



# Oklahoma City Audubon Society

OKC-AUDUBON.ORG

December, 2011

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## Tall Bird Tales

The December 19 program will be our annual "Tall Bird Tales" plus any of your personal digital bird photos you would like to show. Please have the photos on a flash drive. Laptop and LCD projector will be provided. Also, John Shackford will have a report on our December 17 annual Christmas Bird Count. So, bring your favorite story and/or photo to share with everyone. And feel free to bring a seasonal goodie for the refreshment table to enhance our good holiday birding cheer.



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### CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

This Saturday, 17 December 2011 is our annual Christmas Bird Count. If you would like to participate and have not yet been contacted by a group leader or me, please contact me at 405-340-5057 or [johnsshack@aol.com](mailto:johnsshack@aol.com) so that we can try to work something. The Tally Party is at Diane Newell's home at 8304 Lakeaire. It begins from 5 pm and thereafter. Even if you should not be able to participate on the count, we hope you will consider joining us at the party! The more the merrier!

### REFRESHMENTS

Everyone, please bring something savory or sweet to share at our annual Christmas party. Drinks will be provided.

### DUES NOTICE

It's time once again to renew your annual membership for 2012. 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.

### MEETING CHANGE

**Mark your calendar now!!!** The January meeting will be held on the 4th Monday, January 23, 2012 due to the Garden Center closure for MLK holiday.

### WINTER BIRD SURVEY

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation conducts a Winter Bird Survey each year. This year, the survey is January 5-8, 2012. Log on to [www.okwinterbirds.com](http://www.okwinterbirds.com) and download the survey form. As you take the survey, you'll have a chance to get up-close views of a number of bird species.

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# President's Perspective

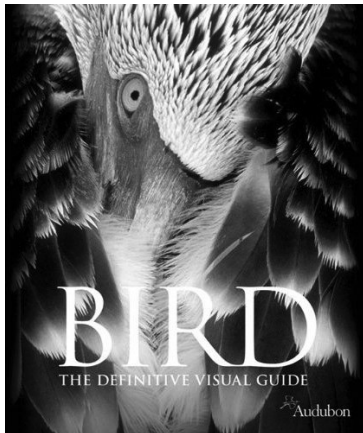
By Bill Diffin



In last month's Perspective, we learned that the Common Blackbird of Europe is a thrush much like the American Robin. We also learned that the thrushes are a group of 175 similar birds having the taxonomic status of a family, the Turdidae. Using the American Robin and the thrushes as an example, we decided to try

and leverage our knowledge of North American passerine birds into the best possible understanding of the passerine birds world wide. We made use of the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, as an online source of photos and briefs for species outside of North America.

There are 94 families of passerine birds according to "Birds, the Definitive Visual Guide". 94 families is too many groups to form the basis of a simple understanding, so let's take a look at the next higher taxonomic rank. The thrushes, the Turdidae, are now generally grouped with some related families into a superfamily,



the Muscipoidea. Other families in Muscipoidea include the thrashers and mockingbirds, the Mimidae; starlings and mynas, Sturnidae; Old World flycatchers and chats, Muscapidae; dippers, Cinclidae; and Philippine creepers, Rhabdornithidae.

The Old World flycatchers and chats, the Muscapidae, are a large family of 275 species with only a few representatives in North America. The New World flycatchers, the kingbirds, phoebes, pewees, empids and their relatives, are very distantly related passerines. Two members of the Muscapidae which regularly breed in Alaska are the Bluethroat and the Northern Wheatear. They are both members of the chat subfamily, the Saxicolinae. Two chat subfamily species you may have heard of are the Nightingale and the European Robin. The European Robin is blue-gray with an orange breast, and the Nightingale is a drab brown and gray. The Common Redstart is an Old World flycatcher in the subfamily, Muscapinae. The male is dark blue-gray with rufous underparts and tail, and the female is

brown. The European Robin and the Common Redstart have a coloration reminiscent of the Eastern Bluebird, and the Bluethroat is also colored with blue and rufous tones. Two other muscapid examples of this color scheme are the Rock Thrush and the brilliant Rufous-bellied

Niltava. The Northern Wheatear has a black mask, wings and tail, gray back, white rump and belly, and rufous wash on the chest. The black-white-gray plumage theme is another common one among the Muscapidae. Examples are the Oriental Magpie Robin, Eurasian Stone Chat, and European Pied Flycatcher.



The mockingbirds and thrashers, the Mimidae, are strictly a New World family of 34 species. As far as plumage colors go, note the rufous of the Brown Thrasher, the rufous undertail of the Gray Catbird and Crissal Thrasher, the black-white-gray patterns of the Sage Thrasher, Northern Mockingbird and Gray Catbird, and the blue of the Blue Mockingbird.

The starlings and mynas form a family, the Sturnidae, with 114 species. The European Starling is certainly a well-known bird, and many birders have probably seen a Hill Myna in a zoo or pet store. The mynas are exceptional among the Muscipoidea superfamily in often having yellow markings, but these are usually imposed on a black-white theme which is otherwise pretty well represented across the Muscipoidea. The most outstanding example of these yellow markings is perhaps the Golden Myna, a bird which is likely to remind one of a Yellow-headed Blackbird. Like the mimids, the starlings and mynas are frequently good imitators. The Superb Starling of Africa has an iridescent blue back and red underparts, yet another example of the Eastern Bluebird color scheme within the Muscipoidea superfamily.

There are 5 species in the dipper family, the Cinclidae, of which the American Dipper is the sole North American representative. The White-throated Dipper is widespread in Europe and Asia. There are three Philippine creepers in the family, Rhabdornithidae. They are currently thought to be most closely related to the starlings, but confident placement within the passerines is still elusive for the group.

Next month we will take another step toward a better understanding of the passerines.

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## Minutes, of the November 21, 2011 Meeting

President Bill Diffin called the meeting to order.

John Shackford announced the Christmas Bird Count would be held December 17. John presented a list of birds and a map covering the count area. Donations were taken in support of the expenses of the tally party. Each participant was encouraged to bring a side dish.

Bill Diffin asked for any corrections or additions to the minutes as published in the November newsletter. Dave Woodson made a motion to accept the minutes, seconded by Sue Woodson. Motion was approved.

President Diffin read the Treasurer's Report as submitted by Nancy Vicars.

Cash on Hand 10/17/11	\$5,787.24
Deposits	.99
Disbursements	-123.61
Cash on Hand 11/21/11	\$5,664.62

### Committee Reports:

Jimmy Woodard reported the unusual sighting of a Field Sparrow during the Fort Reno field trip.

Sue Woodson announced the Nominating Committee's work resulted in all current officers agreeing to serve in their current position for the next year.

The volunteer positions will stay the same with the exception of Jim Vicars resigning as Refreshment Chairman and Larry Mays resigning as Conservation Chairman. Both positions need volunteers to serve.

Jimmy Woodard will resign as Field Trip Chairman on September, 2012. Mark Delgrosso volunteered to accept the Field Trip Chairman effective September 2012.

### New Business:

Dana Holbrook hand made neck warmers. These were available to purchase.

Jeannine Teasley reported a Red-shouldered Hawk in her yard. She shared pictures of her hawk.

Terri Underhill has a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers in her yard.

The Embassy Suite location in Norman has sightings of Chestnut-collard, Smith's, and McCown's Longspurs

along with Lark Buntings. Jimmy advised we could schedule a trip to the Embassy Suite on January 14.

President Diffin stated there are several visitors in attendance. Ralph Cagigal and Jimmy Reddy were introduced. New visitors are welcomed and encouraged to be regular guest.

Warren Harden stated the December topic would be the annual Tall Tales event. All guest are invited to bring his or her favorite bird experience along with a snack to share.

January's speaker will be June Ketchum speaking on her trip to Brazil.

Warren introduced Joe Shepard for tonight's speaker. Joe works as a tour guide at Skagway, Alaska. Joe brought an exciting presentation making the group feel as though we were touring Alaska and seeing the sights along with our tour guide.

Nancy Reed, Recording Secretary

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## 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**

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# Bird of the Month

By John Shackford



The most frequent bird to be used on North American Holiday Greeting Cards, I suspect, is the Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*). Add some snow to the picture of a male cardinal and you have a thing of beauty. This month's picture, illustrating such beauty, is sent as a Holiday

Greeting to you, but you will have to look on the website (OKC-Audubon.org) to see it in color. I want to thank Pat Velte for taking and providing this month's photo illustrating the Northern Cardinal. Pat is the one who always rounds up "Bird of the Month" photos. She never fails to come up with amazing, beautiful pictures.

The Northern Cardinal is one of the 3 *Cardinalis* species of the Americas: The Northern Cardinal of the eastern U.S. and much of Mexico, the Vermilion (or Brazilian) Cardinal (*C. phoeniceus*) of northern South America, and the Pyrrhuloxia (Desert Cardinal) (*C. sinuatus*) of the deserts in the southwestern U. S. and northern Mexico. *Cardinalis* species are only found in the New World, so these 3 are it.

Male Northern Cardinals are a striking red and females are brown with red on the crest, wings and tail. Cardinals have very thick, strong bills that almost any bird bander quickly learns about—they bite really hard with these bills. They are a common permanent resident over most of Oklahoma, except in the Oklahoma Panhandle where they become rarer and rarer as you go west; there are a (very) few records of the related Pyrrhuloxia in Cimarron County.

Generally speaking, the Northern Cardinal is found over most of the eastern U.S. and well into the southwestern states; the fact that they are the state

bird of 7 states attests to its popularity. They, and the Vermilion Cardinal, have been introduced (unfortunately, according to Warren Harden) onto several of the Hawaiian Islands.

In our yards, they come readily to feeders. Like many other small birds they love black oil sunflower seeds and really flock in when the weather is foul—snow and ice storms. Thus we sometimes get to see them with a backdrop of snow, even if we don't get them photographed as Pat has.

The Northern Cardinal has done extremely well in the presence of man. Early in the spring they begin courtship; both male and female sing, something of a rarity among birds. Nests are often placed in



honeysuckle vines and other thick vegetation and shrubbery around our homes. The female lays 2-5 eggs, but usually 3 or 4, in a nest that averages about 6 feet high. They are a common victim—likely the most common victim in our area—of cowbird nest parasitism. Because cardinals nest multiple times in the spring and summer, they often raise cowbird young in their early nestings. I suspect that most successfully reared young cardinals are raised in cardinal nests in the latter part of the nesting season,

after cowbirds are through laying eggs. Thus cardinals replenish more than 1 species—their own and the cowbirds.'

One of my favorite bird stories involves the cardinal and is a true story. A young daughter once asked her father what bird she was seeing outside. He said, "I think it's a female cardinal, but why don't you go ask your mother." The youngster returned somewhat dejected and reported to her father, "You say it's a female cardinal, but mom says it's a mama redbird."

I hope everyone has a wonderful time during the holidays!

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## Birds to See Before You Die

By Mark Delgrosso

### STELLER'S SEA-(or FISH-)EAGLE (*Haliaeetus pelagicus*)

**FAMILY:** Accipitridae

**RANGE:** breeds in far eastern Asia (Siberia); winters south along Siberian coast to northernmost Japan (Hokkaido)

**HABITAT:** coastlines

**STATUS:** though not particularly rare, is considered a vulnerable species

Big. Bold. Beautiful. That's the Steller's Sea Eagle. Reminiscent of the Bald Eagle (also magnificent), the Steller's looks as if it spends a lot more time in the gym. It has been referred to as the 'sumo wrestler' of the eagle world and the Guinness record book has it as the world's largest eagle.

OK – so it's big. And it is majestic. And like most members of genus *Haliaeetus* (which includes the Bald, African Fish, White-bellied Sea, and White-tailed Eagles) strikingly patterned. The terrible-looking bill, perhaps the most massive of any raptor, is a shining schoolbus yellow. Like our Bald Eagle there's a white tail but white also on the rump, thighs, and broadly on the shoulders, with a touch also on the forehead – the rest is black. There is also a rare, dark subspecies that is all black but for the tail.

And like our national bird the Steller's is an opportunistic feeder with a high preference for seafood. Though not loathe to hunt and kill, this eagle would just as soon scavenge and steal. And when an eagle of such massive proportions wants your hard-earned meal you *will* give it over. Given its love of fish this species is strictly coastal in its distribution, and a fairly limited distribution it is.

Breeding primarily on the coast of eastern Siberia (on the Bering Sea) it is seen regularly enough in Alaska to warrant an entry in the National Geographic field guide. In fact, Alaska is the most likely locale for an American birder to encounter a wild Steller's, though a large amount of luck would be needed. Otherwise, some of the more accessible areas to see this species are the coasts of Hokkaido, the northernmost of the Japanese islands – but only during winter.



## FIELD TRIPS: JAN-JUNE 2012

**JANUARY 14 BIRDS AND BONES** Meet at 9AM at the Embassy Suites in Norman off Robinson and I-35. We will search for longspurs. Afterward, we will visit the Museum of Osteology (admission \$6). Also, we could do a group lunch either before or after the museum. LEADER: Jimmy Woodard—405-365-5685.

\*\*\***FEBRUARY ?? BACKYARD BIRDING** Trip to Guthrie. We will visit member Jeannine Teasley's farm near Guthrie. Details TBD.

**MARCH 3 SIA COMANCHE EAGLE FACILITY** We will visit this facility near Cyril which is under the direction of Bill Voelker and the Comanche Nation. It also has other birds there. Meet time and place TBA.

\*\*\***MARCH 16-18 TALLGRASS PRAIRIE PRESERVE** We will spend a weekend at the Nature Conservancy Preserve near Pawhuska. A special focus will be on finding Greater Prairie Chickens. LEADER: Mark Delgrosso (medelgrosso@gmail.com). Details TBA.

\*\*\***APRIL 5-8 HIGH ISLAND, TEXAS** this will be a multi-day visit to the famous migration hotspot along the Gulf Coast. We may visit other birding spots nearby like Anahuac NWR, Bolivar Flats, and Galveston Island. Details TBD.

**APRIL 26 thru MAY 2 LESSER PRAIRIE CHICKEN FESTIVAL** in Woodward This will be the 4th year for this popular bird festival run by TAS and the Oklahoma Audubon Council. Several satellite trips to Hackberry, Wichita Mtns and Black Mesa are run in conjunction with the festival. Contact John Kennington at johnkennington@gmail.com or visit the festival website at [www.lektreks.org](http://www.lektreks.org).

**MAY 11-13 OOS Spring Meeting** Details are still being worked out but the probable site will be in eastern Oklahoma. Details TBA. Visit [www.okbirds.com](http://www.okbirds.com) for more info.

\*\*\***JUNE 2 CLUB PICNIC** After last year's successful event, we plan to do it again. Meeting place and time TBA.

\*\*\*indicates dates could be changed or are yet to be determined.

----PLEASE RSVP to the trip leaders so we will know you are coming. Bring appropriate items for the weather and conditions. Take snacks and drinks as trips may be out for an extended time with no access to amenities.

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## Recorders Report – November 2011

### Goodbye

As the month began ribbons of gold meandered though the fields and forest, winter birds are appearing at feeders and on the lakes, and rain arrived along with tornados and earthquakes.

In Norman along South Jenkins on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mark Jordan saw a flock of about 100 Sandhill Cranes, on the 4<sup>th</sup> Dick Gunn reported a Sora Rail, Marsh Wren and Swamp Sparrow, and on the 5<sup>th</sup> Matt Jung discovered a Hermit Thrush while Jennifer Kidney heard it singing. At the Guthrie Sand Pit Gaery Harritt saw a Bald Eagle flying across the water swooping down on a flock of American Coots. Other species present included Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebes, Ruddy Ducks and Hooded Mergansers.



On Saturday, November 5<sup>th</sup> the largest recorded earthquake in the state of Oklahoma struck with a magnitude of 5.6 and the epicenter in Lincoln and Pottawatomie Counties. Aftershocks included 70 quakes at magnitudes of 1.0 to 2.5 including 12 at magnitudes of 3.0 or higher. On Monday, the 7<sup>th</sup> a front entered southwest Oklahoma bringing tornados. When it arrived to the west and north of Oklahoma City as heavy thunderstorms, another quake hit at 2045 with a 4.7 magnitude. This rain helped move central Oklahoma out of the exceptional drought category into the extreme and severe drought categories. Central Oklahoma still needs another 1 -3 inches of rain to return the soil to full moisture levels, but the lakes and ponds will need even more to return to full except Lakes Hefner and Overholser which received an artificial refill from Canton Lake.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> Ken Williams and Jim Arterburn birded the dam at Lake Hefner where they located a female/immature **Surf Scoter** in the water treatment ponds around 1615. Matt Jung also spotted it and James Hubbell was the last to report it on the 10<sup>th</sup>. On the 11<sup>th</sup> Mary and Mark Peterson discovered a Western Grebe just out from Prairie Dog Point. Sue and Dave Woodson also located Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal, Common Merganser, and Common Loon. On the 12<sup>th</sup> Jimmy Woodard and Nadine observed two Black-bellied Plovers, Forster's Terns, Bonaparte's and Herring Gulls and one smallish

billed and bodied unidentified Loon. Jimmy estimates there are over 200 duck species and perhaps a total of 4-5,000 birds. On the east side of Lake Hefner's dam Bill Diffin located a Lesser Black-backed Gull in the more northerly group of gulls closest to the dam.



On the 13<sup>th</sup> Valerie Bradshaw, Jimmy Woodard, and Willie Hendrickson from Minnesota walked the field near Norman's Max Westheimer Airfield and located Sprague's Pipits, Leconte's Sparrows, Smith's Longspurs, Chestnut-collared Longspurs and a Lark Bunting. In Norman Jennifer Kidney had a Golden-crowned Kinglet doing pirouettes in the mostly denuded hackberry tree. At Lake Overholser on the 19<sup>th</sup> James discovered Canvasback and Least Sandpiper. Jim and John Bates, Dave and Sue Woodson and Sharon Henthorn birded the El Reno Sewage Ponds and Fort Reno locating Wilson's Snipe, Brewer's Blackbird, Western Meadowlark, American Tree Sparrow and Loggerhead Shrike.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> Jimmy checked Lake Hefner and added American Pipit. On the 25<sup>th</sup> Bill watched a Peregrine Falcon harassing Ring-billed Gulls along the dam, and found the first winter Common Goldeneyes. Tim O'Connell had a male and female Purple Finch at his feeders in Stillwater. On the 28<sup>th</sup> Garey reported Eared Grebes at the Guthrie Sand Pits. While visiting from Petaluma, CA Alan Wight spent a few hours walking around the Embassy Suites fields and located Horned



Lark, Lapland Longspur and Black-tailed Jackrabbit. On the 30<sup>th</sup> Dick had a Winter Wren at South Jenkins. On the 29<sup>th</sup> he reported an Orange-crowned Warbler and also, very unfortunately, the death of Norma, the white Red-tailed Hawk. She will be greatly missed by her many admirers.

During November a total of **109** bird species were reported including **2 new** species which increased the 2011 Central Oklahoma area total to **266** species. I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds by turning in reports. I can be contacted by e-mail at [emkok@earthlink.net](mailto:emkok@earthlink.net).

Esther M. Key, Editor.

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## **Patti's Chirpings**

### **December, 2011**

*By Patti Muzny*

Just the other day I was grumbling about the hot summer? How did it get to be December already? If I choose to be grumpy, I could be grumpy about the cold, but I actually like most of winter. December provides wonderful excuses NOT to go Christmas shopping because I have Christmas bird counts to do. My only regret is that there are so many counts and so little time.

This year Brian and I will kick off the CBC season with our own OKC Audubon CBC on December 17<sup>th</sup>. We have stalked winter birds in every kind of weather imaginable over the past 30+ years. A particularly memorable one involved Jim Bates. He was a novice birder and we invited him to participate with us. The temperature was hovering in the single digits and the north wind was howling. Of course, we were near water – the Cofferdam area of Lake Overholser, and I think it must have been 20 degrees colder with the wind blowing across the water.

The plunging temperatures had caused a thin skim of ice on the standing water around the cattails and edges of the lake. Jim had joined us wearing dress slacks and shoes and a light-weight jacket. We heard some birds and piled out of my SUV and began to tromp along the edge of the lake. The first thing Jim did was step out onto a little ice and break through, nearly losing his balance. Single digit temperatures and wet dress shoes and socks don't make for very pleasant birding experiences, but Jim declined to bail on us and seek out dry footwear. It's a wonder he EVER went winter birding again, but this story has a happy ending – Jim (and his son, John) persevered and became a valuable part of our birding community.

Another CBC found us birding in tee-shirts with friends and their two young boys. Young boys (two of my godchildren) are almost as effective as bird dogs when birding vast expanses of grassland habitat. They were rambunctious and eager to help, so we had them run like little jackrabbits all over that field while we counted what they flushed. Worked like a charm! What ever became of these young boys? One is an executive chef for the Secretary of State in Washington, DC, and his brother is the proud father of two beautiful children in Manhattan.

CBC's can produce lots of surprises. One CBC, done in the now-developed area of Memorial Road and County Line, surprised us with a Little Blue Heron that was hiding in cattails at the end of the lake on the property. When we first started doing CBC's, the homes that are now below Lake Hefner Dam were just a design on paper with no homes yet. We were birding in the newly-paved subdivision roads when we found a Long-Eared Owl. Ernie Wil-

son just happened to come along and find us and he had his good camera to back us up. That was a lifer for me and for Brian.

Right after Max Fuller joined OKC Audubon, he was invited to join Nancy, Brian, Jimmy and me to count the birds around Crystal Lake. That particular morning it was bitter cold and a snow event had deposited several inches of precipitation that had thawed a little the day before and re-frozen. The ground was frozen and slippery. Add a wind strong enough to rock a full sized SUV and it was NOT FUN out birding, especially downwind of water again! Nancy and I formulated a brilliant plan and Jimmy and Max momentarily fell for it. We suggested he and Max hike around the lake and we would sit in the SUV and write down anything they told us over our walkie-talkies! It worked...they hiked and we wrote and a particularly brutal gust of wind blew Jimmy off of his feet and he landed unceremoniously on his backside. He probably wouldn't fall for that again!

One day this past week when it was raining and icy cold and generally a dreary, disagreeable weather day, I turned into my driveway and saw a beautiful blue flash sweep down in front of my vehicle. It seems our resident Eastern Bluebirds are still with us and are probably using the bluebird house for a winter roost site.

May everyone experience many wonderful birding days, a few CBC's and a Happy New Year.



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## **Pontotoc Ridge Winter Bird Count**

The winter bird count at Pontotoc Ridge Preserve will be held Saturday, January 28, 2012. Participants will meet at the preserve office as early as they can (8:00ish) then break into groups and survey assigned sections of the preserve.

Bring a snack to enjoy in the field if you like, but all groups will gather back at headquarters at 1 pm to tally species and numbers over homemade chili (vegetarian chili will also be available) and dessert. Unless Pontotoc County is in a burn ban, there will be a campfire to warm with.

Please email Johnna Tucker at [jtucker@tnc.org](mailto:jtucker@tnc.org) if you would like directions to the preserve, a preserve bird list or more information about the winter bird count.

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

