows. A few ducks rode the waves. We spent the night in Beaver. Friday morning, we travelled the back roads west from town thru Beaver into Texas County. Pheasants were everywhere. We found some waterfowl in some ponds next to Hwy 83 where it crosses the Beaver River. Canvasbacks, Ring-necked, GW Teal and Mallard were present.

On the north end of Optima, we found three Burrowing Owls, a pair of Barn Owls, and a half dozen Scaled Quail. We continue west thru Guymon and on to Boise City. We stopped at the state park for birds and a sandwich for lunch. We enjoyed numerous Say's Phoebes, Mountain Bluebirds, Ferruginous Hawk, and Ladder-backed WP.

We met up with Colleen Crank, a birder friend from St Louis, who was the impetus of this trip. She is interested in the Dust Bowl and history of the area. We drove around the Kenton area enjoying the scenery and a few birds. We found Roadrunner, E Bluebirds, Sage Thrasher, Curve-billed Thrasher, Common Raven, and Canyon Wren.



By now it was time for dinner so we went to the Hoot Owl Ranch where we had reservations. The Collins are only open for meals on Friday and Saturday nights but they put on a spread worth a visit. At dusk, we were treated to two calling Western Screech Owls. One made itself visible but the other stayed hidden in a Juniper tree.

On Saturday, we met up with Dan Robinson in Boise City. Dan is a birder and rancher who has lived in Cimarron County since the 80's. He took us to several homesteads that had been abandoned since the mid-1900's. At the first place we visited, we struck pay dirt. Dan found a male Vermilion Flycatcher. We drove a two-track road and had hundreds of Horned

Larks and longspurs flying around. We got to within a few feet of a Chestnut-collared Longspur in partial breeding plumage. At a nearby house, we found two Barn Owls. Along a fence, we found several flocks of Lark Buntings in winter plumage. A FOS Swainson's Hawk circled overhead. Another surprise was a Black-throated Sparrow hanging out with White-crowns. We followed it from a brush pile to a row of trees. A Lesser Goldfinch was another nice find at another abandoned home. Later in the afternoon, we visited Seneca Creek in the southwest corner of the county. This creek feeds into the Beaver River and had a lot of wet, marshy reeds. We called up a Virginia Rail but never got a look at it. A flock of Turkeys ambled along among a herd of cows.

We celebrated our wonderful day with a meal at DQ in Boise and ice cream for dessert, of course! Dan was a wonderful guide and very knowledgeable about the local history and birds.

Sunday morning, we birded around the Kenton area. In town, we found 4 Cassin's Finch(3 female and 1 male) at Asa Jones feeders. Nearby we found one Scrub Jay and a pair of Rock Wrens. Lake Etling held an adult Bald Eagle and a hundred or so ducks including L Scaup, Shoveler, Mallard, Ruddies, and GW Teal. Nadine and I parted company with Colleen late morning. We stopped at the BC Sewage Ponds and found lots of waterfowl including Canvasback, Mallard, Shoveler, L Scaup, Ruddy, and one Pintail. We also had one Snipe and three Horned Grebes. A quick stop at Optima produced two Snowy Plovers and a few Mallard and GW Teals from the south overlook.

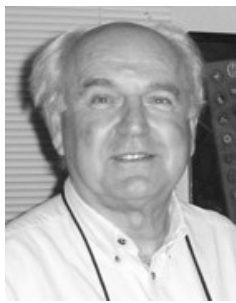
Leaving Boise City it was overcast, misty, and 34 degrees. About twenty miles west of Guymon, we found a breeding Horned Grebe in the middle of the wet, black asphalt road. It had obviously landed on the road thinking it looked like water from above. It allowed me to pick it up but immediately went to pecking me. We tried to throw it up in the air but it only flew about ten yards. We decided to wrap it up in a towel and take it to Sunset Lake in Guymon. The trip only took about 30 minutes and for the most part, the bird rested without struggling. Nadine checked it's condition and it seemed healthy and uninjured. At the lake, we released it into the water. It swam about 25 yards then dove. We watched as it popped back up then dove again. We assumed it was in good shape and hopefully continued it's migration at some point later. Thus ended our good deed for the day.

Jimmy Woodard

PS...just a note on the Black-throated Sparrow. Dan reports that he refound the bird at the same location this week singing it's head off.

Bird of the Month

By John Shackford



Central Oklahoma may be getting a new nesting species—the Fish Crow (*Corvus ossifragus*)—through expansion from the east. Bent, in his life history of Fish Crows (Life Histories of North American Jays, Crows and Titmouse, 1964) says that the Fish Crow is quite similar to the American

Crow in its nesting behavior: they usually nest well above the ground in a wide variety of trees, and normally lay 4 or 5 eggs that are “exactly like other crows except in size”, being slightly smaller than the eggs of the American Crow. Bent makes the point that Fish Crows are often found in the vicinity of heronries. Perhaps the birds reported at Overholser will

utilize the heronry off NW 10th St., less than a mile from Lake Overholser, when that heronry gets going strong. So if you should go to check out the heronry this spring, listen also for the call of Fish Crows in the area.

I believe Fish Crows have been reported in Norman at Lake

Thunderbird for several years. On 6 March 2011 (and other dates) Matthew Jung reported hearing and seeing 1 or more Fish Crows at Stinchcomb Wildlife Refuge, and our President Bill Diffin has sent in a carefully worded probable report of 5 birds he observed on 1 April 2011 on the mudflats at the north end of Lake Overholser: he heard only Fish-Crow-like calls from the group of birds. Bill is well aware of the difficulty of making an unqualified identification of Fish Crow; I know because after our last bird meeting he and I had a conversation specifically about the problems of identifying them.

Absolutely confirming the identity of a Fish Crow is, indeed, something of a problem. First, they are not easily separated by size and other morphology from the American Crow. According

to many authorities, the best way to tell these 2 crow species apart in the field is by voice. Ken Kaufman (Field Guide to Birds of North America, 2000) says that the Fish Crow is “[s]lightly smaller than American Crow, but recognized with certainty only by sound.” He gives the voice as “high-pitched, nasal *kah-kah*, second note lower.” He goes on to say that it makes other *caws*, and that “young American Crows also have high-pitched, nasal voices at first.” It would seem that after a few months the young American Crow’s call would no longer so closely resemble Fish Crow calls; thus most “*kah-kahs*” heard early in the spring, before nesting American Crow young would have hatched—timing that agrees with Matt’s and Bill’s reports—should be Fish Crows. But in my conversation with Bill Diffin, he pointed out an additional problem: we don’t really know all the calls an American Crow can give. The American Crow can be quite imitative of a wide variety of sounds (including human words), and it is hard to

rule out, absolutely, the possibility of an American Crow imitating the call of a Fish Crow. But the weight of the evidence clearly is tending toward Fish Crows being in central Oklahoma.



Dr. George Sutton, the artist/ornithologist who graced our state for many years, had a similar identification problem in Cimarron County of the Oklahoma Panhandle between the Common Raven and its slightly smaller relative the Chihuahuan Raven: I believe it is fair to say that there

are even more differences between the 2 ravens than between the 2 crows being discussed here. Doc knew for many years that the Common Raven was in the Black Mesa area, but he never could prove it beyond doubt. He even had a standing offer, I think of \$10 or \$20, for anyone in the area who collected a specimen. Finally Doc collected one himself in 1962, thereby lying to rest what was, no doubt, years of frustration for him in trying to prove absolutely that the Common Raven was indeed an Oklahoma species. Today proving the identity of a Fish Crow could likely be done through genetic material gathered from a feather, rather than collecting a bird. In summary, sometimes everybody is right—it just might be hard to prove absolutely!

Recorders Report – March 2011

Redbuds greet migrating birds

As drought and high fire danger continues and the landscape begins to brighten up with redbuds in the forest, spring beauties peeking through the mulch, and daffodils on the city lawns; the spring bird migration begins. Will there be any rare or unusual birds? Who will see the first arrival of the Oklahoma state bird? Reports are a mixture of remaining winter species and arriving spring migrants.

On the 1st Matt Jung reported White-crowned and Harris's Sparrows, Spotted Towhee, and a greatly reduced number of gulls. On the 6th along east Stinchcomb WMA Matt discovered a Barred Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, Fish Crow, Brown Creeper, and Orange-crowned Warbler. In Norman on the 7th he had 2 White-winged Doves and heard an Inca Dove. On the 9th along South Jenkins he located Fox, Lincoln's and White-throated Sparrow, and in Stillwater John Polo had a Hermit Thrust.

On the 10th Matt checked west Stinchcomb WMA and observed a male Purple Finch, Hairy Woodpecker, Savannah Sparrow, and Western Meadowlark. In Stillwater Torre Hovick saw a **Cinnamon Teal** at the Teal Ridge Wetlands, and Tim O'Connell reported all three teal were still there on the 16th. On the 13th Alicia Riddle near Lake Arcadia reports the American Woodcock displays were continuing. Jimmy Woodard heard Fish Crows on the 12th in Midwest City and on the 13th around SW 104th and Cemetery Road. Esther Key heard an **Upland Sandpiper** in Moore.



On the 12th Brian Davis thought he saw a **Mississippi Kite** fly over his yard in central Norman. Now this is way early for a kite, but one can never completely rule out a maverick individual or two, and in Norman why not a Sooner Kite. On the 13th without binoculars Andy Crosby apparently saw one in Stillwater. On the 19th John LaGroue and his wife saw and heard a Mississippi Kite fly about 15 to 20 feet over their house in Edmond, and on the 20th Brian Munzy saw one near SW 59th and I-35.

On the 16th the first **Barn Swallows** were reported by Tim O'Connell in Stillwater and Cynthia Van Den Broeke in Norman. On the 19th Tim reported a **Long-billed Dowitcher** at the Teal Ridge Wetland in Payne County. The OCAS field trip led by Jim Bates checked out Lake Overholser and scoped out an **American Avocet**, **Baird's Sandpipers**, and **Franklin's Gulls**.

On the 20th Matt checked the mud flats of Lake Overholser and found

Snowy Egrets, **American Golden Plover**, and **Lesser Yellowlegs**. Angie and Ben took their daughters to Dahlgren Lake in the Lexington WMA and discovered **Blue-grey Gnatcatcher**, **White-eyed Vireos**, **Louisiana**



Waterthrush, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

Meanwhile, in her neighbor's yard in Norman a **Black-and White Warbler** appeared. In SW Oklahoma City Patti Muzny had singing Chipping Sparrows and around sundown Purple Martins swept across her back yard and called out their most welcome greetings. In Edmond Lisa Bewley also had Purple Martins checking out their house.

On the 22nd along South Jenkins Cecil Johnson and Dick Gunn managed to spot **Yellow-throated Warbler**, **Vesper Sparrow**, and Marsh Wren. On the 23rd Bill Diffin located a Ruby-crowned Kinglet on the west side of the Stinchcomb WMA. On the 24th at Stinchcomb Matt noticed two **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** coursing over the river and along the Lake Overholser mud flats five **Pectoral Sandpipers**. Glenda Leslie sent Joe Grzybowski some pictures of **Eared Grebes** on Lake Hefner.

On the 25th Larry Mays had a **Lark Sparrow** singing behind his house in Newcastle, and discovered a Louisiana Waterthrush 7 miles northeast of Tuttle while Dwayne Elmore's wife spotted a very early **Summer Tanager** at their birdbath in Payne County. On the 27th the OCAS field trip led by Dick Gunn along South Jenkins located a **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher**, and Les Imboden discovered one on a power line along Hwy 33 west of Perkins. Donald Winslow saw an **American Bittern** in decidedly unbittern like habitat, the mowed grass of a city park in Shawnee. On the 29th in Norman Joe Grzybowski's feeder visitors included **Clay-colored Sparrows** and Red-breasted Nuthatches.

On the 31st Susie Ruby's friend reports a sighting of 200 Swainson's Hawks on the Menesse Farm field east and south of Paul's Valley. Charles Douglas announced he had seen a **Marbled Godwit** and two Glaucous Gulls on Lake Overholser's mud flats. At Lake Hefner Joe found Pectoral, **Semipalmated** and **Western Sandpipers**, a first cycle California Gull, Red-breasted Mergansers, and Common Loons.

Dick Gunn reports there was a lot of smoke on South Jenkins. Tinker Vandenburg told him the fire started at the compost facility and burned south along the Half Mile Woods up to the beaver pond and then on Cancer hill. Will this create a change in bird species for the area?

During March a total of **134** bird species were reported including **28 new** species which increased the 2011 Central Oklahoma area total to **166** species. I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds by turning in reports. I can be contacted by e-mail at emkok@earthlink.net. Esther M. Key, Editor.



The Nesting Season

By Elizabeth Hacker

It's nesting season and birds are on the move. April 3, I added the male white-eyed vireo to my life list thanks to Matt Jung and his recordings of *Stokes Field Guide to Bird Songs*. We saw only one male but as we continued along the trail, we heard 2 more fiercely defending their territories.

It's spring, the time of years we birders relish. When I'm not out looking for migrating birds, I'm reading about them. *The Nesting Season: Cuckoos, Cuckolds, and the Invention of Monogamy* by renowned German naturalist Bernd Heinrich is rich in the details on the habits of bird mating and parenting. He also explores the implications of monogamy for many species.

A little bit about the author. Heinrich was born in Germany and placed in a boarding school so his parents could travel to Mexico and Africa to conduct field research. Heinrich followed in his parents foot steps and his research has changed our understanding of bird behavior. At 70, Heinrich is professor emeritus in the biology department at the University of Vermont.

The Nesting Season details Heinrich's research on various bird strategies for choosing a mate. I've read a few of his other books including *Mind of the Raven* about the complex behavior in ravens including their use of tools. If this sounds familiar, his research is often featured on Animal Planet and other wildlife documentaries.

Heinrich's' research on why and how a bird chooses a mate is a hot topic for birders. Studying bird behavior has been researched by many scientist since Charles Darwin's' *On The Origin of Species*. However, Heinrich research techniques bring new life to this subject and his findings are eye-opening.

Heinrich explores the antics males use to attract a female but states that selection is ultimately the determined by the female and she makes her selection based on the health and vigor of the male. While showy male behavior, colorful plumage, and vocal repertoire are obvious, Heinrich explores other less obvious techniques. One bird he studied was the penduline tit (European native). The male tit builds an intricate pear shaped nest and the female determines his vitality based on how well the nest is constructed and thus his outward appearance is not a factor in her selection.

While walking the south rim of the Grand Canyon in January, I noticed that the male western bluebirds were in bright blue breeding plumage. Of particular interest were two female bluebirds perched on the same low hanging branch. Two males were eagerly hunting for insects on the near by craigs to bring to them; a courting technique used by many species to woo a female. One of the female enthusiastically fluttered her wings as the first male approached and eagerly accepted his offering while the other female was ho-hum. She accepted the insect from the second male but after he left to hunt for another morsel, she spit it out. Did he not meet her selection criteria or had she had her fill of insects? It was obvious that she wasn't all that excited about her suitor. I wonder if I would have even noticed this behavior if I had not read Heinrich's book..

Oklahoma City Audubon Society
c/o Carla Brueggen
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Bethany, OK 73008

Field Trip Schedule

Apr. 15-17 **LPC Festival** at Woodward Contact John Kennington for more details, johnkennington@gmail.com.

Apr. 15-16 **Salt Plains Bird Festival** Details: <http://www.travelok.com/listings/view.profile/id.14124/type.event>

May 6-8 Kansas Ornithological Society spring meeting at Elkhart, KS.

May 13-15 Oklahoma Ornithological Society spring meeting at Black Mesa State Park in Cimarron County. contact Doug Wood at dwood@se.edu.

June 4 **Club picnic and Nightjar walk at Lake Draper** The club has reserved the shelter near the marina. The marina is near the restrooms, the playground, the police station, and just a short distance to good birding along the lakeshore road to the north.
