



# Oklahoma City Audubon Society

OKC-AUDUBON.ORG

JANUARY 2008

## A Journey to 700

A 21-year road of adventure, exploration and learning about birds and nature

**Program and Meeting: January 28, 2008**

The speaker at our January meeting will be Jimmy Woodard, recounting events leading to his successful quest of acquiring 700 species on his North American list, a feat few accomplish.

Jimmy Woodard is a native of Tulsa but grew up and attended high school in Jenks. He is a graduate of Oklahoma State University where he earned a bachelor's degree in geography. Jimmy began birding on April 17, 1986 and has not stopped since that day. He's spent many weekends, holidays and vacations traveling and birding in the far flung reaches of North America and Central America -- from the top of Alaska to Costa Rica. As a result of his field experience, extreme interest, eagle eyes, microphone hearing, and the memory of an elephant, Jimmy is regarded as one of the premier birders on the North American continent. He has motivated and aided many people to become excellent birders and continues to influence others and aid our knowledge of the natural world through his committed field study and leading field trips for others to enjoy.



Our meetings begin at 7:00 p.m. at the Will Rogers Garden Center, I-44 and NW 36th Street. Visitors are always welcome.

## Atlas Fun January 2, 2008

*By Patti Muzny*

Most of us who are birders begin to work on a new birding list when a new year arrives. Although I didn't have an opportunity to think much about my list on January 1, Nancy Vicars and I made up for my lack of sightings on January 2nd.

We left OKC around 8:15 a.m., to survey an atlas block SE of the town of Rosedale in McClain and Garvin Counties. It was not warm (in the mid-20's), but a beautiful -- although frosty morning -- was waiting for us to sneak up on an awesome list of birds. This particular block contained only parameter roads and looked like we would have so little access that our success would be limited. Wrong!

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### **COOKIES:**

Refreshments for the January meeting will be provided by Pat and Carmelita Garrison, Matt Jung and Fay Carver.

### **FRIENDLY REMINDER:**

It's time to renew your annual membership! Please pay \$10.00 at the January meeting or mail to Nancy Vicars, 820 Arthur Drive, Midwest City, OK 73110.

## Atlas... continued

With weedy roadsides and lots of briars and brambles and a variety of habitat from riparian to hayfield to pasture to basic crosstimbers, we had most of the expected sparrows, including a Vesper and a LeConte's. We had House, Carolina and Bewick's Wrens, but no Winter Wren. A

Purple Finch and two Red-breasted Nuthatches went on our growing list, but we could find not one White-breasted Nuthatch. Nancy also found an Eastern Towhee. A Kestrel on the prowl caused a



flock of Longspurs to take flight. Ruby-crowned Kinglets were at several areas, but we never found a Golden-crowned. We heard Western and Eastern Meadowlarks and were incredibly lucky to find one Loggerhead Shrike. A Brown Thrasher and a Hermit Thrush made our list at the same stop.

Robins were never far from us at any stop.

A lunch break at our cabin east of the town of Byars added a few more species to our year list, but we had left our atlas area. On our property we added White-breasted Nuthatch, more Purple Finches at our feeder, a small flock of Rusty Blackbirds, a few Chipping Sparrows and a Kingfisher.

We had one countable Chipping Sparrow. We stopped along Hwy. 59 at a small rural cemetery and when Nancy opened the gate, she saw a deceased Chipping Sparrow. It had not been dead long and it's body had no apparent injuries. I didn't say it was airborne, I said it was countable! Five miles east on our property, we had a small flock of them -- very much alive.

Things we missed that should have been in the area: Great Blue Heron, Black Vulture, Winter Wren, Sharpie and Cooper's Hawks, White-breasted Nuthatch, Pileated Woodpecker, Kingfisher, Eastern Phoebe.

In a little less than 6 hours, we identified 58 species in 9 square miles and had a fantastic day of birding. If this story has a moral: Looks can definitely be deceiving when it comes to birding territories. What a way to begin a new year!

## Oklahoma City Audubon Society Financial Report for 2007

CASH ON HAND 12/31/2006  
\$6,221.35

### INCOME:

Membership dues	950.00	
Checking Acct. Interest	210.33	
Calendar Sales	256.00	
Contributions	10.00	
	1,426.33	<u>+1,426.33</u>

\$7,647.68

### EXPENSES:

Meeting Room Rent	320.00	
Newsletters (copies & postage)	975.43	
100 - 2008 Promotion Calendars	243.00	
2006 Xmas Count	230.00	
270 - Club Promotion Brochures	173.73	
Speaker Honorarium	25.00	
Gift for Diane Newell	21.60	
	<u>1,988.76</u>	<u>-1,988.76</u>

CASH ON HAND 12/31/2007  
\$5,658.92

## Oklahoma City Audubon Society

### Officers 2008

President	Nealand Hill	388-6759
Vice Pres.	John Shackford	340-5057
Secretary	June Ketchum	387-3620
Treasurer	Nancy Vicars	732-9885
Parliament	Sam Moore	752-9549
Programs	Warren Harden	364-3491
Recorder	Esther M. Key	381-9170
Conservation	Larry Mays	392-2131
Field Trips	Jimmy Woodard	324-1462
Newsletter	Patricia Velte	751-5263
Publicity	Cheryl Allen	478-0339
Historian	Nealand Hill	388-6759
Refreshments	Jim Vicars	732-9885
Webmaster	Patricia 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 our outstanding website and keep up with the latest happenings.*

**OKC-Audubon.org**

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# Northeast Birding Trip

By Jimmy Woodard

Nealand Hill and I left early on Saturday, December 1, 2007, to fly to Philadelphia for a week of birding in the northeast. We arrived in Philly in the afternoon and headed out in our rental car, bound for Freeport, New York. We made the outskirts of NYC about dark. Traffic was fairly smooth except for some construction on Staten Island. We got a few glimpses of the Manhattan skyline in the distance.

On Sunday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, we awoke to 2" of snow on the ground. It was snowing as we left the dock in Freeport for a pelagic trip in the Atlantic waters off Long Island. The wind was light and the seas calm as we left the harbor on the Capt. Lov VII.

A few miles out we found our first Dovekie. This was the bird I wanted most on this trip. For the rest of the day we sighted Dovekies in groups of 1-5 birds. Altogether, we counted an amazing 316 Dovekies! We stopped the boat for the first fifty or so. After that, we started cruising right past the little guys as they sat on the water – some as close as twenty feet.



Other birds seen on the pelagic were hundreds of gulls including Greater and Lesser Black-backed, Laughing, Herring, Iceland, and Black-legged Kittiwake. We had 22 Atlantic Puffin, Surf and White-winged Scoters, Razorbill, Northern Fulmar and hundreds of Gannets.

The strange thing was the many passerine land birds we saw flying around or landing on the boat while we were over 40 miles out to sea! We observed a dozen Common Redpoll, two Fox Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows, Junco, American Pipit, Goldfinch, and Red-winged Blackbirds. Most of them seemed tired and a few landed on the boat. Several were chased by the gulls but none were caught. A redpoll landed on the water to eat chum off the surface.

It was a happy group of 30+ birders who returned to the dock that evening. This was one of the best pelagics I have been on. The boat had a covered upper deck to view things and it even had hot food and drink we could purchase from the gallery. I highly recommend a trip with See Life Paulagics ([www.paulagics.com](http://www.paulagics.com)).

Monday dawned clear but cold with strong winds. We

headed to the east end of Long Island near Montauk. We visited the Deep Hollow Ranch which is the oldest cattle ranch, established 1658. Two rare geese (Pink-footed and Barnacle) had been seen there recently. We located the Pink-footed on a grassy hillside. We only got long-distance, scope views because the bird was on private property.

As we viewed another field, we ran into Vicki Bustamante and Doug Futuma, two local birders. Doug took us to another spot for a slighter closer view of the Pink-footed Goose. While there he got a call from Vicki who had located the Barnacle Goose. We rushed over to that place and quickly located the Barnacle. As I watched it, I noticed a Scissortail in the same scope view, sitting on a fence. This got the New Yorkers excited and they called several other birders to report the find. Talk about the

"Patagonia Picnic Table Effect" in action! You look for one rare bird only to locate another.

We left our new friends to bird Montauk Harbor and the jetties. We found several Purple Sandpipers, a lifer for Nealand. There were Red-throated Loons and Common Eider in the harbor.

Next we visited the Montauk Lighthouse and park. The high, rocky bluffs are very beautiful. We found lots of White-winged Scoters but high winds and cold wind chill made our eyes water. We

were forced to give up scoping the ocean. We headed out and spent the night in Riverhead on northern Long Island.

On Tuesday morning we drove to Orient Point and took the car ferry, Susan Anne, over to New London, Connecticut. We saw Great Cormorant and Mute Swans along the way.

We quickly went through Connecticut to Providence, Rhode Island, where we stopped at Watchemocket Cove. This is a well-known spot for Common Black-headed Gulls in the winter. We soon found one with its red legs and bill. It was close to the road so we got a great look.

We went to Newport for the night. Nealand was stationed there years ago in the Navy so it brought back a lot of memories for him.

Wednesday morning we visited nearby Norman Bird Sanctuary, a scenic 400 acre preserve. I took a very cold walk along several of the many trails. The trails wound through woods and up and down several rocky ridges. A few miles away we stopped at Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge.

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## Northeast Birding... continued

The visitor center was closed so we walked several trails. The fields were covered with briars, brambles and berry bushes covered with thorns. I found an amazing four catbirds hiding in the bushes.

At the rocky shore we found Great Cormorant, Common Eider, Mute Swan, Surf Scoter, Purple Sandpiper, and Ruddy Turnstone. Several dozen Harlequin Ducks rested on rocks just offshore.

We left Rhode Island and drove into Massachusetts and out onto Cape Cod. The drive out was fast since most of the road was a four-lane divided highway. We made Provincetown at the end of the cape in the afternoon. We birded around town. The tide was out and we saw several shorebirds on the mudflats including Dunlin, Sanderling and Black-bellied Plover. Brant were abundant in the harbor.

We stayed in a beautiful, quaint, old hotel next to some of the most scenic beaches and sand dunes I've ever seen.

The next morning we visited nearby Race Point. Wind chill was near zero as the waves crashed on the beach and the blowing sand stung our faces. We didn't stay long but did enjoy seeing hundreds of Gannets plunging into the ocean in a feeding frenzy.

Heading back down the Cape we visited a few spots including Wellfleet Harbor, Mass Audubon Sanctuary and Marconi Point, the place where the first wireless telegraph was established. We saw several Razorbills from the high bluffs. The sanctuary was a great mix of woodland, fields and marsh habitats, with lots of trails. High winds made the birds scarce there.

We drove through Massachusetts and Rhode Island and into Connecticut where we stayed the night in New London.

Friday morning we visited Hammonasset State Park, another beautiful spot on the coast. Birds were abundant in this scenic and large park. The best finds were a couple of Lapland Longspurs in a flock of Horned Lark and a group of 20 Snow Buntings. Nealand saw several Red Crossbills.

The afternoon was spent driving through New York, bypassing NYC, and then making our way into New Jersey and down to Philadelphia. We flew out on Saturday morning and arrived in Oklahoma City mid-afternoon.

We ended this great trip with 107 species. For both of us the Dovekie, Pink-footed Goose, Barnacle Goose, and the Common Black-headed Gull were lifers. The Purple Sandpiper was also a lifer for Nealand. We visited some of the scenic spots on the east coast and, with the addition of New York, Rhode Island and Connecticut, I have now visited and birded in 49 of 50 states. The only one I've not been to is Hawaii... perhaps someday!

## Minutes of the Oklahoma City Audubon Society

**December 17, 2007**

The meeting was called to order at 7:10 PM by Pres. Hill. There were 13 members in attendance.

There were no November meeting minutes to approve since the December newsletter has not been published due to the power outages caused by the recent ice storm.

The treasurer, Nancy Vicars, reports the club is solvent with a current balance of \$5,444.36.

Jimmy Woodard, fieldtrip chairman, is working on the schedule for January fieldtrips. Please let him know if you have requests for destinations or would be willing to lead a fieldtrip.

John Shackford announced the preliminary results of our annual Christmas Bird Count held on Saturday, December 15 was very successful. In spite of the horrible weather related conditions (rain, snow & very strong winds) faced by the courageous members, they were able to tally a remarkable **107** species. This number may change when all the reports come in from the folks that didn't attend the "Chili Supper" that evening. A big THANK YOU again to Diane Newell & Donna Knauf for hosting this annual "after the count" party. Also, another big THANK YOU to Cheryl Allen for making the most delicious chili and to all the folks that brought tasty treats for all to enjoy.

New Business: Annual Election of Officers.

A motion was made to retain the current slate of 2007 officers. The motion carried and was approved by the members present. Pres. Hill announced that the 2007 committee chairpersons have all agreed to continue to serve in their current positions for 2008.

Old Business: None

The program this evening was our members sharing their "Tall Tales" including birding trips, experiences and observations. As usual, we continue to learn so much from the vast knowledge base contained within our own members.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

*Nancy Vicars, acting Secretary in the absence of June Ketchum*

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# In Other Words

by Larry Mays

Recently on the OKBIRDS listserv there was a conversation about raptors attacking backyard birds--especially at bird feeders meant to attract them. There was a lot of anguish if not outright anger expressed, and one of the thicker threads was how the hawks were taking "my birds". Whenever I hear that--and I've heard it more than once--I chuckle. Our brains work in mysterious if not outrightly bizarre ways. It may be "my cardinal", but it seems not ever "my Sharp-shinned Hawk". It is difficult to imagine hearing, "yeah, my Cooper's Hawk came in yesterday afternoon and carried off my collared dove."

However, if a cat commits the crime, it suddenly takes quite a different perspective. Now we hear, "Oh, yeah, my cat caught another bird." Followed by something like "you just can't change their nature." And that brings the point--if you can't change the cat, what can you change?

The American Bird Conservancy several years ago launched the program "Cats Indoors!" to address the problem. Much of the information presented here is drawn from their website at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cat> . and from several other sites on the internet.

Roughly 30% of American households have at least one cat. It is estimated that there may be as many as 40 million feral cats roaming the countryside in the US alone. Overall, there are at least 90 million cats in this country alone--possibly as many as 100 million. Each of these cats must eat. The feral cats, of course, will eat what they can find in our garbage, or they will capture prey. The list of creatures that cats will capture and eat is astonishingly long. Just about anything a cat can catch and kill will be eaten. Rodents, other small mammals, insects, small reptiles and, especially for our principal concern here, birds, are regularly killed and eaten by cats. It is important to understand that even well-fed domestic cats will follow their hunting instincts and kill wild creatures.

What impact do free-roaming cats have on wildlife? A study done in Wisconsin estimates that between 8 and 217 million birds a year, with a reasonable estimate of 39 million birds per year, fall prey to cats in that state. That is a lot of birds. That is from a study done in just one state. A rough estimate of a billion or so birds lost to cat predation annually may well be on the low end. Cats may have contributed to the extinction of more bird species than any other cause, except habitat destruction ( One caveat here; there is considerable contention over just how much damage cats actually do, with predictably most of the dissent coming from

various humane and cat advocate organizations). Cats may do the most damage on island ecosystems where their introduction not only increases the pressure on native wildlife, but as the native fauna may be also relatively tame, they are thus more susceptible to cat predation.

One of the more interesting studies done was on Stewart Island in the New Zealand archipelago where cats are causing the decline of the Yellow-eyed Penguin. This one stuck as particularly funny, because this study stated that rats, another introduced species, on the island represent 60% of the cats prey base, and rats are known to be extraordinarily destructive to ground nesting birds. What a tangled ecological web we un-weave!

Enough with rats; back to cats.

What may be most critical to our understanding of the problem with cats is that cats are not a native predator. Insofar as North America is concerned cats are definitely an alien species. Like so many situations where an alien, or introduced, species is concerned, the native fauna have not evolved alongside it, and may not have developed defensive mechanisms to deal with the new predator. At the very least cats compete directly with native predators like weasels, owls, hawks and foxes for what must necessarily be a limited number of individual prey animals. Because cats tend to be concentrated near human habitation, these areas will be more heavily stressed by cat predation. It wouldn't be too much of a stretch to say that birding would improve closer to home if there were fewer cats in the neighborhood.

Obviously cats negatively affect the welfare of wildlife, but what about the welfare of the cats themselves? Feral cats that have to make it on their own rarely live more than about 5 years. It is much the same for cats that are allowed by their owners to roam free.. The outdoors is no place for cats. Not just the natural environment, but the human as well, present countless dangers to cats. Cars alone kill several million cats each year along with their massive toll on other organisms. Poisoning--both accidental and intentional--is also a real threat to the life of an outdoor cat. Such items as antifreeze, the chemicals used to treat lawns and gardens and rat and mouse bait may cause the death of a cat.

Cats in the outdoors may become the victim of other animals as well. They may be attacked by dogs, wildlife or other cats. Coyotes appear to be especially fond of cat, and cats that live or prowl on the interface between the human environment and the natural world are especially at risk. Great Horned Owls frequently prey on cats--even in the urban environment.

The list of diseases that affect cats is quite long. Feline Leukemia Virus is found in various body fluids and can be

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## Road Trip: Elkhart and Mesa CBCs

Jerry Vanbebber and I departed about 9 a.m. Friday, December 29, 2007, and headed west. Patches of ice and snow slowed our trip at times.

Our first stop was Optima Lake. The frozen lake held very few birds. We checked a line of cedars on the west side. The trees held none of the hoped-for owls, just one Solitaire.

In Guymon, we visited Sunset Park. There were many geese and ducks, Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches, and two Mountain Chickadees. We didn't find the previously reported Pygmy Nuthatches.

We continued to Elkhart to spend the night and meet up with the Kansas birders. On Saturday, we ate breakfast with the other counters then headed to the cemetery to begin the CBC. The 10-degree weather made for frigid birding. A Sharp-shinned Hawk was harassed by several magpies.

Jerry and I went to our count area north of the Cimarron River and west of Highway 27. We visited several ice covered ponds ringed with cattails and found two Marsh Wrens and several sparrows.

Visits to Point of Rocks, Middle Springs and the river resulted in a meager number of species in the cold and wind. We found pheasant, Great Horned Owl, Northern Harrier, shrike, Tree Sparrow, goldfinch, Pine Siskin, and a Great-tailed Grackle.

We met after noon at a campground on the river for a brief picnic lunch. A fly-over Prairie Falcon warmed our spirits. After lunch, we drove the north end of our area which was mostly cultivated or overgrown grassy fields. Our efforts produced several Ferruginous and Rough-legged Hawks and two Merlins.

The snow cover concentrated an amazing number of Horned Larks and longspurs. Seemingly every field held hundreds, if not thousands, of birds. Sometimes large flocks covered the roads. We estimated the larks at 35,000 which was probably an underestimate. We saw and heard about 20,000 longspurs, 99% of which were Lapland with a few McCown's and Chestnut-collared.

The day ended with dinner at the motel restaurant and a compilation in a motel room. The species total was 60.

Jerry and I drove to Boise City for the night and joined up with Terry Mitchell, Max Fuller and Nealand Hill.

On Sunday, we were joined at breakfast by Sebastian Patti, Gene Young and Max Thompson from Kansas. We met John Sterling, Berlin Heck, Steve Metz, and Kim Wade in Kenton to begin the Mesa CBC at 8:30 a.m.



My group was assigned an area west of Kenton and north past Black Mesa to the Colorado border. We found many juncos, robins and Mountain Bluebirds. Also found were kestrel, Common Ravel, Mountain Chickadee, Loggerhead Shrike, magpie, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, Pine Siskin, and Canyon Towhee.

Lunch at the Merc consisted of pork chops, mashed potatoes and black-eyed peas. Afterward, we followed Sebastian's group to see Cassin's Finches they had found early at the state park.

The lake held waterfowl including Snow, Ross's, White-fronted, Cackling and Canada Geese. Ducks included Mallard, Gadwall, Pintail, Hooded and Common Merganser. We looked for Lewis's Woodpecker at the Hoot Owl Ranch but had no luck. We did find a Bald Eagle nest but no eagle. We also saw Rock and Canyon Wren and Red-breasted Nuthatches.

Steve Metz's group found six Western Bluebirds near Kenton. We looked for them but didn't see them. We did find Bushtits and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

At dark we met for dinner at Pup's Place (formerly Sheen's) in Boise City. We did the compilation in our room at the Townsman Motel. Our species count was 67.

On Monday, we returned to Guymon to look again for Pygmy Nuthatch. No luck! A stop at Fort Supply failed to locate Long-eared Owl or Glaucous Gull previously seen by Steve Metz. We did find a male Barrow's Goldeneye, two Bald Eagles, Roadrunner, Fox Sparrow and a pair of Purple Finches.

It was another enjoyable weekend in the Mesa country.

## Great Backyard Bird Count February 15 - 18, 2008

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds. Learn more at: <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>

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## In Other Words... continued

transmitted through bites or such activities as social grooming or the sharing of food or food containers. Other nasty diseases such as Feline Immunodeficiency Virus, Upper Respiratory Infection, Toxoplasmosis, Cat Scratch Disease and Feline Infectious Peritonitis await the free-roaming kitty. Plague and Rabies can also be caught and transmitted by cats. Parasites that use cats as hosts abound. Cats can be infected with round-worms, tapeworms and hookworms.

So let's cut to the chase here. If you have a cat, or cats, and you care at all about your pet's welfare, the only responsible thing to do is to keep your cat(s) indoors. Cats have no place outdoors. Not even just for a little bit. A frequent argument is that the pampered pet insists on going outside, and cannot be kept in the house. Nonsense. It may take a little effort on the part of the owner, but a cat can be taught to remain indoors. One good idea is to keep a spray bottle of water near the door. A good squirt can help to remind kitty not to try to rush the door. This is not on a par with water-boarding, by the way. Of course, the best way is to begin with that kitten. Keep it inside from the start. With older cats it will no doubt take some, perhaps considerable, determination, but pet ownership is about being responsible.

Next, have you cat spayed or neutered. Unless you are a breeder of one of the special varieties and plan to be in the business of selling their offspring, there is absolutely no good reason to not do so. So you were diligent, but kitty got outside for just a moment or so, and now you've got three or four kittens. Now what? Give them away? Try to sell them? Or dump them at the local Wal-Mart like the ones I saw there a couple of months back. Now, there's an ethical dilemma.

What happens with all those accidental feline offspring? Far, far too many wind up back in the outdoors. Then what? Quite a number of folks who care a lot more about cats than I do, maintain feeding stations for feral cats. I'll wager nearly everyone reading this article knows of at least one of those places. A recent article in the Oklahoma Gazette stated that there were nearly a hundred of these sites in the Oklahoma City metro area alone. A goodly number of souls far more compassionate than I help to trap, spay and neuter, re-release and feed all those animals. And a goodly number of souls far more vile and irresponsible caused the cats to be there in the first place.

One critical component of a program to stem the rising tide of outdoor cats, and cats in general, is legislation. A model of sensible legislation is the pet control ordinance passed by the city of Aurora, Colorado. Their law states that all cats (and dogs) must be licensed, and vaccinated against rabies. Pets must have the tags certifying compliance on at all times. The owner must purchase a special permit to maintain an "intact" animal--that is one not spayed or neutered. Statistics maintained by the city show positive results following the enactment of the ordinance.

## Chirpings

By Patti Muzny

Perhaps this column should be entitled, "Feeding Birds Can Be Hazardous to Your Health," or maybe, "Stupid Human Tricks." Last weekend Sam had hung a wooden/glass tower-type feeder from the edge of our covered patio. The birds had immediately found it and it seemed to be a great place to hang a feeder.

On Saturday, December 8, 2007, I ventured out into the chilly mist to check the bird feeding stations. I wandered around to the front yard and decided to put some seed on the edge of the brick planter at our bedroom window. I then strolled back around the house to put the container back on the porch. I had on a ball cap and my head was down. As I began to step up onto the porch from the grass, there was loud and painful "crack!" I was certainly glad I was strolling instead of galloping! In this situation, my head was not the winner! That'll teach me to watch where I'm going, but won't stop me from filling feeders.

Also in the front yard that day were hundreds of Starlings. Most of them were in the neighbors' trees, but they were plentiful. The noise was amazing. All of a sudden, the noise stopped and they flew off. Who knows why they picked this particular area in which to stop. No further Monk Parakeet sightings in this area.

My thistle feeder has finally attracted some Goldfinches and the House Finches use it, too. A feisty Bewick's Wren visits the back patio nearly every morning, searching the cracks and crevices for edibles. Brian recently found Cedar Waxwings and he saw the Red-breasted Nuthatches while I was at work. I tried to turn a House Finch into a Siskin, but that transformation never happened. I'm whining for a siskin, Nancy!

W-a-y back in the 80's, I fed the birds and would have hundreds of Goldfinches on the patio at the same time. In fact, one of the traveling companions of those Goldfinches was a Common Redpoll, which resulted in our first encounter with the OKC Audubon Society. Our hats are always off to that little northern visitor.

Shortly after I wrote the above article, we lost our power and were without for 4 days. While we sat inside trying to stay warm, we studied the feeders. It was quite entertaining. Our first Eurasian Collared Dove landed in the yard.

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## Bird of the Month: Great-tailed Grackle

*By John Shackford*

The Great-tailed Grackle first arrived in Oklahoma about 1953 and the first confirmed nesting was in 1958. At that time it was called the Boat-tailed Grackle. In 1973 our part of the Boat-tail Grackle population was split into a new species, the Great-tailed Grackle. The Great-tail is now a very common species in central Oklahoma.

An interesting phenomenon has been occurring with this species. While traditionally a nester in cattails, they now have invaded the “inner city,” and are nesting around McDonald’s restaurants and shopping malls, well away from any cattails. One of the big reasons, I feel confident, relates to ornamental Bradford pear trees planted extensively to beautify the city.

The Bradford pear is a very versatile ornamental tree with blooms (which smells great), and leaves that come out about 2 weeks ahead of most any other deciduous trees in central Oklahoma. Then in fall its leaves turn into the most beautiful oranges, reds, yellows, and purples. So far so good!

Now enter the Great-tailed Grackle. When the early blooms and leaves start coming out on the pear trees, the grackles start building nests in them—maybe two weeks earlier than any other deciduous tree around and 2 months ahead of the first stand of new cattails that would support their nest. I suspect the grackles just keep nesting in the Bradford pears—over and over—all summer long.

They seem to find plenty of food in these neighborhoods—my guess is French fries from nearby McDonald’s and other fast-food restaurants, chicken nuggets, popcorn—any food dropped by anyone in parking lots and at drive-thrus, not to mention possibly eating bugs from the grills of parked cars.

Although I have not “mustard” enough enthusiasm to do the research, I believe one could do a serious research paper on this apparently humorous subject. It would look at the relationship between Great-tailed



Grackles, Bradford pear trees, and fast-food restaurants. I believe one would find that breeding grackles are in much higher densities in city areas with Bradford pears and fast-food restaurants in close proximity.

But even without the research, there is a problem. The grackles tend to roost in the pear trees, and this brings grackle droppings and people close together, leading to the birds being a nuisance and possibly at some point a health hazard to humans. Admirably, conscientious people who rightly appreciate the beauty of Bradford pears have planted the trees to beautify our city. But the good intentions appear to have backfired into an unpleasant problem—parking lot grackles. Warren Harden and I speculate that somewhere down the line, these parking lot grackles will evolve into a new species and then the Great-tail, like the Boat-tail before them, will be split into a new, separate species, perhaps the Parking Lot Grackle or maybe the Bradford Grackle. Who would have thought that such good intentions to beautify our city could end up being such a problem. And judging from reports to the south in Texas, our Oklahoma birds are just getting warmed up!



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## Minutes of the Oklahoma City Audubon Society

**November 19, 2007**

The meeting was called to order by Pres. Hill at 7:00 PM. Visitors, Jim Walden and Ed Roberts, were introduced and welcomed. Twenty members plus two guests were in attendance.

The minutes of Oct. 15 meeting were approved as published in the Nov. newsletter.

Treasurer, Nancy Vicars reports our bank balance to be \$5,310.34 as of Nov. 19, 2007.

Old Business: None

New Business: Congratulations were expressed to Grandpa Warren Harden on the arrival of his first grandchild, a grandson born Nov. 18, 2007.

John Shackford, Compiler of our annual Christmas Bird Count, gave his report on the upcoming Christmas count scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 15. Count teams are encouraged to report their rare or unusual findings to Pat Velte during the day. John also announced that Diane Newell has graciously invited us, once again, to her home for our "After The Count" chili supper. A hat was passed around for donations to purchase plates, bowls, napkins, soft drinks, etc and a supplemental food list for side dishes and desserts was also circulated.

Pat Velte has volunteered to design a spread sheet to enable on-line reporting of our count this year. John also reminded us that birds seen within the "Count Week" three days before and three days after Dec. 15<sup>th</sup>, within the count circle, should be reported.

Jimmy Woodard reminded members of the upcoming fieldtrip to the Washita Wildlife Refuge on Saturday, Dec. 1 to be led by Nancy Vicars. He has a copy of the fieldtrip schedule for Tulsa Audubon Society if anyone is interested in visiting other birding locations around the state. He reported 87 species were found on our recent fieldtrip to the Wichita Mts. The best bird of the day was a female Long-tailed Duck at the Medicine Park sewage lagoons.

Jimmy also announced the release of a new book written by Dr. Jerome Jackson about Dr. George M. Sutton, published by the OU Press that he intends to include on his Christmas wish list. Ted Goulden can possibly get a reduced price if we order 10 or more copies.

Warren Harden announced our next meeting on

December 17, 2007. We are all presenting the program with our annual "Tall Tales" during this Christmas celebration. In addition to their Tall Tales, members are encouraged to also bring slides, photos and some sort of refreshment. Coffee and soft drinks will be provided.

The January 2008 meeting date has been moved from the third Monday to the fourth Monday due to the closure of the garden center for the legal holiday. Be sure to mark your calendars now. The January meeting will be held on Monday, January 28, 2008 and the speaker will be our own Jimmy Woodard. He will talk about his achievement in reaching 700 birds on his North American list.

Pres. Hill announced it is time to elect officers and committee chairpersons for 2008 at the December meeting. Please contact him directly if you would like to serve on our board of directors.

The program was presented by our own John Shackford. He gave a very informative presentation and slide show about the great birds we get in Oklahoma during the winter. For instance, did you know that our winter bird population is around 120 species versus about 80 species in the summer?

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

*Nancy Vicars, acting Secretary in the absence of June Ketchum.*

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## Tuesday Morning Birders, Nov. 27, 2007

Mother Nature smiled on our little Tuesday Morning bird group once again providing a bright sunny sky and a southerly breeze. I enjoyed touring Tim Ryan, Matt Jung and Wendall Long around Lake Stanley Draper, one of my favorite birding areas. I had 3 target birds in mind to find this morning, Bald Eagle, Hermit Thrush and Purple Finch. One mature Bald Eagle was all we found today but there's always next time!!

Eastern Bluebirds, American Robins, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Song, Lincoln's, White-throated and Field Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, Spotted Towhees, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Carolina Wren, Blue Jays and American Goldfinch were colorful additions to our list.

Waterfowl species were few and far between. Mallards, Buffleheads, Canada Geese and one Horned Grebe was about it. There was a small group of ducks too far out for a proper ID. American Kestrels, Belted Kingfisher, Killdeer, Northern Flickers, Red-bellied Woodpeckers helped fill in our list for a grand total of 33 species. AND we had a BOBCAT run across the road near the model airplane field.

## Recorders Report – November 2007

### Red-breasted Nuthatch Invasion

Cynthia and Matthew Vandenbroeke did some hiking at Lake Thunderbird State Park just east of Norman on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November. It was amazing to them how rapidly the birds have transitioned to wintery species and were very easy to find. At the same time the blend of butterflies was still very summer-like. Oklahoma was amazing that time of year. Birds included Franklin's Gulls, Pileated Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, White-breasted and Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, American Pipit, Hermit Thrush, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, White-throated Sparrow, and Greater Roadrunner. Butterfly species included Orange Sulphur, Common Sulphur, Cloudless Sulphur, Dainty Sulphur, Red-spotted Purple, Buckeye, Goatweed Butterfly, Question Mark, Gray Hairstreak, Red-banded Hairstreak, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, American Lady, Amymone, Pearl Crescent, Phaon Crescent, Texan Crescent, Common Checkered-skipper and Sachem.

Tim Ryan has a Red-breasted Nuthatch in his yard near downtown Oklahoma City; Matt Jung had 2 Red-breasted Nuthatches at his feeder in Bethany; Debbie Kaspari reports Red-breasted Nuthatches in her yard on the east side of Cleveland County in Little Axe; and Joe Grzybowski had 3 Inca Doves and at least 2 groups of 3 Red-breasted Nuthatches coming to his feeders in Norman.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> at Rose Lake Matt Jung found 4 Common Snipe, a single Hooded Merganser and a Ruddy Duck nearby. On the 6<sup>th</sup>



Joe G. saw his first flock of Cedar Waxwings in McClain County. On the 10<sup>th</sup> Hollis Price spotted an Osprey fishing near the dam at Lake Arcadia. On the 13<sup>th</sup> Matt Jung discovered a Peregrine Falcon sitting on the very tip of the tower atop the First National Bank building first thing on the Tuesday Morning fieldtrip.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> Debby K. had 4 male and 3 female Purple Finches visiting her feeder; and on the 17<sup>th</sup> she saw a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher perched on the telephone wire at the entrance to Martin Park Nature Center. In Blanchard on the 19<sup>th</sup> Matt and Jenny Foster tallied

11 Pine Siskins along with Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Purple Finch, Chipping Sparrow and American Goldfinch. In Norman Kimberly Wiar was pleased to see a male Red-breasted Nuthatch land on the trunk of her sweetgum tree. He turned around and was gleaning the bark as he headed down, spied her Cardinal feeder, helped himself to some black oil sunflower seeds, and returned to the sweetgum tree to feed on the suet.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> on the South Canadian River at the end of Jenkins in Norman Richard Gunn found a Bald Eagle, Common Snipe, American Pipits, Horned Larks, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Song Sparrows, Fox Sparrows and Pine Siskins. Matt Jung's daughter reported one Purple Finch, one Carolina Wren and Red-breasted Nuthatches coming to her feeder. Matt Jung went to Lake Hefner and found Horned Grebes, a Common Loon, Hooded Mergansers, Buffleheads, Ring-necked Ducks, and Forester's Terns. On the 26<sup>th</sup> at Lake Overholser's Coffey Dam he found American White Pelicans, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Song Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrows, Greater Yellowlegs, Green-winged Teal, Common Snipe, and Pied-billed Grebes.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> Vince Cavalieri and Paul van Els observed the Western Grebe at Boomer Lake in Stillwater. On the 28<sup>th</sup> Matt and Jenny Foster had an estimated 60 Pine Siskins at their feeders.

I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds by turning in their reports of bird species seen at home and in the field. I can be contacted by email at [emkok@earthlink.net](mailto:emkok@earthlink.net), leave a message at 405-381-9170 or mail to 4603 Pikey's Trail, Tuttle, OK 73089. Esther M. Key, Editor.

## Recorders Report – December 2007

### The Worst Ice Storm and Invasion Surprise

On Saturday, December 1<sup>st</sup> in Edmond west of Kelly, off Danforth, during a soccer game from 3:00 to 4:30 pm, Joe Grzybowski noticed groups of robins flying overhead. They kept coming; perhaps 100 to 150+ per minute during all but the beginning of the game; heading towards the north side of a group of cedars south of the soccer fields. Those numbers add up, and this American Robin roost should be greater than 10,000. Meanwhile, in a group of hackberry trees, also south of the fields, was a rarely found Townsend's Solitaire. Other species were Eastern Bluebirds, House Finches, Cedar Waxwings, and circling the area overhead were a Sharp-shinned, Cooper's and Red-tailed Hawk.

Lisa Bewley has found a pond in west Edmond with a

*Continued on page 11*

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## Recorder's Report... continued

variety of ducks on it. They include Ring-necked, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Redhead, Northern Shovelers, American Wigeons, Gadwalls and some Teal. Two Great Horned Owls visit the area regularly. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> while walking the trail in her Greenbelt area in Edmond, Dora Webb reports Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Harris's Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, a fly over Double-breasted Cormorant, and on the pond 3 male Hooded Mergansers.

Jan Dolph reported a Pileated Woodpecker at the old Dayton Tire/Bridgestone Reserve on Council Road and SW 15<sup>th</sup> street. On the 4<sup>th</sup> Mary Lane reported a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in her yard in north Oklahoma City. On the 6<sup>th</sup> Dora had a Pine Siskin on her feeder and some Northern Quail just below their deck calling two different times around 8:30 am.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> in the backyard of Tim Ryan near downtown Oklahoma City, there was an unusual amount of activity including 20 Mourning Doves, 8 Eurasian Collared Doves, Carolina Chickadees, Northern Cardinal, Blue Jays, White-breasted Nuthatch, Red-breasted Nuthatch, 8 Purple Finches, House Finch, 2 Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 6 Northern Juncos, a Downy Woodpecker and a possible Townsend's Solitaire. At Lake Hefner Dora found 10 peeps, most likely Least Sandpipers, near a couple of Killdeer.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> early morning rain turned to sleet and ice which built up on the roads, power lines and trees. Over 600,000 people in central Oklahoma lost electrical power, and it took almost 2 weeks for all areas to have electricity restored. Ice build up on the trees, especially ones that still had leaves, destroyed many trees and broke limbs on many, many others especially in Norman and Midwest City. In south Logan County Karen Bays found a Fox Sparrow under her feeders. Other yard birds included Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Northern Mockingbird, Yellow-rumped Warbler, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, American Goldfinch, and House Sparrow

While birders were aware it was an invasion year for Red-breasted Nuthatches, on December 9<sup>th</sup> Joe G. heard some Red Crossbills flying over, just east of his house in Norman, Oklahoma. He also has 6-8 Red-breasted Nuthatches in his yard. On December 10<sup>th</sup> Jane Cunningham reports Red-breasted Nuthatch and Northern Juncos at her feeder. Karen Bays had four woodpecker species at her feeder: Red-bellied, Downy, Northern Flicker, and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. There are several more reports than usual this winter for Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers. On December 12<sup>th</sup> Matt Jung spent the day in Norman piling up branches, and was

joined by two Wrens hopping around in the scrub piles while at the relocated feeders there were Purple Finch, Northern Cardinal, Red-breasted Nuthatch and many sparrows.

On December 15<sup>th</sup> the Oklahoma City Christmas Bird Count began with another round of rain, snow and cold weather. In Norman Joe G. had 5 Red Crossbills with at least 2 brick-red male circled over the row of arbor vitae that runs along Chautauqua and Hoover Streets. At the Shawnee airport Donald Winslow reports a large flock of Smith's Longspurs. On the 16<sup>th</sup> Cynthia Whittier reports a group of at least 25 White-winged Doves along with a Brown Creeper in Norman on Findlay Avenue.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> Deborah K. had a Pine Warbler among the Yellow-rump Warblers bathing in the goldfish pond east of Lake Thunderbird. Matt Jung birded Martin Nature Center and saw 20 species including a Tufted Titmouse, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Brown Creeper, a Pine Siskin, 4 White-breasted and 6 Red-breasted Nuthatches. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> Harold Peterson found an Orange-crowned Warbler just inside the entrance to the zoo and a Wood Duck on the large pond next to the zoo.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> Joe G. noticed a Ferruginous Hawk on the ground at the intersection of 24<sup>th</sup> Street NW and Robinson. On the 24<sup>th</sup> the Red Crossbills were still in Norman. In Norman Kimberly Wiar had 2 Red-breasted Nuthatches, 1 Purple Finch, 1 juvenile Sharp-shinned Hawk, and a Brown Creeper in her small backyard. On the 26<sup>th</sup> Jane C. found a Common Loon at the northeast end of Lake Hefner and on the water treatment ponds lots of Common Goldeneyes and a few Redheads. Dora had an Orange-crowned Warbler coming to the suet at her backyard feeder. On the 27<sup>th</sup> Matt and Jenny Foster in Blanchard had their first Harris's Sparrow with Wednesday's snow.



In Stillwater on the 31<sup>st</sup> Paul Ribitzki arrived at Couch Park to meet with Paul Van Els and search for the Red Crossbills. They found them at the 12<sup>th</sup> hole near the creek. He could hear others in the pecan trees in the creek bottom.

I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds by turning in their reports of bird species seen at home and in the field. I can be contacted by email at [emkok@earthlink.net](mailto:emkok@earthlink.net), leave a message at 405-381-9170 or mail to 4603 Pikey's Trail, Tuttle, OK 73089. Esther M. Key, Editor.

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# Field Trips

## **January 26, 2008 - Canton Lake**

Look for winter birds at this Blaine County hotspot. Leader: Nancy Vicars (732-9885 or [nvicars@msn.com](mailto:nvicars@msn.com)) Meet at McDonald's at I-40 and Mustang Road at 7:30 a.m.

## **February 16, 2008 – Oklahoma City Lakes**

Tour the metro lakes for wintering birds and perhaps early migrants. Leader: Jimmy Woodard (324-1462). Meet at Route 66 Park at NW 23<sup>rd</sup> & Overholser Drive at 7:30 a.m.

## **March 8, 2008 – Stillwater Area**

Explore Lakes McMurtry and Carl Blackwell and other spots. Meet at the Braum's on at 15<sup>th</sup> Street & I-35 in Edmond. Leader: TBA



### **Tuesday Morning Birders**

**Tuesdays, beginning February 19 (weather permitting)**

Nancy Vicars will resume the Tuesday Morning field trips on February 19th. Birders of all levels are encouraged to participate. Contact Nancy at: [nvicars@msn.com](mailto:nvicars@msn.com) or 732-9885.

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### **Oklahoma City Audubon Society**

% Patricia Velte

1421 NW 102nd Street

Oklahoma City, OK 73114-4925

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