January: Eastern Oklahoma's Surface Geology Implications for Bird Habitat and Hot Spots

Join us January 23 when Zach Poland will be the guest speaker at the Oklahoma City Audubon Society meeting.



This is the second in a two part series exploring how the state's surface geology impacts bird distributions. This talk uses case studies at local scales (≤ 10 miles) of some common, and some less common, birds found in the eastern part of Oklahoma and attempts to put their sightings (via eBird) into their geological contexts. By doing this, we start to see that many of these sightings are not random, but follow a logical, often geo-logical, pattern.

Zach received his B.S. in geology, with honors, from Wichita State University in 2008 and his M.S. in geology in from Oklahoma State University in 2011. While working toward his graduate degree, he studied the Rush Springs Sandstone, an important aquifer in western Oklahoma, and adjacent units from outcrop. During this work, he came to appreciate the interesting surface geology of the state.

Zach was born and raised in south-central Kansas, and his interest in birds was nurtured at an early age by his grandfather. As a kid, weekends during migration season often meant trips for the two to

Quivira and Cheyenne Bottoms National Wildlife Refuges in search of Whooping Crane. After stepping away from birding during his late teens and twenties, he resumed birding seriously in 2012. His interest in birds includes advanced ID techniques, conservation and habitat preservation.

Zach lives with his wife and son in southern Logan County. He loves being outdoors and enjoys keeping a National Parks list in addition to his bird lists. He is currently employed as a geologist at Devon Energy in Oklahoma City.

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.

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.



President's Perspective

By Bill Diffin



What an amazing Oklahoma City CBC we had a month ago. The team I always count with has been doing the far northwest part of the Stinchcomb WR for about ten years. Some of you may not even know this part of the refuge exists. However there is a piece of it that lies west of the Kilpatrick Turnpike and that runs to Sara Rd

on both sides of the N. Canadian River. On the CBC we only survey the part north of the river which can be accessed from Wilshire Blvd. We also survey the adjacent Bob Scott Nursery which has a large area behind the greenhouses that backs up nearly to the river. The nursery owners have our sincerest thanks for allowing OKC Audubon onto their private property every December.

I arrived around 7 am at the Bob Scott parking lot, 30 minutes before sunrise. The near freezing drizzle and strong wind kept me in the car for a while. None of my usual CBC partners showed up this year due to the weather. When the drizzle let up around 8 am I started walking the customary route around the perimeter of the open area behind the nursery. The only things moving were flocks of pigeons and Red-winged Blackbirds. There were none of the Bluebirds, Robins, Towhees, Sparrows, Jays, Chickadees and Wrens that we usually find.

About 8:45 I switched to the refuge. At that time of year it is a dried up swamp with a large smartweed marsh in one part, also dried up. Fortunately the trees blocked a lot of the wind. The smartweed marsh was uncharacteristically overgrown with cocklebur plants, 7 feet tall in many places. There were several big flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds in the cockleburs. The birds eat the seeds inside the burs, (see the Food section under the Life History tab in the Red-winged Blackbird article at allaboutbirds.org, https://goo.gl/f9v8ji). A number of times at Lake Hefner I have seen a RWBL pick up a cocklebur, fly up to a tree branch and peck and pull at the bur. I managed just one transect of the marsh, ploughing through the cocklebur plants. This was nowhere near the amount of attention the marsh usually gets. It wasn't that the clingy burs were so bad, because the ones that remained were mostly high and avoidable. Rather it was just too much work pushing through the tall stems, and most of the time I couldn't see anything over the plants, certainly none of the sparrows, warblers wrens and finches we usually find.

After pushing through I went to the easternmost

accessible point along the river and started walking parallel to the bank. The first mixed species flock appeared about 9:20. It started with Fox Sparrows, about a dozen, some of them singing, then a White-throated Sparrow, a Spotted Towhee and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Finally came Eastern Bluebirds, 30 of them all in one flock, the first time I have seen a big flock of Bluebirds like that at the refuge. Other than blackbirds and pigeons, this particular mixed flock, (or was it two flocks that just happened to coincide?) was the largest group of birds I saw all day. Four other good-sized flocks of sparrows and other birds were seen that morning which made it a pretty good count for the refuge despite the weather. And by following its calls I managed to track down the big prize for that location, a Pileated Woodpecker, which hopped onto a fallen log to pose about ten feet away. I think it might have been feeding on beetle or fly larvae in the rotting log.

By lunch time the temperature had fallen into the low 20's. I had worked up so much warmth while ducking limbs and greenbrier vines and stepping over deadfalls, I hadn't even noticed how cold it was getting.

This year the tally party was smaller than usual because the weather kept a lot of people home. But the party came off in grand fashion anyway with delicious hot chili and corn chowder, salads, deserts and other goodies. Nathan Kuhnert did a masterful job of leading the species tally and making everyone feel proud of their efforts despite the weather. Patti Muzny, Sam and Brian were wonderful hosts as usual. Their home was full of comfy, warm, Xmas spirit. The really big hero of the event every year is John Shackford, our CBC compiler and Vice President. I can't imagine a CBC could be planned and organized any better.

Identifying female dabbling ducks can be a challenge. One thing to look at is the tertials, particularly helpful with Mallards, which have large tertials, shaped and colored almost exactly like the male's, https:// goo.gl/0gjC4g. Most similar to Mallards are Gadwalls. In Sibley the female Gadwall is illustrated with mottled and light-edged tertials, but in Nat Geo they are shown as gray, almost like the male's tertials. As far as I have been able to determine from internet photos, the mottled tertials on female Gadwalls occur only during April to mid-June. Here is a mottled example in Apr. https://goo.gl/ vfxQRD, a gray example in Feb, https://goo.gl/TwjuCT and a gray one in Dec, https://goo.gl/LVXvyx. And here is a female in June with most of the mottled tertials on one side replaced with gray ones, scroll to the 7th and 8th images, https://goo.gl/9zkAzl. The spring tertials on a few females don't have the light interior markings, only the light edges, https://goo.gl/fqlJfD. More species next month.

Bird of the Month

By John Shackford



There is an element of fun for me in identifying an American Tree Sparrow (Spizella arborea); it has to do with the bill. Usually I see the rufous cap first which narrows the choices down considerably. Then I see the 2-toned bill—dark above and yellow below—and immediately the identification becomes clear. It is a Tree Sparrow. It is always a little surprising to me what a consistently

good identification point this is.

We in Oklahoma are on the southern edge of the species'

wintering ground. With global warming, we tend to see fewer and fewer of this species each year on our Oklahoma City Christmas Bird Count (CBC)—they apparently are just not regularly coming this far south anymore. Jimmy Woodard and Ted Goulden and their CBC parties saved us on this year's count—they found 2 each. Thanks, Jimmy and Ted!

In Bent's Life History on the American Tree Sparrow, it discusses the Tree Sparrow's name, which is something of a misnomer; "...few birds spend less time in trees, either

summer or winter..."; actually the Tree Sparrow "might more accurately be called brush sparrow; for its haunts include the shrubby edges of our fields, and marshes, hedgerows, and fallow fields" (Bent, A.C., 1968. *Life histories of North American Cardinals, Grosbeaks, Buntings, Towhee, Finches, Sparrows*, and allies," as written by the author of this life history for Bent, Oklahoma's own Dr. A. Marguerite Baumgartner.

Apparently, to our forefathers, the American Tree Sparrow was reminiscent of the Eurasian Tree Sparrow they had known in Europe and accordingly named ours a Tree Sparrow too, even though the two sparrow are not that closely related—the genus of ours is Spizella, a true sparrow, while that of the European bird is Passer, a weaverbird, related more closely to the House Sparrow. As mentioned above, the American Tree Sparrow has a very close association with Oklahoma: the Bent life history for the species was written by Dr. A. Marguerite

Baumgartner. She and her husband, Dr. Fred M. Baumgartner are the authors of Oklahoma Bird Life (1992. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OK). Both Drs. Baumgarterners graduated with doctorates in zoology from Cornell University. I was surprised to learn that Marguerite did her doctoral thesis on the American Tree Sparrow. The circumstances are interesting. As she was working on her thesis she contacted A.C. Bent to find out what he knew about the species life history, particularly during the nesting season. Bent replied that "it is regrettable that you (Marguerite) did not select a bird you could study in the field yourself." (from Bent's Life histories, as cited above). Marguerite responded by arranging to spend the next two summers (1933 and 1934) in Churchill, Manitoba, in Canada, studying the breeding habits of the American Tree Sparrow. She found, and closely watched, 26 nests during the two summers she was in Churchill.

The Tree Sparrow lays 3-6 eggs, usually 3-5, in a nest on or near the ground, with a very few exceptions up to 4 feet high, in dwarf willows. It strikes me as remarkable that Marguerite arranged funding for her research in Churchill; this was, after all, during the middle of the great depression of the 1930s.

Then in 1939, I believe, the Baumgartners moved to Stillwater, Oklahoma, where Fred was a professor from there until 1965; Marguerite raised five children, if I remember correctly and continued studying the winter habits of the Tree Sparrow, banding over 200 of them in Stillwater. One very interesting thing she learned was that in winter, female Tree Sparrows, apparently being less

hearty than males, tended to migrate further south than males. Her sex ratios for Oklahoma heavily favored females, approaching 2.7 females for every male.

The Baumgartners did other things for birds in Oklahoma. For many years, I believe, Marguerite wrote a column on birds for the *Daily Oklahoman*. They helped organize many field expeditions, like Thanksgiving Safaris to see the Whooping Cranes at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, and if memory serves, I believe they were instrumental in getting the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher designated as the State Bird of Oklahoma.

In reading about the American Tree Sparrow, I realized for the first time how much Marguerite had contributed to the scientific understanding of this sparrow. Although the Baumgartners are no longer living, we owe them a big thanks for advancing the study of birds in Oklahoma!



To 2016 CBC Participants: Thanks for a Great Job!

As I have told several people—who pretty much agreed: Weatherwise, Count Day began poorly--and went downhill from there! Brrrrruuurrrh!!! The low for the 24-hour day was 9 degrees!

Despite the weather, our 2016 count day species list stands at 111 species, a truly heroic, classy effort from our group.



Last year, with much better weather, we had 116 species, so to be only 5 species below that this year is remarkable. We should have final numbers of all species for this year's count to put in the February OCAS Newsletter.

Pat Velte has been doing data entry and she has been working faster than I have been able to get party lists to her; any delays are on me. A great big thank you goes to Pat.

A very special thanks goes to Patti, Brian and Sam Muzny for hosting the tally party. It was a delightful evening, especially the warm fire after such a raw day! Also thanks to everyone who contributed food and deserts for the party. Nobody went home hungry!

And finally—once again—a most heartfelt thank you to every counter who braved the day!

—John Shackford

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.

Where did this one come from?



A rarity during this year's CBC was the male Baltimore Oriole that was spotted by John Bates (photo by Francesca Bates) during Count Week and by Jerry Taylor during Count Day. Both sightings were in the same neighborhood near N. Rockwell and Melrose Lane.

Oklahoma City Audubon Society

Officers 2017

5	D.II D.W.	700 0770
President	Bill Diffin	722-3778
Vice President	John Shackford	340-5057
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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**

Minutes OCAS December 19, 2016

The meeting was called to order by President Bill Diffin. The minutes for November were approved, without corrections, as printed in the December newsletter.

Treasurers' report was approved as given by Nancy Vicars showing a current account balance of \$5,134.95.

CBC Compiler, John Shackford reported 105 species were found on the annual Christmas count held Saturday, December 17. This is an astounding number considering the weather conditions being one the worst in recent memory!!

Field trip co-chair, Betz Hacker reports efforts are being made to confirm dates and places for future field trips in January, February and March. The Tuesday Morning outings will restart the middle of March. She also wants to add our outings to the website "Meet Up" in an effort to attract the general public participation.

Jimmy Woodard announced the OOS Spring meeting will be held in Lawton, OK, May 5-7, 2017 and the Fall Meeting will be in Kingston, OK, October 13-15, 2017. Final details will be made available later. He also reminded all to keep Sunday, January 22, 2017 on your calendar to participate in the Nichols Preserve Winter Bird Count. Dr. Mia Revels has just completed a banding program that netted 18 Saw-Whet Owls.

The following slate of officers were voted and approved for 2017. President, Bill Diffin, Vice-President, John Shackford, Recording Secretary, Sharon Henthorn, Treasurer, Nancy Vicars and Parliamentarian, Ted Goulden.

Warren Harden announced the speaker for January will be our own Zack Poland. This meeting will be held on the 4th Monday, January 23, 2017.

The business meeting was adjorned at 7:45PM so that all could enjoy the vast array of culinary delights provided and regale in the annual Tall Tales telling. As advertised, it was wonderful, harrowing and DEATH defying birding experiences.

-Nancy Vicars, Acting Recording Secretary

Big Year Finishes!

Former Texas birder, OKC Audubon presenter, and cur-



rent Alaska resident Lvnn Barber set a new record in 2016 for Alaska with 307 species, blowing out the previous record of 287. As many know, Lynn's zest for Big Year glory is hardly limited to this year, she previously topped 700 in the ABA Area, and set a Big Year record in Texas and was one of three birders to pass the record in South Dakota before tackling the largest state in 2016.

ABA Area Big Year

John Weigel – 780 (+3: Cuban Vireo, Pine Flycatcher, Common Shelduck) – A late run up the west coast netted John 2 more species for the year. A Red-footed Booby in San Diego and Whooper Swan on Adak, Alaska, where he closed out the year.

Olaf Danielson – 776 (+2: Pine Flycatcher, Common Shelduck) – Olaf had bad luck with weather and gulls in Newfoundland, where he missed the on and off Kelp Gull in St. John's. He did pick up the Idaho Red-flanked Bluetail in the last week for his last bird of the year.

Laura Keene – 759 (+3: Cuban Vireo, Pine Flycatcher, Common Shelduck) – The Rhode Island Greylag Goose and the New Brunswick Common Shelducks highlight Laura's last week. She headed home on 12/30 with her spectacular year in the books.

Christian Hagenlocher – 750 (+2: Cuban Vireo, Pine Flycatcher) – With Dovekie luck eluding him in the last weeks, Christian headed west to Idaho where he picked up the Red-flanked Bluetail as the last bird of his year, officially passing Neil Hayward's record without considering provisional species. what no one has ever done in the continental US and Canada.

All have passed Neil Hayward's 2013 Big Year record of 749.

Recorders Report December 2016

The End of the Year

December was a busy month with Christmas Bird Counts all over the state. Even so birders had time to find new birds in several of the central Oklahoma Counties. According to eBird at the end of the year four counties had reported over 200 species, another five had over 100 species, 2 had over 90 species, leaving one county at 59. In the Central Oklahoma area during December 137 species were reported with 1 first-of-the-year report bringing the year's total to 284.

On the 10th Tim O'Connell discovered a Brown Pelican on Boomer Lake in Stillwater, Joe Grzybowski had a

Western Grebe at Lake Overholser on the Canadian County side; and Michael Novak spotted a Common Merganser at Boomer Lake Park. On the 13th Emil Younger Jr found Northern Harrier, Hairy Woodpecker, Whitecrowned Sparrow and Purple Finch in



Pottawatomie County. On the 17th Zach Poland found Winter Wren and Orange-crowned Warbler at the Stinchcomb WMA gate 3 on North County Line Road in Canadian County.

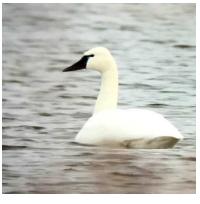
On the 21st T K located a Red-breasted Merganser at Lake Thunderbird's south dam. On the 25th Joe Buck noticed a Ferruginous Hawk near Calumet in Canadian County. On the 27th



Judith Bowman spotted an Inca Dove at Tabletop Homestead in Garvin County, and T K found a Common Merganser at Lake Thunderbird's south dam.

On the 31st Zach Poland located a Great Horned Owl, Brown Thrasher and **Tundra Swan** at Lake Elmer in Kingfisher County, and Paul Cook discovered a Lapland Longspur at the Goldsby Sod Farm in McClain County.

eBird has issued an interesting challenge for the year of 2017. Can you turn in a bird report each day of the year? While January is almost over it is not too late to



see how many weeks or months a bird report can be turned in each day. For a report to qualify a birder must spend at least five minutes focused on birding and record both the species seen and the number of each species. Backyards, parking lots, a neighborhood park are all qualified places. Last year as I walked the parking lot at work I was able to record 45 species on 41 checklists. So take a few minutes each day, spend time with the birds and report it in eBird. You may be surprised at what is happening.

I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds by making reports at http://ebird.org and can also be contacted by e-mail at emkok@earthlink.net. Esther M. Key, Editor.

Welcome to OKC Audubon!

We have been behind in our efforts to welcome new members and are happy to finally introduce them!

Glenn Hamilton, Nowata, OK
Roy McGraw, Nichols Hills, OK
Yong Brenneman, Cyril, OK
Marie Bohlier, Bethany, OK (Welcome back)
Daniel Martin, Edmond, OK
Steve Ireland, Oklahoma City, OK
Nancy Huffman, Midwest City

The Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail

Birds, grinning alligators and sinkholes

It was suppose to be a family reunion, but how can one not go to Florida and bird? But where? I went online and discovered www.floridabirdingtrail.com which has been redesigned since last year. They have identified 510 sites for viewing birds, butterflies and other information, and I was able to purchase a thumb drive with all the information about each birding location. Mid-trip we stopped at a Visitors Center and were given a really nice booklet for the Panhandle Section.

Then I checked eBird's Hot Spots Map for Florida http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L127263 for more information. Then came the 2017 eBird challenge – to enter at least one complete, no X, checklist everyday for the entire year. How can one do this when traveling and visiting? Finally a target species list was created for birds, mammals, reptiles, lighthouses and sinkholes.

We left Wednesday, January 4 heading for Horn Lake, MS. As we crossed Arkansas on I-40 going 70 mph, a flock of white birds with black wingtips flew by; and then another flock and another. Looking on the other side of I-40 was a field of snow. No not cold, wet snow, but rather Snow Geese, thousands of them were in the field between I-40 and a railroad track. John wouldn't stop so I could take pictures. Yes a checklist for eBird, but it didn't qualify for the eBird challenge checklist.

Dusk was settling in when we arrived in the motel parking lot and no eBird qualifying checklist for the day. How can one get a checklist in a parking lot? However, between I-55 and the parking lot was a small group of trees with a trickle creek running through it. I phished and up popped a White-throated Sparrow.

Who would have thought one could get a White-throated Sparrow at a motel parking lot? Another check the next morning netted 8 different species.

We arrived mid-afternoon in Chipley, FL and had time to bird. As we parked at Falling Waters State Park, a targeted species appeared. It was a white squirrel, no not albino, which I expected to find near the Gulf Coast. Then we walked up the trail to the sinkhole. A creek falls 73' into the 100' deep sink



hole and disappears making it the highest waterfall in the state. On the way back we passed Blue Pond. A check on eBird showed it was an eBird Hotspot. A stop the next morning led to the discovery of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Pied-billed Grebe, Yellow-rumped Warbler and a mystery singer.

On our way to Florida Caverns State Park while we drove through Marianna, Black Vultures flew around everywhere. At Florida's only air-filled cave with tours available for visitors, we were billed the children's rate since flooding had filled parts of the cave. Although our tour guide was very knowledgeable about the history and geology of the cave, we learned he was actually a theater major in college doing both acting and building sets. Returning to the car, I heard the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker pecking, but when checking out the trees, I finally discovered a Pileated Woodpecker creating a hole in a large tree and was able to watch it for almost half an hour.

Next was a stop at Torreya State Park where a few of the endangered

Torreya Pine Trees grew on the lawn around the historic Gregory House overlooking the Apalachicola River. Alas, time was running out and we had to pass up



birding site after birding site as we drove down Apalachicola National Forest and Tates Hell State Forest. Birding has been slow but surly it would pick up when we arrived at St. George Island at the Apalachee Bay area of the Gulf of Mexico.

As we crossed the bay, birds begin to appear, a few gulls and Brown Pelicans. Our vacation house overlooked a pond between the house and bay. We were pleased to discover a Great Blue Heron hung out in it, in the shrubby was an Eastern Towhee, and a few Yellowrumped Warbler. As I took a walk on the beach with my sisters, three Sanderlings were dancing in the waves, Foresters Terns flew by and two strange shorebirds walked along the shore, which were later identified as a Willet. After nightfall the wind began howling, the rain pounded the porch and the cold seeped into the house. Warm and sunny Florida disappeared during the night.

The next day was cold and windy and the Great Blue Heron's feathers were blowing askew. While shivering when talking to a brother-in-law, a Bald Eagle flew overhead. As we were traveling to lunch, we took the dirt road along the bay checking for birds. Yellow-rumped Warblers popped out everywhere, Red-winged Blackbirds were hunkered down in the cattails, Northern Mockingbirds and Eastern Phoebes bravely set in the bushes. I suggested we check out the State Park at the end of the island, but two of my sisters advised that it was a very boring area. But it was on the Great Florida Birding Trail and had several eBird Hotspots. We will see. *(continued next month)*

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

Field Trip Schedule: (contact trip leader if you are planning to attend)

- JAN. 22: Winter Bird Count, J. T. Nickel Family Nature and Wildlife Preserve, Tahlequah
- JAN. 28: Fort Cobb Lake. Meet up will be at the Braum's on Garth Brooks Blvd just off I-40 in Yukon. If you want some semblance of breakfast be there at 7:00. We will leave promptly at 7:30am and return to that Braum's at 5:30pm. Nearly all the places we will bird are paved, and walking will be easy, though we might get a bit away from the cars occasionally. Leader: Larry Mays (405) 568-8775
- 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)
- 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).
- FEB. 17-20: Great Backyard Bird Count http://www.audubon.org/menu/great-backyard-bird-count
- FEB. 25: Wichita Mountains Nat'l Wildlife Refuge. Meet at Love's gas station at the I-44 / Medicine Park exit at 9:00 on Saturday Feb 25th. Lunch at Meers or Ann's Country Kitchen. Target species: Canyon & Rock Wrens, Longspurs, Le Conte's & Rufous-crowned Sparrows, and anything else we stumble upon. Leader: Kurt Meisenzahl (meisenzk@sbcglobal.net)
- MAR 15: Tuesday Morning Birders resume
- APRIL 22: Joe Barnes Park: Leader: Jimmy Woodard (j.woodard@cox.net)

Refreshments for January meeting:
Cookies, etc. - Nancy Vicars and Doug Eide; Ice and Drinks - Terri Underhill