



# Oklahoma City Audubon Society

OKC-AUDUBON.ORG

DECEMBER 2016

## December: Tall Bird Tales

Telling "Tall Bird Tales" will again highlight our annual December meeting on December 19, accompanied by holiday culinary delights and camaraderie. Bring yourselves and your anecdotes and yarns to regale fellow members with your wonderful, beautiful, harrowing or death defying birding experiences.

Great birds have shown up in Oklahoma this past year and some truly great birders have had truly great times with those and many other birds, not only in Oklahoma but in other parts of the world.

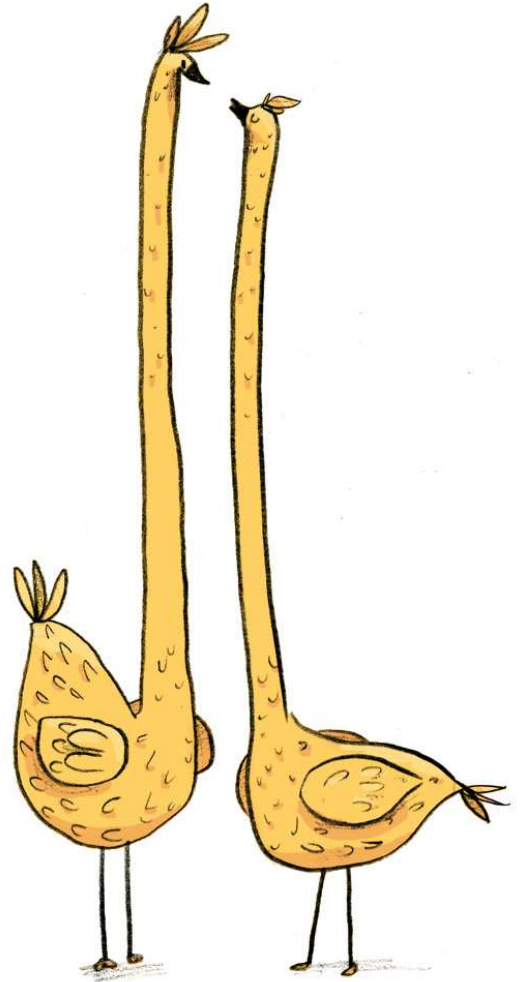
Be certain to practice to insure the believability of your rendering. Come out for the fun and friendship and sharing. A good time will be had by all.

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. Visitors are always welcome.

**Refreshments:** Everyone is encouraged to bring something to share for the December meeting. Sue Woodson will bring drinks and coffee.

### Make a note!

The Will Rogers Senior Activities Center is closed on the 3rd Monday of January 2017 in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. **The January meeting will be held January 23, 2017.**



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## Note: New meeting location

While the Garden Center is undergoing renovations, we will meet at the Will Rogers Senior Activities Center, 3501 Pat Murphy Dr, in Will Rogers Park. We have paid for and are scheduled to meet in the Senior Activities Center through Feb. 2017 at this time.



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## President's Perspective

By Bill Diffin



Don't forget the Christmas Bird Count on December 17 followed by the tally party at the Muzny residence. See details in the November newsletter. It was very gracious of Patti and her family to volunteer their home for yet another club party this year. Patti, Sam and Brian are so generous and gracious, it warms

my heart.

A big thanks to Doug Wood for the presentation on his trip to Antarctica in the November meeting. Several people said it was the best program we've ever had. The beautiful scenery from such a foreign and inaccessible place, the penguins and other wildlife and Doug's entertaining story-telling style made for a fascinating evening.

Also at the November meeting the Election Committee announced its slate of candidates for the five officer positions in 2017, Ted Goulden - Parliamentarian, Sharon Henthorn - Secretary, Nancy Vicars - Treasurer, John Shackford - Vice President and Bill Diffin - President. These are the incumbents, so there will be no change in the officer positions next year. The present committee chairpersons have also agreed to continue in their positions. The one change is that Betz Hacker has volunteered to be a co-chair of the Field Trip Committee with Mark Delgrosso. The volunteers for the Election Committee this year were Marion Homier, Marilyn Taylor and Nancy Vicars. They executed their task to perfection for which I am very grateful. Please give each of them a hearty thanks for their work when you get a chance during the next meeting. The election will be at the upcoming December meeting.

I want to thank all the officers and chairpersons for the great job they did in 2016. These volunteers have busy, full lives, yet they still manage to find time to faithfully and enthusiastically perform their duties for the benefit of our club. Almost all of them have been in their positions for years, doing an outstanding job year after year. Each of them is a miracle for our club. Try to remember to thank them the next time you see them.

Did you know that our Tuesday Morning Birders outings have been restarted? Since mid-October trips have been made to Lake Overholser, Lake Hefner, Martin Park, South Jenkins, Yukon City Park, Mitch Park and Joe B. Barnes Park. Nancy Vicars, Betz Hacker and Hal Yocum have been leading the walks. If you are at home during

the week and aren't participating in these walks, you are missing a fine opportunity to get in some birding. To find out more, talk to Betz or Nancy at the numbers in the contact list in this newsletter. Betz plans to launch the Tuesday Morning birders again in mid-March. If you have an idea for a little local trip that you would like to lead, by all means step up. Your help will be very much appreciated.

I started my time as a birder with a sighting of ducks at Lake Overholser around eleven years ago. While walking for exercise along the berm I noticed a half a dozen ducks that weren't the Mallards I was used to seeing. I went home and looked up the ID in a Golden Nature Guide, *Gamebirds*, that I had saved from my youth



-- they were Ring-necked Ducks. Leafing through the book, I got the notion to continue to watch Lake Overholser through the winter and see how many of the duck species would show up. In the remaining winter and spring

I managed to see 16 species and was hooked. Does 16 species seem like an impossibly large number? Actually there are 19 species that a birder should easily see with a dedicated effort through a season -- check out your field guide.

The 19 doesn't even include the real prizes like Barrow's Goldeneye, Cinnamon Teal, Long-tailed Duck or the scoters. Identifying ducks can be a good tool to hone identification

skills. A variety of species will usually be present on any lake or large pond. With a few exceptions, mainly the two scaups, the male ducks are pretty easy to separate if they are seen well. The females are



tougher, but fortunately there are usually males around to provide clues. With a little practice most ducks can be identified easily if they are close enough to look like the pictures in our guides. The fact is however that many of the ducks sighted on a lake such as Overholser or Hefner will not be seen under conditions where they can easily be compared to field guide illustrations. They (cont. pg 5)



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# Bird of the Month

By John Shackford



The **Fox Sparrow** (*Passerella iliaca*) is definitely one of my favorite sparrows. When I first see one my first thought is usually “possible Hermit Thrush,” because of both species’ rich reddish-brown coloration. When it turns out to be “only” a Fox Sparrow, I am not that disappointed—Fox Sparrows are not all that common either. So I am very happy with either result. At least one

other observer I read later in *Bent’s Life Histories* noted that a fleeting glimpse of the Fox Sparrow evoked the same reaction in him. We usually find a number of Fox Sparrows each year on our Christmas Bird Count (CBC), but the species is not always a sure bet—we are on the western and northern edge of the winter range of the species.

In reading Life history of the Fox Sparrow, by Bent, he suggests, I believe, that the species is quite strict in the dates it migrates, more so than most other small species. This can cause major problems for the species when unusually snowy—particularly icy—weather hit during its spring migration northward. There are accounts of thousands being starved and frozen during harsh weather in the eastern United States during such periods. It is believed that this is the major threat to Fox Sparrow populations, rather than any particular predator, and the species usually recoups its numbers in the next several years.

During our CBC I usually see the species in rather thick brush along the river below Lake Overholser. At first I generally see it low in the vegetation (probably on the ground) and then it moves upward in the trees to maybe 8-20 feet high. Sometimes I hear its song as it sits there, which is very pleasing. It also has a “check” note which can be identified by careful observers (not me yet). On the breeding ground it is a vociferous singer, it does not matter whether the day is sunny or cloudy.

In feeding, the species scratches the ground with both feet at the same time. It has been noted that the bird must have great balance to not pitch forward to the ground

during this feeding activity. Most of its food during migration and winter is vegetable matter. In one study 127 stomachs were found to contain 86% vegetable matter—ragweed and smartweed seeds being favorites—while 14% animal. On the breeding ground its diet is believed to be much more animal matter, especially what they feed the young.

The Fox Sparrow nests across Canada to Alaska, from east coast to west coast of the continent, and there are considerable plumage color difference between eastern birds (the “red” form) and western birds, (grayish birds in the Rocky Mountains of the west, to sooty-colored birds toward the west coast). There is some debate if these different forms should be considered separate species, so let’s discuss the species now, before someone decides to split it! The only birds I remember seeing in Oklahoma are the “red” form.



A. C. Bent has an interesting quote on the Fox Sparrow: “The one outstanding requirement for the fox sparrow’s breeding habitat is dense, bushy cover where the birds can nest and scratch for food while well screened from view” (1968, *Life histories of North American cardinals, grosbeaks, buntings, towhees, finches, sparrows, and allies*). It seems to particularly like stunted forest woodlands for breeding habitat.

Sometimes researching a Bird of the Month can result in some surprising information. At the time of the

writing of Bent’s life history on this species, there was not much known about Fox Sparrow behavior during the breeding season, apparently due largely to the retiring nature of the species. Gaps of information like this indicate a need for more basic research to fill in our knowledge and understanding of a species: we assume—erroneously sometimes—that everything has already been worked out. There is still a need for close observation (perhaps a lot has been figured out on the Fox Sparrow since Bent wrote his life history in 1968; I do not have ready access to the North American Bird Life Histories released in recent years.)

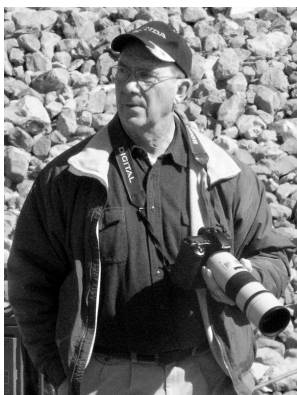
I think this habit of being a retiring species on the breeding ground also informs us of the nature of the bird during winter here. They do seem to be retiring; when the weather gets bad in winter in Oklahoma—like ice and snow bad—we see one or two show up on the ground below our feeders, always a treat. But when the weather is moderate, they seem to find enough food elsewhere, instead of depending on feeders.

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## Election raises conservation concerns

*By Dave Woodson, OCAS Conservation Chairperson*

The recent election results have caused various conservation organizations concern as they wonder what impact to the environment will take place the next four years. I have received emails urging donations, and requests to write congress to voice our opinion. A recent controversial issue is about our State's Attorney General Scott Pruitt nomination to lead the Environmental Protection Agency. I'll let you decide what, if any, action you wish to take but a letter to your congressmen is suggested.



We understand and are taught that "clean air, clean water, and a stable climate are fundamental to the welfare of birds and people. Audubon's Birds and Climate Change Report found that more than 300 species of birds are at risk this century because of climate change. These species could lose more than half of their current ranges." Not to mention the drastic loss of the polar ice due to climate change.

"The EPA has a fundamental duty to uphold science-based standards to protect our nation's people and wildlife and set the foundation for a strong and sustainable economy. Scott Pruitt's nomination raises strong concerns that we will lose ground in the urgent fight against climate change, while impairing the air we breathe and the water we drink."

"The U.S. Senate will decide whether or not to confirm this nomination. Scott Pruitt has worked to dismantle well-grounded protections for clean air and clear water while spearheading efforts to undermine common-sense solutions to climate change."

Please consider writing a letter to your U.S. Senators; urge them to ensure that any nominee to head the EPA will be committed to basic scientific standards in safeguarding a livable environment for current and future generations by protecting our clean air and water and implementing common-sense solutions to address climate change.

### DUES NOTICE

It's time once again to renew your annual membership for 2017. 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, 24 SE 57th St., OKC 73129.



## Banding Station Closes

The Northern Saw-Whet Owl banding program came to a close at the end of November. Dr. Mia Revels, biology professor at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, and her students ended their season with a total of 18 owls banded at Nickel Family Nature Preserve,

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## Oklahoma City Audubon Society

### Officers 2016

President	Bill Diffin	722-3778
Vice President	John Shackford	340-5057
Secretary	Sharon Henthorn	521-9958
Treasurer	Nancy Vicars	831-1945
Parliament	Ted Golden	354-3619
Programs	Warren Harden	596-2759
Recorder	Esther M. Key	735-1021
Conservation	Dave Woodson	601-622-3467
Field Trips	Mark Delgrosso	403-5655
Field Trips	Betz Hacker	638-6210
Newsletter Editor	Pat Velte	751-5263
Publicity	Doug Eide	495-8192
Historian	Vacant	
Refreshments	Sue Woodson	601-622-3467
Webmaster	Pat Velte	751-5263

*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: **OKC-Audubon.org***

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## Minutes OCAS November 21, 2016

Meeting was called to order by President Bill Diffin. Minutes of October meeting were approved without corrections.

Treasurer Nancy Vicars reports that the Parks and Recreation Department will trade work credits for room rent and can substantially reduce the monetary charges for 2017 meeting room for the OCAS at the Garden Exposition Building. More details will be forthcoming. The account currently has \$5258.

Visitors were introduced: Paul and Grace Huffman.

Recent visit to Great Salt Plains State Park was reported on by Jimmy Woodard. Among the cranes present, the group did not see any whooping cranes. Other recent interesting sightings were Long-billed Curlew, Brown Pelican and Townsend's Solitaire. A late-nesting Eastern Phoebe was seen near Norman.

Nancy Reed reported on the Ft. Davis, Texas Hummingbird festival and encourages us to watch the [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org) bird cam for live viewing of the birds at Ft. Davis.

Elk City recently hosted the North American Falconers Association Field Meet. Reportedly a great experience and lots of live work with the birds.

Christmas Bird Count in OKC will be held on Saturday December 17. John Shackford can be contacted for assignment of count groups. All are invited to include their own yards, neighborhoods and parks within the count circle. Patti Muzny will host a dinner afterward at 5:00 pm at her home at 8716 S. Olie, and the OCAS will donate \$100 for expenses.

Future events include February 17-20 Great Backyard Bird Count which is sponsored by the National Audubon Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology. [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org) has all the information.

Notifications can be expected for the many upcoming Christmas Bird Counts, including January 1-3 in SW Kansas and Black Mesa, OK.

Nominating Committee for next year's officers has received positive responses from all current officers to continue their roles in 2017. The office of Club Historian is available for any interested party.

Our program was presented by Professor Doug Wood, whose family visited the continent of Antarctica as part of a well-organized tour group. As anticipated, Doug did not disappoint with his stories and photos.

Next meeting of the OKC Audubon Society will be in the same location at the Will Rogers Park Senior Activities Center. Third Monday of December, 12/19/16 at 7:00 pm.

—Sharon Henthorn, secretary

## Perspective (cont.)

will be seen at a distance and/or under lighting conditions that shrink and obscure markings, colors and outlines, and they may be in flight or bobbing up and down on a vigorous chop.

A scope is a help on birds that are stationary and not too far away, but there will almost always be birds that are beyond the range of easy perception. Yet because the basic arrangement of the boldest markings is so distinctive from one species to the next, it is almost always possible to identify everything that is seen. It just takes practice and some getting used to the idea that you can identify a bird without seeing it in perfect detail as long as you are sure about the crucial diagnostic marks.

Once you become familiar with the different common species, try stepping down in magnification from scope to binoculars or from binoculars to naked eye. Ask yourself what you really need to see to diagnose the



difference between the males of similar species pairs like Redhead/Canvasback, Common Goldeneye/Common Merganser and Ringneck/Scaup. Then move on to females and birds in flight. Notice differences in flock formations. There is a reference available on the internet that is some help, Ducks At A Distance, <https://goo.gl/jHqIQm>. We are lucky to have a multitude of ducks on our lakes. Go out and have some fun with them!



# Recorders Report November 2016

## A warm fall

The warm fall weather continued in November which helped delay the winter migrants. Still many interesting shore birds and sparrows were discovered and Red-breasted Nuthatches were popping up in various locations. Will these species still be here for the winter Christmas Bird Counts?

October 30<sup>th</sup> Jimmy Woodard documented a **Cape May Warbler** at Meeker Lake in Lincoln County. On the 1<sup>st</sup> Betz Hacker spotted a Red-headed Woodpecker and Chipping Sparrow in Yukon; in Stillwater Corey Riding came across a late Scissor-tailed Flycatcher; and John Hurd found a Little Gull at Lake Overholser. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> in Guthrie Roy McGraw located a White-breasted Nuthatch and Cooper's Hawk at Mineral Wells Park and an Osprey at Guthrie Lake. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Larry Mays noticed a Red-breasted Nuthatch at his home in McClain County, and at Lake Carl Blackwell David and Cheryl Hubbard saw a Forster's Tern. On the 4<sup>th</sup> at the El Reno sewage lagoons Joe Grzybowski reported an Eared Grebe, American Wigeon, and Jeremy Ross turned up a Song Sparrow.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> in Lincoln County at Bell Cow Lake Hermit Thrush and Fox Sparrow were recognized; in Logan County near his home Zach Poland turned up a Swamp Sparrow, Brown Creeper, and Northern Bobwhite; along South Jenkins John Tharp had a Marsh Wren; at Lake Thunderbird Dam Caleb Frome added a Merlin; and at Lake Hefner Inlet Bill Diffin detected a Black-bellied Plover. On the 6<sup>th</sup> Joe Grzybowski identified



Chestnut-collared Longspur at the Goldsby Sod Farm in McClain County and a Le Conte's Sparrow at Ten Mile Flats in Norman. Nathan Kuhnert got an American Woodcock and Grasshopper Sparrow at the Myriad Botanical

Gardens in downtown Oklahoma City.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> in Stillwater Scott Loss counted a Vesper Sparrow at The Falls, and C H Hephill saw an Eastern

Screech-Owl. On the 8<sup>th</sup> Ellen McAlister spotted a Red-shouldered Hawk in Shawnee in Pottawatomie County; and Betz Hacker had a House Wren along South Jenkins. On the 9<sup>th</sup> at Lake Carl Blackwell Scott Loss discovered a Red-breasted Nuthatch and Cattle Egret, while at Sanborn Lake Michael Novak identified a Greater Scaup. On the 10<sup>th</sup> Laura Madden found a Ruby-crowned Kinglet at Blanchard in McClain County,



and Caleb Frome noticed a Pine Siskin and Winter Wren at Lake Thunderbird Area #5.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> Paul Cook recognized an American Pipit and Savannah Sparrow at Washington in McClain County. On the 12<sup>th</sup> John Hurd

reported a Northern Harrier, Brewer's Blackbirds and Horned Lark at the Goldsby Sod Farm; Mike Yough tallied a Snow Goose at Lake Carl Blackwell; Joe Buck found an Osprey at Arcadia Lake; and Roy McGraw located a Long-billed Dowitcher at Lake Hefner Prairie Dog Point. On the 14<sup>th</sup> Brian Stufflebeam came across a Dunlin at Lake Hefner South Shore Park near the fire station; and Elizabeth Pratt detected a Hooded Merganser at Lake El Reno. On the 17<sup>th</sup> Scott Loss ascertained there was a Prairie Falcon at Lake Carl Blackwell.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> Michael Novak noticed a Virginia Rail at Lake Carl Blackwell; T K had an Eastern Towhee and Orange-crowned Warbler at Lake Thunderbird Little River Marina; and Tim O'Connell had Northern Bobwhite and Hermit Thrush in Stillwater. On the 20<sup>th</sup> Mike Yough spotted Northern Shoveler at Liberty Lake south of Guthrie; and Caitlin

Laughlin recorded a Cooper's Hawk at the Teal Ridge Wetland. On the 21<sup>st</sup> Roy McGraw located a Fox Sparrow and White-crowned Sparrow at Meeker Lake in Lincoln County. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> Zach Poland encountered a Peregrine Falcon in downtown Oklahoma City; and Hal Yocum saw a Red-breasted Nuthatch and Fox Sparrow in Mitch Park.



On the 23<sup>rd</sup> T K identified a Little Gull at Lake Thunderbird Alameda Bridges. On the 24<sup>th</sup> a Barred Owl was spotted in Garvin County; at Prague Lake City Park in Lincoln County Jimmy Woodard located a Bonaparte's Gull, Bald Eagle, and Pileated Woodpecker; Emily Hjalmarson noticed a Purple Finch at Woodcreek Park in Norman and T K had a Pine Warbler at the Lake Thunderbird Little River Marina. On the 25<sup>th</sup> Cameron Carver discovered Wilson's Snipe and Lesser Yellowlegs at the Dollar K Cattle in Garvin County and a few miles away a White-breasted Nuthatch and American Goldfinch were found. William Diffin recognized Common Merganser and Common Loon at Lake Hefner; while Chad Gardner saw Pileated Woodpecker and Tufted Titmouse at Arcadia Lake Central State Park.



On the 26<sup>th</sup> Esther Key reported Black Vulture, White-throated Sparrow, White-breasted Nuthatch and Belted Kingfisher in the Sportsman Lake area in Seminole County; Emily Hjalmarson detected a Rudy Duck and Dunlin at Lake Hefner Prairie Dog Point; and William Diffin had Red-breasted Merganser, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Forster's Tern at Lake Overholser in Canadian County. On the 27<sup>th</sup> T K identified a Dunlin and Wilson's Snipe at Lake Thunderbird Alameda Bridges; a Rusty Blackbird was spotted along South Jenkins in Norman; and at Lake Carl Blackwell Scott Loss found a Swamp Sparrow.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> Christie Stoops noticed Green-winged Teal and American Goldfinch at Cottonwood Creek in Logan County;



Deb Hirt saw a Black-crowned Night-Heron at Boomer Lake Park; and Deanne McKinney came across American Wigeon, Lesser Scaup, and Bufflehead at the AT&T Pond in Oklahoma City. On the 29<sup>th</sup> Joe Fitzgibbon located a Red-tailed Hawk in Stroud in

Lincoln County. And now as winter approaches it is time to gear up for the annual Christmas Bird Counts.

In the Central Oklahoma area during November **145** species were reported with **1** first of the year report bringing the year's total to **283**. I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds by making reports at <http://ebird.org>. I can also be contacted by e-mail at [emkok@earthlink.net](mailto:emkok@earthlink.net). Esther M. Key, Editor.

## ABA and World Big Year Records Already Topped

The end of 2016 is only 2 weeks away and the Big Year birders are not slowing down at all. The biggest news of the month is undoubtedly the promotion of Laura Keene to "record-breaker" status, as she becomes the **third birder this year to pass Neil Hayward's 2013 total of 749**.

### John Weigel - 779

Birding for Devils

As this is printed, John's Big Year total is 779 (plus 3 provisional: Cuban Vireo, Pine Flycatcher, Common Shelduck). John is a native of the US but a current resident of Australia where he co-manages the Australian Reptile Park.

John writes in his Birding for Devils blog that his Big Year was inspired by reading Kenn Kaufman's stirring *Kingbird Highway* for the umpteenth time, followed by *Return to Wild America* by Scott Weidensaul. 2016 would be the year he'd cross the Pacific and embark on the 'real deal' of year-listing: an ABA North American big year!

### Olaf Danielson - 773

The Bad Weather Big Year

Olaf Danielson is an author, religious scholar, storyteller, and adventurer that typically goes where few men or women dare to go. Now a resident of South Dakota, he grew up in a Swedish Immigrant community in northern Wisconsin.

### Laura Keene - 750

Congratulations are due to Laura Keene, who becomes the third birder in 2016 to break the ABA Area Big Year record. The milestone bird was the Oregon Common Scoter, not counting the two provisional species she has banked. She has reached an impressive 750 (+2).

**World Big Year:** Dutch birder **Arjan Dwarshuis** has already broken **Noah Strycker's World Big Year record, 6042, set last year**. Arjan topped that record this past month in Panama, with a Tody Motmot as bird number 6042. He shows no signs of stopping, and his travels northward through Central America and the Caribbean see him **sitting at a stunning 6336 at the moment**.

Oklahoma City Audubon Society  
c/o Patricia Velte  
1421 NW 102nd Street  
Oklahoma City, OK 73114

## Field Trip Schedule:

DEC. 17: Christmas Bird Count: contact CBC coordinator John Shackford at: [johnshackford@gmail.com](mailto:johnshackford@gmail.com) for details regarding this annual event.

JAN. 30: Pontotoc Ridge Winter Count: this event is done through the Nature Conservancy. Contact their representative Jona Tucker for details and further information ([jtucker@tnc.org](mailto:jtucker@tnc.org))

FEB.4: Oklahoma Yanahli Winter Count: this event is done through the Nature Conservancy. Contact their representative Jona Tucker for details and further information ([jtucker@tnc.org](mailto:jtucker@tnc.org)).

FEB 18 or 25: Woodcock Mating:

MAR 15: Tuesday Morning Birders resume

APRIL 22: Joe Barnes Park: Leader: Jimmy Woodard ([j.woodard@cox.net](mailto:j.woodard@cox.net))

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