



# Oklahoma City Audubon Society

OKC-AUDUBON.ORG

April 2016

## Soundscape Ecology: The Science of the Auditory Landscape



Join us April 18 when Ashley Unger will be the guest speaker the Oklahoma City Audubon Society

Sound is a key component in how humans, birds, mammals, reptiles, and many other living things navigate the world around them. Urban and natural environments are associated with vastly different types of sounds, which together form urban and natural soundscapes. This talk will discuss the science of sound in the landscape, and how these soundscapes are impacting the way we study ecology, especially birds.

Ashley Unger is a Graduate

Research Assistant in the Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management at Oklahoma State University. Her research is focused on the effects of anthropogenic development on lesser prairie-chicken movement, habitat use, and survival.

A native of Pennsylvania, she earned a bachelor's degree from Delaware Valley College and a master's from the University of Tennessee in Wildlife and Fisheries Science.

Our meetings are held September through June on the third Monday of each month (with the exception of January, when the meeting is held on the fourth Monday). They begin at 7 p.m. at the Will Rogers Garden Center, I-44 and NW 36th Street. Visitors are always welcome.

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### Welcome!

The Oklahoma City Audubon Society welcomes new members:

Amy Atkinson, Edmond, OK  
Victor Parsons, OKC

### Refreshments

Refreshments for the April meeting will be provided by:

Snacks - Jana Mott and Sue Woodson  
Drinks & Ice - Marion Homier

## President's Perspective

By Bill Diffin



Hi, members. As of the day this article is finishing up, April 7, the winter Redtails, longspurs and most large gulls have already moved north. Some of the small birds of the cool months, sparrows, towhees, kinglets, Yellow-rumped Warblers, will linger to mid-April or even early May. On OKbirds the FOY posts have been rolling in,

first Purple Martin, first Barn Swallow, first Scissortail, first hummingbird. The first Mississippi Kite can't be far behind. By the time you get this newsletter around mid-April, migration will be in full swing. The peak of the wave lasts until mid-May. For another week there will be dwindling numbers of warblers, some empids and shorebirds. Finally the White-rumped Sandpipers (left) will come through, and spring migration is over. We will want to take advantage of migration while it lasts and get out birding. Things happen fast this time of year. Breeding bird surveys are just around the corner.



In last month's article we had started an investigation of the Other Passerida, a collection of small songbird clades whose relationships to the passeridan superfamilies treated to this point, Muscipoidea, Certhioidea, Sylvioidea and Passeroidea have remained enigmatic. The limits of each of these enigmatic clades and where each should be placed on the Passerida tree continue to be the subject of phylogenomic research. One such



group is the Bombycillids (waxwings and relatives). In 2008 a research paper was published by Spellman et. al., "Clarifying the systematics of an enigmatic avian lineage: What is a Bombycillid?" This paper verified conclusively that the waxwings (Bombycillidae), the Phainopepla (left) and silky flycatchers (Ptilonotidae), the Grey Hypocolius (Hypocolidae) and the Palmchat (Dulidae) all

belong together in a clade. The paper also revealed that another bird, the Hylocitrea, previously unsuspected of being a Bombycillid also belonged with them -- a link to Don Roberson's Creagrus page on the Hylocitrea with images is here, <http://goo.gl/hwKw8I>. The paper is here, <https://goo.gl/ijlC3h>. To quote the authors, "Inclusion of these taxa in the bombycillid lineage was supported by 100% of 100 bootstrapped datasets and a



synapomorphic insertion of a single codon in the RAG-1 reading frame..." The single-codon insertion in the RAG-1 gene is a particularly compelling piece of evidence for phylogenetic researchers, a unique genetic marker possessed by only the members of this clade and no others. Then in 2014 a research paper was published by Alstrom et. al., "Discovery of a relict lineage and monotypic family of passerine birds". The title of this paper doesn't incorporate all of its scope and importance. The research consisted of a seven-gene phylogenetic study of the Passerida that was intended to clarify the limits of the clades and their relationships.

There were some significant findings concerning clade limits and deeper relationships although some relationships remained unclear. However the title highlights the discovery that a bird previously thought to be a sylvioid babbler, the Spotted Wren-babbler (right) (*Spelaeornis formosus*), is actually the single living representative of a basally diverging passeridan lineage, see image of the bird here <http://goo.gl/U1KQC8>. The bird is now called the Spotted Elachura since it was moved to its own genus, Elachura, and family, Elachuridae by the authors. The Passerida tree deduced by the authors is shown as Figure 2 of the paper here, <http://goo.gl/GZhJnA> (click on the Open in new tab link below the figure to get something large enough to read). Note the Bombycillid clade has a superfamily name, Bombycilloidea, and includes the same



(Continued on page 5)

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# Bird of the Month

By John Shackford



The **Swainson's Thrush** (*Catharus ustulatus*) is strictly a migrant in Oklahoma. Most of these thrushes spend the breeding season well north of us in Canada and into Alaska. Their wintering season is spent well south of us, in Central and South America. Dr. George Sutton (1967; *Oklahoma Birds*) gives April 16 to June 6 in the spring and September 7 to September 29 in the

fall as the dates to look for Swainson's Thrushes in Oklahoma.

During spring and fall migration, it is the thrush I most often see. Differences between several of the thrushes are subtle. Besides the Swainson's Thrush, there are the similar Hermit Thrush, Veery, and Gray-cheeked Thrush; all of these have brown backs and spots on the breast. Perhaps the best field mark for the Swainson's Thrush is its prominent buffy eye-ring. This is the thing that usually attracts me most in identifying the species. They also show buffy on the sides of the breast and olive brown on the back. The Hermit Thrush is similar but differs by having a reddish-brown tail that is redder than its back. The Veery has less spotting on the breast than the other thrushes, a relatively plain face and an even brown back. The Gray-cheeked Thrush has grayish on the face and neck, and no buffy eye-ring. One final thrush to rule out from the above four is the Wood Thrush. The feature that readily separates this species from the other four is very bold spots on the ventral surface that cover almost all of the throat, breast and belly. Well, actually, there is one other thrush, but we do not need to worry much about this one—the Bicknell's Thrush. It is found in the breeding season in quite localized areas in New York State northward into eastern Canada. It was fairly recently separated from the very similar Gray-cheeked Thrush—differences are mostly habitat and song, I believe.

In the back of my mind I have often wondered why the Swainson's Thrush is so much more common during migration in Oklahoma than the other thrushes, but I have never taken the time to look up why this might be so. It turns out that the Hermit Thrush has a breeding range that is even larger than the breeding range of the Swainson's Thrush—which covers much of Canada and up into

Alaska. But the Veery and Gray-cheeked Thrush have smaller breeding ranges, and the Wood Thrush breeding area occurs in the eastern United States, primarily east of central Oklahoma. So large breeding range size for the Swainson's Thrush is likely one answer as to why it is more common during migration in Oklahoma than other thrushes.

Since we do not see this bird on its breeding and wintering grounds, I thought it might be of interest as to what goes on when we do not see the bird, in summer and winter. In summer the Swainson's Thrush usually nests in moist northern areas of spruce or balsam firs, other evergreens, but also poplar and willow thickets. The nests are usually quite low, about 2-8 feet high, although they can be considerably higher. They lay 3 to 5 eggs (usually 3 or 4) in a nest that does not use mud in its construction, as the Wood Thrush and American Robin do.



In winter, the birds separate out somewhat by 2 populations. The first and largest—and our population—migrates to southeastern Mexico southward on into northern Argentina. This population was formerly called the Olive-backed Thrush. A second population I have not mentioned breeds along the west coast state south to southern California, and also southward in the Rocky

Mountains as far as New Mexico; this population winters on the southwest coast of Mexico south to Guatemala. This was formerly known as the Russet-backed Thrush. There appears to be a gap between these two populations on the wintering ground. This gap is in the middle parts of southern Mexico and extends southward a way.

The Swainson's Thrush is named after William John Swainson, who was an English ornithologist and artist (1789-1855) and who moved to New Zealand in 1841. His formal education was cut short by a speech impediment. Thomas Nuttall named the Swainson's Thrush after him; Audubon named the Swainson's Warbler after him, and Charles Lucien Bonaparte named the Swainson's Hawk after him. It is likely that Swainson never saw any of these species that were named after him.

So when you see a thrush in spring or fall migration in Oklahoma, think first of Swainson's Thrush. You will be right most of the time.

## OKC Audubon Minutes 3/21/16

Called to order by President Bill Diffin. Minutes were approved from February meeting without opposition.

Treasurer's report: Nancy Vicars reports cash on hand \$5,802.83.

Guests were welcomed: Amy and Johnathan Atkinson. Rita Miller from Edmond.

Report of recent Hackberry Flat field trip: March 4<sup>th</sup> a large group congregated at the Visitor's Center and were met by Lou and Mary Truex, who led us on a tour of the wildlife refuge and also to areas of known owl roosts. An estimated 26 persons from OKC Audubon attended, and all were appreciative of the special tour.

Upcoming events: Spring OOS meeting will be in Woodward April 15-17, and will coincide with the Lesser Prairie Chicken Festival.

Earthfest is slated for Saturday April 30<sup>th</sup> at Martin Park Nature Center and volunteers are requested to welcome the visitors to the OCAS booth on the patio.

Field trip to Wewoka Woods will be Sunday May 1<sup>st</sup>. Attendees will meet at 6:45AM at Sunnyslane and I-40 Braums. Wewoka Woods is three miles west of Wewoka on highway 51. Free lunch will be available, so please notify us if you plan to attend. We were warned that GPS will not lead you to the correct location. Recommended is the DeLorme Road Atlas for finding such locations.

Nancy displayed a large group of birding literature and gifts for those who would like to purchase them. The monies will go to the OCAS.

Meeting was adjourned and we were entertained by a presentation by Tiffany LaLonde, who spoke to us about the care and nurturing of pet birds.

Next meeting will be April 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm at the Will Rogers Park Garden Center.

Sharon Henthorn, Secretary

## Proposed Duck Stamp format changes

Recently, a proposal to change the format of the the venerable Duck Stamp was put forward. The proposed changes would require that artists include a non-game species on the stamp in addition to the traditional waterfowl. This is intended to draw attention to the many other, rarely acknowledged, species that benefit from the habitat acquisition and management of National Wildlife Refuge land that the Duck Stamp helps to fund.

The proposal was met with mixed reactions from the hunting, birding, stamp collecting, and wildlife art communities.

The proposal:



### ***Including a Secondary Migratory Bird Species in 2016 Art-work Entries***

*Current § 91.14 explains that a live portrayal of any bird(s) of the five or fewer identified eligible waterfowl species must be the dominant feature of the design, but that the design may depict other appropriate elements such as hunting dogs, as long as an eligible waterfowl species is in the foreground and clearly the focus of attention. We propose to add to this section the requirement that an appropriate non-waterfowl migratory bird species must also appear in any entry submitted to beginning with the 2016 contest. We propose this change beginning with the 2016 contest in recognition of the 2016 Centennial anniversary of the Migratory Bird Treaty between the United States and Great Britain (on behalf of Canada) and to emphasize that habitat conservation benefits all wetland-dependent species.*

In announcing the competition for the 2016 Duck Stamp art competition, the USFWS decided:

*An appropriate, identifiable non-waterfowl migratory bird species will remain an **optional element** for 2016. Inclusion of a secondary species will not confer an added benefit and is at the artist's discretion.*

The waterfowl species eligible in 2016 are:

Brant, Canada goose, Northern shoveler, Red-breasted merganser and Steller's eider.

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## Perspective (cont.)

four groups as the Spellman et. al. paper discussed above. The \*/\* symbolism, short for 1.00/100, above the Bombycilloidea branch indicates the highest possible confidence that the included families do constitute a separate clade. The Bombycilloidea are in turn included in a clade with Muscicapidae, Certhioidea and the monotypic Spelaeornis clade. The 0.99/79 at the node joining these clades indicates good support for the combined clade. Previous studies had shown the Bombycillids to be part of a clade with Muscicapidae and Certhioidea but with only very weak support (as in ToL). Thus the results of this study provide a definite advance in clarifying the relationships between the Bombycillids and the rest of the Passerida. The support for a distinct Muscicapidae+Certhioidea clade is good but not great, 0.91/73. The support for a distinct Bombycilloidea+Spelaeornis clade is poor, 0.70/-.

The conclusion has to be that although Muscicapidae, Certhioidea, Bombycilloidea and Spelaeornis all belong in the same clade, the precise relationships between them are still murky. What has emerged for us in our quest is that Bombycilloidea can be studied for characteristics that may be shared by North American birds, Cedar Waxwing, Bohemian Waxwing and Phainopepla, and interesting foreign species, silky flycatchers, Palmchat, Grey Flycatcher and Hylocichla. It is also possible that the Spotted Elachura shares characteristics with birds somewhere in Muscicapidae+Certhioidea+Bombycilloidea. Wrens are an obvious first place to look. Until next month.



### EarthFest at Martin Park

Just a reminder; members of the OCAS will support Earthfest this year at Martin Park. The event will be held Saturday, 30 April 2016 from 12:30 to 4:00 pm.

Our displays will be located on the Nature Center's front porch. Come and join us, do some birding and see what other nature related organizations are doing.

## Upcoming Field Trips

**APRIL 30 – Big Sit:** Marion Homier and John Cleal are opening up their property in Choctaw for an unofficial 'Big Sit'. Address is 3626 Santa Fe Drive, Choctaw, OK 73020. Phone 405 390 2001 or email at: johncleal2@yahoo.com. They live in the Railhead Addition. Santa Fe Drive is off Triple X, in the section of Triple X between SE 29th and SE 44. We will be open from 9 am until the light fails. It is suggested visitors bring folding chairs. In the event of rain, we will re-schedule for the following Saturday, 7 May. We suggest intending visitors phone us before hand and leave their phone numbers, so we can advise them if there is a last minute postponement due to weather. Details pending. Leader: John Cleal (johncleal2@yahoo.com)

**May 1 – Wewoka Woods:** Directions: Wewoka Woods is located in Seminole County on Rt 59, 3 miles west of Wewoka. *Caution: If you try using your GPS, it will not get you there.* From the west: Take Exit 200 south off Interstate 40 (Rt 99) through the town of Seminole to Rt 59 east, travel about 8 miles, Wewoka Woods Adventist Center will be on your left—there is a large granite sign.

From the east: Take Exit 212 south off Interstate 40 (Rt 56) into Wewoka. At the second traffic light turn right on Rt. 59, three miles, Wewoka Woods Adventist Center will be on your right—there is a large granite sign. For those wishing to caravan or ride share. We will meet at the Braum's just south of the junction of Sunnyside Rd and Interstate 40 at 6:45 a.m. Sunday morning May 1. There will be a free lunch served. If you plan on coming please contact Bob Holbrook at: [incatarn@msn.com](mailto:incatarn@msn.com) by April 22 and let him know if you will meet us at the caravan site or come out on your own and so he can plan accordingly for lunch.

# Recorders Report

## March

At the end of a mild and dry winter, the bird action shifts from backyard feeders to incoming migrants. Flocks of thousands of geese disappear and are replaced by geese couples dawdling together. When will the ducks on the lakes be joined by shorebirds and egrets? Will the state bird arrive this month or next?

On the 1<sup>st</sup> Lindell Dillon identified a Greater Scaup in Hallbrooke Addition in Norman. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brian Stufflebean spotted Bonaparte's Gull at Liberty Lake in Logan County, and in Kingfisher County he discovered a Greater Yellowlegs at a Marsh just south of Dover along CR E0730. On the 5<sup>th</sup> Joe Grzybowski documented **Baird's Sandpiper** at the Morgan Road playa and John Marshall School Pond in OKC, a Western Grebe at Lake Hefner, and a large flock of **Sprague's Pipits** at the Norman Ten Mile Flats. In Lincoln County Joe Buck found a White-crowned Sparrow. On the 6<sup>th</sup> in Garvin County near Hennepin Bob Ellis located Greater Yellowlegs, **Blue-winged Teal** and Pied-billed Grebe; Lindell Dillon noticed a Great Egret in Norman; and Deb Hirt recognized a Common Yellowthroat at Boomer Lake Park in Stillwater.



On the 8<sup>th</sup> Brian Stufflebean came across a **Yellow-headed Blackbird** at Lake Hefner, and Jerry Taylor discovered an **Eastern Screech-Owl** in Oklahoma City. On the 9<sup>th</sup> John Bates located a Barn Owl in the cedars by Sara Road. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, Larry Mays had a Brown Thrasher at his home in McClain County; and Chris Butler identified Swamp Sparrow and Marsh Wren at Rose Lake. On the 11<sup>th</sup> in Pottawatomie County Brian Stufflebean checked the Shawnee Reservoir Upper Section and tallied Blue-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck and Song Sparrow. Meanwhile **Purple Martins** arrived in Garvin County at Elmore City Lake.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> Joe Grzybowski identified American Pipit along Ladd Road in McClain County plus in Garvin County east of Maysville he found a Loggerhead Shrike,

and in Foster Esther Key saw Lark Sparrow. In NW Canadian County Daniel Robinson spotted Barred Owl, Northern Bobwhite and

### **Northern Rough-winged Swallow.**

In Cleveland County John Tharp noticed **Black-and-white Warbler** at the Little River State Park, and Corey Riding discovered Purple Martin at Boomer Lake Park in Payne County.



On the 15<sup>th</sup> Larry Mays reported a flock of Sandhill Crane in McClain County and Cédric Duhalde found Sprague's Pipit at the Purina Fields in Edmond. On the 16<sup>th</sup> John Tharp identified **Tree Swallow** and **Cliff Swallow** at Lake Thunderbird State Park North Sentinel Campgrounds. On the 17<sup>th</sup> Joshua Cullum saw a **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** at Little River State Park. On the 18<sup>th</sup> Scott Loss noticed a Barn Swallow at Boomer Lake Park. On the 19<sup>th</sup> Ricky Jones encountered Loggerhead Shrike and Lincoln's Sparrow around Rose Lake, and Deb Hirt came across **Louisiana Waterthrush** and Lark Sparrow at Boomer Lake Park.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> T K saw a **Barn Swallow** at the North Base/Airport Area in Norman, and at Boomer Lake Park Scott Loss spotted

**Solitary Sandpiper,** Tree Swallow and Cliff Swallow.

Andrew Barndt discovered a **Snowy Egret,** Purple Martin, Barn Swallow and Cliff Swallow at Lake

Hefner. A Black-and-white Warbler was located at Arcadia Lake, and Jimmy Woodard counted a Tree Swallow at Lake Overholser's Coffey Dam. On the 21<sup>st</sup> Andrew Barndt noticed a flock of Sprague's Pipit at the Garrett Farmstead in McClain County and



*(continued on page 7)*

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## Recorder's Report (cont.)

Scott Loss identified an **American Golden-Plover** at the Meridian Technology Center Pond in Payne County, while Emily Hjalmarson recognized a **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** in Norman.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> Kyle Horton spotted a **White-eyed Vireo** at the George M. Sutton Wilderness Park in Norman. In Logan County on the 24<sup>th</sup> Zach Poland identified Fish Crow at Mineral Wells Park, and on the 25<sup>th</sup> he detected a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher at his home. Deanne McKinney recognized a Barn Swallow at Rose Lake in Canadian County, and an Osprey at the Stinchcomb Wildlife Refuge; while Lindell Dillon reported an **Osprey** at Lake Thunderbird and Joe Grzybowski turned up a **Yellow-throated Warbler** along South Jenkins in Norman.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> Curt Hofer found Horned Lark at the Goldsby Sod Farm, and C H Hemphill noticed a Black-and-white Warbler at a ranch in Logan County. At the Little River



State Park, John Tharp saw a Louisiana Waterthrush and Vesper Sparrow, while Caitlin Laughlin discovered a **Cinnamon Teal** at Sanborn Lake in Payne County. On the 27<sup>th</sup> Christie Stoops identified an Eared Grebe at Cottonwood Creek; Scott Loss detected a Spotted Sandpiper at Boomer Lake Park;

and Chris Butler recorded a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher in Choctaw. On the 28<sup>th</sup> Zach verified a Purple Martin at his home in Logan County. On the 29<sup>th</sup> Caitlin Laughlin reported the first **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** at the OSU Arboretum. But the best is yet to come in the busy migration month of April. So get on out there, check out the birds, have fun and participate in a citizen science project !!

In the Central Oklahoma area **22** new species were reported in March bringing the year's total to **170**. I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds and can be contacted by e-mail at emkok@earthlink.net . Esther M. Key, Editor.

## Citizen Science

by Esther Key

Bird watching is fun – lots of fun !! But it can also provide useful data if we enter our sightings into Citizen Science Projects. And what better time than now as spring begins and new bird species begin migrating into Central Oklahoma. Who will show up first and how soon after that will we all see them? Where can we enter this information so it can be shared with others?

In April the Oklahoma Biological Survey is conducting a virtual Bio-Blitz. Participation is free and open to everyone! To participate, you need to set up an account at [iNaturalist.org](http://iNaturalist.org) and join the [Spring Virtual BioBlitz Oklahoma Project](http://SpringVirtualBioBlitzOklahomaProject.org). You can easily record observations using the smart phone app ([android](#) or [iPhone](#)) or add observations directly to the website. Need help getting started? Check out the links to detailed instructions and tutorials on their [website](#) .

In May, the Global Big Bird Day will occur on May 14. To have your sightings included in the Global Big Day, they have to be entered in eBird as one or more checklists. Go to <http://eBird.org/globalbigday> to learn more. You don't need to do a full day of birding; even an hour or 10 minutes makes a difference! Of course, most importantly, get outside, see some birds, have fun, and contribute your sightings to global bird conservation!

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## Oklahoma City Audubon Society

### Officers 2016

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

For up-to-date Oklahoma City Audubon news log onto:  
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