



Oklahoma City Audubon Society

OKC-AUDUBON.ORG

February, 2011

Black Mesa Country

Black Mesa country in Cimarron County, Oklahoma, was said by Dr. George Sutton to be the only part of Oklahoma to present a truly distinctive array of bird species found nowhere else in the state. Our February program, Black Mesa Country, should be a great tune-up for the OOS Spring Meeting, to be held at Black Mesa State Park from May 13-15, 2011. Our February program will feature photographs by farmer/rancher Dan Robinson of Boise City in Cimarron County. Dan has become a valuable resource for information on western Oklahoma ornithology. He exhibits genuine artistry in his pictures, many of them documenting rare birds that just make it into Oklahoma from areas west of the state. For example, he photographed the first Hepatic Tanager to be verified in Oklahoma. Both Dan and his 3 acre yard of hardwoods and evergreens are well worth a visit any time you get into Black Mesa country, but out of courtesy to Dan, please call ahead before visiting.

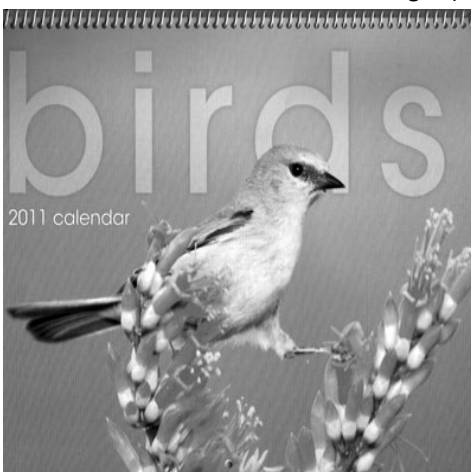


Photo by Dan Robinson

Jimmy Woodard and John Shackford will present Dan's photographs and comment on them. Additional photos of interesting birds found in the Oklahoma Panhandle also will be presented. Whether or not you have a Black Mesa trip on your agenda this spring, you need no better reasons to attend our February meeting than a desire to see some beautiful bird photographs and to experience our unique Oklahoma mesa country. Come along and bring a friend.

2011 Calendars For Sale

Our beautiful calendars are available for \$5 each. Pick one up at any meeting or order online at www.okc-audubon.org. (add \$1.50 each for mailing)



Cookie Patrol

Refreshments for the February meeting will be provided by Carla Brueggen, Feodora Steward, Nancy & Jim Vicars

Welcome

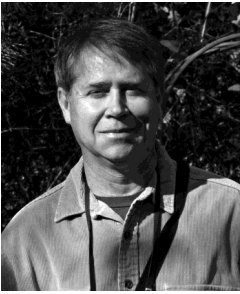
We welcome Paul Cook to the Oklahoma City Audubon Society

Dues Notice

It's time once again to renew your annual membership for 2011. OCAS dues are \$15 per household and may be paid at the monthly meetings, online at our website <http://www.okc-audubon.org> or mailed to Nancy Vicars, Treasurer, 820 Arthur Drive, Midwest City, OK 73110. If you would like to receive your monthly newsletter via E-mail, please notify nancy.vicars@sbcglobal.net

President's Perspective

By Bill Diffin



As this is being drafted, a second February blizzard is lashing Oklahoma. Yet by the time of our March meeting on the 21st, winter will be over. The fascinating array of visiting Redtails will be gone, leaving only our permanent Oklahoma population to bother the cotton rats. Records from last

year show that the Smith's Longspurs wintering west of the Norman Airport had diminished in numbers by March 2 and were gone entirely by the 19th. The number of Chestnut-collared Longspurs the Weekly Birders found near the Holy City on March 2 was two, when just a couple of weeks earlier 50 or so had been reported by Jimmy Woodard. It is very likely that the snow up north is what brings the longspurs and hawks here in the first place. Hardy birds like longspurs are able to withstand very cold temperatures, but snow cover prevents these small ground feeders from foraging normally. Rodents will go into hibernation in response to protracted snow and cold depriving Redtails of a food supply. But as soon as the snow melts and the ice begins to thaw to our north, the earliest departing migrants will start to head in that direction.

As long as there is open water, our lakes will continue to be good places to look for ducks, geese, grebes and gulls. Lake Hefner has been an outstanding place to see gulls this year -- Glaucous, Lesser-black Backed, Thayer's, and California have all been seen along with many Herring and the usual Ring-billed. If you haven't done so yet, there is still a little time to add to your list and hone your id skills by trying to spot some unusual gulls.

Juvenile gulls pose a significant identification challenge with nearly every species being close in appearance to at least one other species. Overall, the plumage has a tendency toward a confusing blend of small areas of dark, medium and light shades. However chaotic it may seem, the pattern in a particular area is usually created by a mosaic of overlapping feathers all bearing a similar coloration. The most basic coloration is a large dark center surrounded by a light edge. Overlapping feathers of this type produce a scaly appearance on the bird. The Juvenal

plumage of the Lesser Black-backed Gull exhibits this pattern. The next level of complexity is created by a notching or scalloping around the edge of the dark center of each feather. This pattern is expressed on the back of the juvenile Herring Gull and is often described as a "holly leaf". Further invasion of the light indentations can produce on each feather a pattern like a string of dark shells on heavy twine. If the light areas are intensified and expanded enough, the result is alternating dark and light bars, chevrons, or "anchors". Sometimes there remains only a single terminal dark marking. On the wing coverts, the dark and light areas tend to line up and produce a barred pattern even if the individual feathers are not truly barred.

When trying to identify juvenile gulls, it helps to be aware of the timing and effect of the post-Juvenal molt. This is a partial molt not involving the wings or tail, but it does include the mantle and scapulars. If you have studied molt and feathers a bit, you know about feather tracts, or ptergia. These are the areas on a bird, surprisingly limited in extent, from which the contour and flight feathers grow. The scapular tract is located on the boundary between the upper wing and the side of the back. It is separated from the dorsal tract by an apteria, an area without feather follicles, and it barely touches the humeral tract on the front of the wing, the source of all the coverts except the greater. Thus the scapulars are a unique set of feathers which can have their own appearance and molt timing. In gulls, the post-Juvenal scapulars are less uniform and scaly looking than the Juvenal. They are often blotchy with dark bars, crescents or anchors, often on a slightly grayish background. Most juvenile gull species seen in our area have started the post-Juvenal molt by October and have completed it by mid-winter. An exception to this timing are the juvenile Thayer's Gulls. They start the post-Juvenal molt later, often not until spring, so that their unmolted scapulars help to differentiate them. The time for Ring-billed Gulls to mature is three years vs. four years for the larger winter gulls. The Ringbills skip straight to a gray back in their post-Juvenal molt. They are the most obvious evidence in our area of the fall molt of juvenile gulls.

European Herring Gull Plumage Sequence Photos (took a couple of minutes to download on my computer, but worth it) -- <http://www.birdersplayground.co.uk/files/Ages%20of%20Herring%20Gull.doc>

Bird of the Month

By John Shackford



To me there is something a bit eerie and other-worldly about the Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*). A.C. Bent, in his species life histories (website: <http://birdsbybent.com/ch1-10gbh.htm>), says that “[I]t is a stately bird, dignified in its bearing, graceful in its

movements and an artistic feature in the landscape.....[p]erhaps you have seen it from afar and think you can gain a closer intimacy, but its eyes and ears are keener than yours; and it is a wise and a wary bird.” Other ornithologists have commented on this wariness. When it launches

into flight it settles into slow wingbeats that add a languid feel to the species’ persona. Also there is a languid feel to the bird’s search for food; it stands still or steps very slowly forward, using patience, as it tries to catch fish, crawfish or other aquatic fare. But I would hate to be looking up along this bird’s long bill and into its eyes if I were prey: for one instant this heron is very quick, striking well forward of its body with its long neck and bill.

Of its food, Bent (same website) cites Audubon: “The principal food of

the great blue heron is fish of all kinds; but it also devours frogs, lizards, snakes, and birds, as well as small quadrupeds, such as shrews, meadow mice, and young rats, all of which I have found in its stomach.” Audubon also mentions aquatic insects, moths and butterflies. With even more items of prey mentioned by Audubon and other observers, this species clearly has a broad array on its dining menu; it can seek prey well away from water.



Although some Great Blue Herons migrate into Oklahoma in winter, the species is considered a permanent resident throughout the state. Its status in Oklahoma has changed dramatically in the last few decades. Once a quite hard bird to find on our Christmas Bird Counts, it now shows up all over our count area: on our most recent count, 13 field parties (all field parties that were in the field more than 30 minutes) found at least 1 Great Blue Heron, with a total of 131 birds.

The Great Blue Heron is one of the earliest of our nesters. Although I am having trouble documenting it, I believe that by mid-February or so in recent years, birds start showing up in their nesting colonies, long before leaves come out in the spring. So it is time to start watching for nesting activity.

There is a colony of some 25-30 nests on Waterloo Road 3/4ths mile east of Highway 74; you will see the nests in big cottonwoods about 1/4th mile to the north of Waterloo Road. Bent (same website) says that “[o]n the plains and prairies of the interior the great blue herons have to be contented with the largest trees they can find, cottonwoods, poplars, and box elders, in the timber belts along the streams.” Great Blues usually nest in relatively small colonies of 10-30 nests and tend to return to those colonies year after year. They build a platform nest like most other herons and lay 3-7 (rarely) eggs, but usually 4. The number of years they return to a nesting location usually seems to be related to how long the large trees in the area will support their nests, assuming the birds are not harassed at that location.

One thing that is a bit afield from Oklahoma ornithology is the “Great White Heron,” currently classified as a form of the Great Blue. I enjoy the fact that this pairing of two forms is more strikingly different than the pairing of “Snow” and “Blue” goose forms of the Snow Goose. The “Great White Heron” has beautiful pure white plumage and is normally found in southern Florida, Cuba, and coastal areas of the Yucatan Peninsula. So if you ever travel that way.....

2010 Oklahoma City Christmas Count

Species	Total #	Species	Total #	Species	Total #
Snow Goose	1	Bonaparte's Gull	296	Savannah Sparrow	42
Cackling Goose	414	Ring-billed Gull	5656	LeConte's Sparrow	5
Canada Goose	3774	Herring Gull	116	Fox Sparrow	40
Mute Swan [tame]	"(1)	Forster's Tern	24	Song Sparrow	110
Wood Duck	10	Rock Pigeon	2041	Lincoln's Sparrow	7
Gadwall	171	Eurasian Collared-Dove	106	Swamp Sparrow	17
American Wigeon	76	White-winged Dove	1	White-throated Sparrow	28
Mallard	587	Mourning Dove	151	Harris's Sparrow	222
Northern Shoveler	111	Greater Roadrunner	cw	White-crowned Sparrow	20
Northern Pintail	1	Great Horned Owl	4	Dark-eyed Junco	503
Green-winged Teal	20	Barred Owl	4	Slate-colored Junco	1
Canvasback	116	Common Poorwill	cw	Lapland Longspur	9
Redhead	14	Belted Kingfisher	14	Northern Cardinal	208
Ring-necked Duck	51	Red-bellied Woodpecker	34	Red-winged Blackbird	930
Greater Scaup	20	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	8	Eastern Meadowlark	5
Lesser Scaup	188	Downy Woodpecker	47	meadowlark sp.	480
Bufflehead	198	Hairy Woodpecker	2	Common Grackle	275
Common Goldeneye	311	Northern Flicker	97	Great-tailed Grackle	266
Hooded Merganser	328	Pileated Woodpecker	3	Brown-headed Cowbird	219
Common Merganser	484	Eastern Phoebe	5	House Finch	66
Red-breasted Merganser	30	Blue Jay	151	Pine Siskin	1
Ruddy Duck	59	American Crow	256	American Goldfinch	221
Northern Bobwhite	2	Horned Lark	102	House Sparrow	380
Pacific Loon	1	Carolina Chickadee	159		
Common Loon	8	Tufted Titmouse	51	Total number of species	115
Pied-billed Grebe	96	Red-breasted Nuthatch	2	Total number of birds	28,123
Horned Grebe	36	White-breasted Nuthatch	3	Additional subsp. Or forms	1
Eared Grebe	2	Brown Creeper	7	Additional sp., count week	3
Western Grebe	1	Carolina Wren	84	Additional species [tame]	1
American White Pelican	261	Bewick's Wren	5		
Double-crested Cormorant	149	House Wren	2	Total Party Hours	87.5
Great Blue Heron	131	Winter Wren	9	--Party Hours (Foot)	50
Great Egret	cw	Marsh Wren	7	--Party Hours (Car)	37.5
Black-crowned Night-Heron	8	Golden-crowned Kinglet	7	Total Party Miles	340.5
Bald Eagle, Adult	2	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	26	--Party Miles (Foot)	31.5
eagle sp.	1	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	1	--Party Miles (Car)	309
Northern Harrier	8	Eastern Bluebird	39	Total (Party) Owling Hours	0.5
Sharp-shinned Hawk	8	Hermit Thrush	2	--Owling Hours (Foot)	
Cooper's Hawk	5	American Robin	1891	--Owling Hours (Car)	0.5
Red-shouldered Hawk	7	Northern Mockingbird	41	Total (Party) Owling Miles	0.5
Red-tailed Hawk	83	Brown Thrasher	9	--Owling Miles (Foot)	
Harlan's Hawk	1	European Starling	3982	--Owling Miles (car)	0.5
Ferruginous Hawk	1	American Pipit	2	Total (Party) Feeder Hours	8.5
Rough-legged Hawk	1	Cedar Waxwing	225		
American Kestrel	19	Orange-crowned Warbler	4	Total Parties (field)	14
American Coot	228	Yellow-rumped Warbler	135	Total Observers (field)	55
Killdeer	35	Common Yellowthroat	3	Total Parties (Feeder only)	2
Greater Yellowlegs	31	Spotted Towhee	33	Total Observers (Feeder only)	3
Least Sandpiper	93	American Tree Sparrow	29	Total Observers	58
Wilson's Snipe	2	Field Sparrow	8		

Minutes of January 24, 2011

President Bill Diffin called the meeting to order. Guests : Kay Williams, Jennifer Waldrap, Jennifer H., Angelia Scott, & Randy Hacker were welcomed along with new members Joe Shepard & Paul Cook.

Minutes of the December meeting were approved as published in the January newsletter. The January Treasurer's Report was approved as presented by Treasurer, Nancy Vicars:

Cash on Hand 12-20-2010	\$5,417.11
Deposits:	604.78
Disbursements:	107.86
Cash on Hand 01-24-11	\$5,914.03

Field Trip Report

Jimmy Woodward gave a report on their very successful Canton Lake field trip, stating there must have been 10,000 water fowl on the lake. They found a Barrow's Goldeneye, female Black Scooter, Thayer's gulls, 2nd winter Black-backed gull, two Long-tailed ducks, and 12 to 15 Bald Eagles.

The upcoming February 5th field trip to Sooner Lake, led by Matt Young, is a joint trip with Tulsa Audubon. To go into the Sooner Lake OG&E property your name must be on their list. If you are on their list, at the gate they will give you an ID card to carry. To put your name on their list, contact Cyndie Browning at Vermilian_flycatcher@Yahoo.com.

February 12 field trip will be to Ft. Cobb. Additional field trip schedules can be seen on the back page of our newsletter under Field Trip Schedule.

Birding in Oklahoma Wildlife management areas now requires each person to purchase and carry with them a Conservation Passport, or a current Hunting or Fishing license. If you are caught without one you will be fined.

Old business: none

New Business

Dues are due now. Nancy has calendars for sale, and her husband Jim pleads for sales so that he does not have to purchase those that are not sold.

Jim has been doing this for several years. Let's all give him a break and purchase another one even if we have already bought one. They make good gifts you know!

Refreshment break.

Warren introduced our guest speaker, Douglas R. Wood, PhD who is professor at Southeastern Oklahoma State University for the past ten years. His program was on the "Prothonotary Warblers' Nest Success, Site Fidelity, and Behavioral Ecology in a Changing Landscape from 2003-2010. This was an extremely interesting program made even more so by Doug's wit and ease of presentation. A bonus was beautiful prothonotary photographs.

After the program Warren mentioned a PBS program "Birds of Paradise" he highly recommended.

Dora Webb

For 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

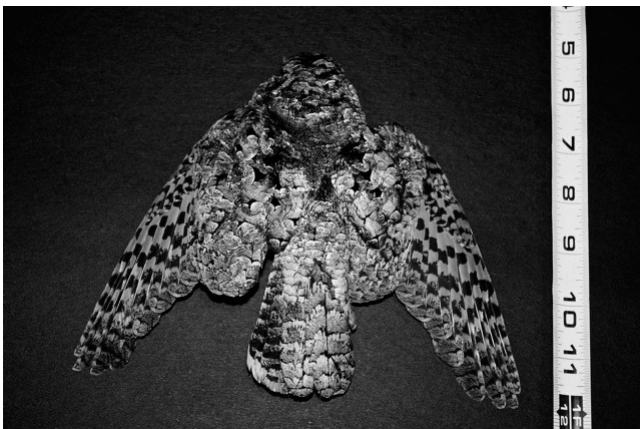
The Oklahoma City Audubon society is neither a chapter of nor affiliated with National Audubon.

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

OKC-Audubon.org

Common Poorwill

This bird was found alive during count week--on 15 December 2010--in an Oklahoma City building; it was sent to Wildcare and died there 2 days later. This is an amazing record for central Oklahoma in the winter. Thanks to Bill Voelker for kindly forwarding these photos.



Thanks for the Memories

We owe many thanks to Diane Newell and Jane Jones of Austin, Texas, for hosting our CBC tally party this year and in previous years, a big thanks to Cheryl Allen for the great chili she has made for years, and a special thanks to all who brought food to the tally party. The count tally party was, as always, a wonderful time!

Eagle Nest Cam

There are two nest locations this year at Sooner Lake & Sequoyah Wildlife Refuge and the nest at Sequoyah already has two new eaglets!!!

http://www.suttoncenter.org/pages/live_eagle_camera

Recorders Report – January 2011 A Busy Month

The weather for January 2011 has been very cooperative for bird watchers, but lack of moisture has created a severe to moderate drought. By the 22nd the 90 day rainfall total for Oklahoma City was 5 inches below normal making it the fourth driest period since 1921. The U.S. Drought report indicates Oklahoma City centers in a severe drought while the surrounding central Oklahoma area is in a moderate drought. Indications are that the drought could continue until April. But the sunny weather has produced a multitude of bird reports for January.

James Hubbell started the New Year by birding Lake Hefner and spotting an immature **California Gull**. On the 2nd he drove along the southwest corner of Lake Overholser and saw a mature Bald Eagle do a fly by which scared up hundreds of gulls, and later he spotted the female **Long-Tailed Duck**. On the 2nd Patti Muzny discovered a **Pine Warbler** northeast of Lake Thunderbird.

On the 5th Lindell Dillon discovered 3 adult **Trumpeter Swans** on Summit Lake in Norman. On the 6th at Lake Hefner Joe Grzybowski located a first-winter **Thayer's Gull** with some Herring Gulls as well as a Greater Yellowlegs. Earlier this week he casually ran into an adult **Ferruginous Hawk** near Rock Creek and West 48th Street in the Ten Mile Flats area. On the 7th Cecil Johnson saw a **Virginia Rail** in Norman along South Jenkins; meanwhile, at Lake Hefner Bill Diffin viewed several Common Loons, Red-breasted Mergansers, Pied-billed and Horned Grebes.

On the 8th Ben Holt sited a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** and a **Glaucous Gull** at Prairie Dog Point on Lake Hefner, and the OCAS field trip led by Jim Bates located an Eastern Phoebe at the Bridgestone Preserve. On the 9th Jimmy Woodard discovered a group of **Lapland Longspur** in Yukon near I-40 and Garth Brooks Road. At Lake Hefner on the 11th both Matt Jung and Joe Grzybowski found **Greater Scaup**, and Matt found a gull that looks suspiciously like a **Mew Gull** but it hasn't been confirmed. Again at Lake Hefner on the 12th Matt saw a **Western Grebe**, and on the 13th Lisa Wiesbauer located a Snow Goose.

Dustin Lynch decided to spend the weekend of the 15th and 16th birding Oklahoma. He started in Stillwater at Boomer Lake with waterfowl and the OSU Arboretum with Pine Siskins and a Brown Creeper. In OKC at Martin Park he discovered a Brown Thrasher, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Winter Wren. At Lake Hefner he added Ruddy Duck and Field Sparrow. He went down the turnpike to Fletcher and then 7 miles east and introduced himself to Harvey Coomb. Harvey said the Trumpeter Swans had been hanging around his pond for two months but not that day. Dustin then spent Sunday further south and returned in the evening to find 3 Trumpeter Swans. He ended up seeing 93 species in two days.

On the 15th in Norman the OCAS and Cleveland County Audubon Clubs had a joint field trip. It started in dense fog but by the time the large group arrived at the field it had lifted enough to see a Merlin winging low out of the mist, a large group of Savannah Sparrows, and a flock of at

least 100 **Smith's Longspurs**. Along South Jenkins the group spotted Swamp Sparrows, **Common Yellowthroat**, Pileated Woodpecker and a Sharp-shinned Hawk. On the 16th John Raeside and Anais Starr saw three American Tree Sparrows along South Jenkins.



On the 17th at Lake Hefner Jimmy sited a flock of Lapland Longspurs with 2 **McCown's Longspurs** mixed in the group. On the 21st Kim Wiar spotted a White-winged Dove at her feeder in Norman. On the 22nd Elvind Vamraak photographed a Glaucous Gull, 2 Thayer's Gulls, and a Lesser Black-backed Gull at the North Canadian River. On the 22nd in Stillwater Timothy O'Connell was surprised to see a **Turkey Vulture** lazily cruising over Wal-Mart. On the 23rd Dick Gunn had a Peregrine Falcon on South Jenkins.

On the 27th Jimmy received some photos from a friend showing an **Evening Grosbeak** coming to a feeder in Yukon. On the 30th continued drought and high winds fueled at least 25 grass fires in the state with a large blaze covering over 5 square miles near Guthrie. On the 31st in the last 2-3 hours moisture began arriving in the form of sleet and/or snow.

During January 2011 a total of **126** bird species were reported. I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds by turning in reports. I can be contacted at emkok@earthlink.net. Esther M. Key, Editor.

Oklahoma City Audubon Society
c/o Carla Brueggen
8010 NW 32
Bethany, OK 73008

Field Trip Schedule

Feb. 26: **Woodcock Watch** Patti Muzny will host us to observe woodcocks at her cabin just east of Byars. Meet in the Lowe's parking lot behind the IHOP at I-240 and Sante Fe at 9 a.m.

March 5 **Tenkiller Lake** (joint trip with Tulsa Audubon) Meet at 7 a.m. at McDonald's at I-40 and Douglas in Midwest City. leader: Jimmy Woodard

March 19 **Stinchcomb WMA** Meet at 8 a.m. at Jim's Restaurant, NW 39th St. & Council Rd. Leader: Jim Bates

March 26 **South Jenkins St./Norman** Meet at 8 a.m. at the compost piles on Jenkins Street., just south of the Water Treatment Plant. Dick will be parked along the road. Leader: Dick Gunn

Apr. 9 **OKC Zoo Behind the scenes birding** Meet at the main entrance at 8 a.m. As attendance may be limited for the behind the scenes tour part, please RSVP leader, Nadine Varner, gallinuleofpurple@yahoo.com.

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

Apr. 29 **Salt Plains Bird Festival**

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.

May/June **Club picnic and Nightjar walk at Lake Draper** details TBA
