Oklahoma City Audubon Society

OKC-AUDUBON.ORG

March 2014

Alaska Adventure

Oklahoma City Audubon's own June Ketchum will be the presenter at the March 17 meeting. She will share her experiences of travels to Alaska.

June 2012 sent June in search of Siberian vagrants and Bering Sea specialties. Her search took her to Gambell, Nome, and finally to Denali National Park in Alaska.

Gambell is a Yupik village situated on St. Lawrence Island 36 miles from the Russian far east and 202 miles southwest of Nome. Gambell is strategically situated so that it is ideal for intercepting



stray Asian migrants as well as providing sea watches for flybys of thousands of alcids. Crested and Least Auklets, Common and Thick-billed Murres, Tufted and Horned Puffins, all three species of Eiders, Emperor Geese, Jaegers, and Arctic and Yellowbilled Loons are possible as well as a few breeding pairs of Dovekies.

Resident White Wagtails and



Snow Buntings fast become "trash-birds" while mega-rarities such as White-tailed Eagle and the first North American record of Siberian Chiffchaff might arrive without warning and leave just as quickly as it did on her trip.

After the vagrant drama of Gambell, Nome provided a spectacular combination of greater avian diversity, birds in breeding plumage, great scenery and big mammals. Some of the highlights were Bristle-thighed Curlew, Blue-throat, Rock and Willow Ptarmigan (her 700th ABA Life-bird) and Northern Wheatear. She ended her trip with a visit to Denali National Park which blessed her with unusually clear views of Mt. McKinley. June invites all to join her for a recap of her Alaska

adventure. Our meetings are held September through June on the third Monday

of each month (with the exception of January). They begin at 7 p.m. at the Will Rogers Garden Center, I-44 and NW 36th Street. Visitors are always welcome.

Welcome!

The Oklahoma City Audubon Society welcomes:

Kevin Groeneweg, Wichita, KS Dolores Smith, OKC Elaine Dunkle, OKC

President's Perspective

By Bill Diffin



The proposed KC-46A expansion at Tinker AFB will be the subject of the Perspective this month. We received a request from Tinker to review the Environmental Assessment for the expansion and provide any input we might have. A majority of the officers and chairpersons have agreed that an ad hoc committee should be formed to review input from members prior to

compiling it into a letter to be sent to our contact at Tinker. As this Perspective is being written on the same weekend that we are distributing Tinker's proposal documents, it doesn't have the benefit of your feedback. The endpoint for the comment period is March 14.

You may know by now that the proposed expansion will require about 90 acres of roof and paved area which expands to 120 acres when intervening spaces and buffer zones are included. There are 640 acres in a section (a mile square), so the amount of land required for the expansion is not large, less than a quarter section. The expansion will

1960 and Sikes Act Improvement Act of 1997, as well as the Green Infrastructure initiative of the US Environmental Protection Agency. In compliance with the Sikes Act the base has an Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan which it has developed in cooperation with the Department of Interior -- US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation. Under the EPA's Green Infrastructure (GI) initiative modifications to the base have been made to connect green areas with corridors, and the green space is now maintained as an interconnected whole to the maximum extent possible. The existing GI on the base is mostly contained within the projected 100-year floodplain. The Preferred Alternative for the expansion utilizes land entirely outside the 100-year floodplain (see page 3-31 of the EA vol. 1 for a flood plain map). However it is planned in the Preferred Alternative to preserve a GI corridor 300 feet wide along the north and west boundaries of the BNSFRY. Furthermore 54-64 acres located in a former housing area adjacent to GI in the northwestern area of the base would be converted to high quality grassland/ riparian woods as mitigation for the habitat losses in the developed area. Other than the 300-foot wide GI corridor, the expansion areas which are not covered with pavement or buildings are currently expected to be improved turf. You may note that the land area dedicated

encompass 14 aircraft maintenance bays, an engine test bay, support facilities and parking space. The Preferred Alternative for the expansion is to acquire the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Rail



to the Preferred Alternative is 239 acres which considerably exceeds the 120 acres estimated as the requirement. Therefore the way is open to ask Tinker whether some of the excess land in the expansion area might be maintained as native grassland as at Wiley Post airport in northwest OKC.

Yard (BNSFRY) adjacent to the south boundary of the base. Together with an adjacent piece of Tinker Aerospace Complex land (Building 9001, former GM plant), the total area dedicated under the Preferred Alternative is 239 acres (but some railroad track and activity will remain). The second alternative, called Alternative 1 in the planning documents, is to utilize the Defense Logistics Agency Infill site which is located within the existing base boundary close to the BNSFRY.

Tinker manages its green spaces, monitors native plant and animal life, and generally attempts to support and encourage natural areas within the constraints imposed by the missions of the base. A golf course is located on the northwest corner of the base. The base has a Natural Resources Manager and staff within the Civil Engineering Directorate. The base manages biological resources in accordance with Federal Law, specifically the Sikes Act of

A significant concern at Tinker is the aircraft strike hazard posed by birds. The US Air Force has a service-wide program called Bird/Wildlife Air Strike Hazard (BASH). At Tinker the help of the US Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services is used to monitor birds on the base and implement bird control strategies. The main strategies used are habitat management and harassment techniques. A good assessment of the program can be gained by reading the following article, http://goo.gl/ A0IXfC. Avoidance of air strikes is obviously an overpowering constraint on any suggestions we might offer to encourage bird life on the base. However the Green Infrastructure initiative does imply a tolerance for birds which reside consistently outside the runway area and don't pose a strike hazard. It will therefore be important to discover how the BASH program will govern bird and habitat policies for the expansion area before deciding on any suggestions we might make.

Bird of the Month

By John Shackford



The Greater Roadrunner

(Geococcyx californianus) is a fascinating bird, one that is found over most of the southwestern U.S., including all of Oklahoma, and over most of the northern 3/4ths of Mexico. It averages about 22 inches in length. Did you ever wonder about the Lesser Roadrunner? It is indeed a bird and is found in the Sierra Madre Occidental Mountains of western Mexico, southward into Guatemala, with a disjunct popula-

tion in the Yucatan Peninsula. The Lesser is quite similar to the Greater, but smaller (averages about 16 inches) and has a smaller bill. The range maps I have found suggest the 2 species overlap slightly in spots near the west coast of Mexico.

But back to the Greater. From a human perspective, most everything about the roadrunner is fun. It may have started for me with "Wile E. Covote and Roadrunner" cartoons which were first released in 1949. The Greater Roadrunner is not common across our state, so just seeing one is a treat; during breeding season it is easier to hear one: they give a series of dove-like "coos" similar to the Yellow-billed Cuckoo, to which they are closely related (roadrunners are in the cuckoo family). The "coos" start high in pitch and descend in pitch; at the same time, however, the bird starts with its bill held low and keeps raising it higher and higher until the bill is held very upstretched—so as the notes go lower, the bill goes higher.

Roadrunners usually run (up to 20 miles an hour) from danger rather than fly, and if they do fly they tend to fly low. This low-flying behavior was once demonstrated to me when a group of birders were looking at a roadrunner about 5 feet high in a mesquite tree in Texas. We were told by someone in the group that if we surrounded the bird in the mesquite and moved in on it, it would not fly, but would allow itself to be picked live from the tree. This is exactly what happened-a roadrunner in the hand! I believe this was possible because the roadrunner cannot fly upward very much, if at all, and therefore chooses to "freeze" rather than fly into people surrounding it.

One of the places in Oklahoma where the roadrunner is most common is in the Black Mesa area in the very northwestern tip of Cimarron County and I have 3 stories to share from that area. The first story about roadrunners comes from Warren Harden. He and several members of his family were in the Black Mesa area, and as they drove along a dirt road there, a roadrunner was seen to one side of the road. Warren parked the car and just sat to watch the bird, which moved closer and closer. Finally, it was so close to the front of the car that it was out of sight. They kept waiting for it to come back into view on the road. But the roadrunner had other plans. It jumped up on the car hood, directly in front of them! The bird had probably been picking bugs from the grill of the car and had jumped on the hood to see what else might be available to eat there.

Another "Mesa" story comes through the good humor of Dr. Jack D. Tyler, of Lawton, Oklahoma. He and his class once spotted a roadrunner there and Jack began running after it, hoping his class and he could get a better look. But Jack tripped and tumbled into a patch of prickly pear cactus. He and his students picked thorns and needles of prickly pear from him for guite a while.

And yet another "Mesa" story came from Truman Tucker. Truman and his wife are no longer living, but for many years they were the northwestern most people in Oklahoma-living only a few tenths of a mile from both Colorado and New Mexico. The Tuckers loved to feed hummingbirds in their yard. They also had a pair of roadrunners that frequently nested in the yard and surrounding areas. One day Truman found some small feathershummingbird feathers—on the ground under a tree where both a hummingbird

and a roadrunner often perched. Truman missed the actual moment of action, but he was thoroughly convinced that one of the roadrunner had captured and eaten the hummingbird. It would be interesting to know if the roadrunner nabbed the hummer from the air or from a perch.

As much fun as it is for people to see roadrunners, it is a rather hard life for roadrunners in Oklahoma in the wintertime. They eat most anything they can subdue, vegetable matter, insects, mice, lizards and snakes—even dog food left outside. Generally, their winter food options can be quite limited in the Oklahoma City area; in terms of extended ice storms we had 2 harsh back-to-back winters during 1977-78 and 1978-79, and the local roadrunner population was virtually wiped out. It was some 15 years or so after these harsh winters before the bird returned with any regularity to our area. Judging from recent reports, they currently seem to be doing well; we had 2 reported on the Christmas Bird Count.

Minutes of February 17, 2014

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

Treasurer's report: Nancy Vicars reports \$6,223.65 after expenses for newsletter and the Christmas Bird count meal supplies.

Field trip report: Mark DelGrosso reports there are no planned events until April 19th, when the group will visit the Yukon City Park.

Conservation report: in Dave Woodson's absence, Bill Diffin described an expansion at Tinker AFB that might have an impact on birds in the area. Bill has read the proposal and feels the expansion is appropriate, with unlikely new consequences for the birds, as the area is already in a noisy flight path for large aircraft.

Sharon Henthorn requests a trash pickup date of March 1st at Prairie Dog Point, weather permitting. Meet at 8 am at Lake Hefner.

Guest/new member Kevin Groeneweg attended. His job has transferred him from Wichita, KS.

Guest presenter Jennifer Randell and associate from the Citizen Potawatomi Nation in Shawnee discussed and showed a video about the eagle sanctuary that they have developed for those birds that can not be released into the wild. They introduced to the group their education bird, an African Augur Buzzard similar to our native hawks, who was happy to be appreciated by all attending.

Sharon Henthorn Secretary

DUES NOTICE

It's time once again to renew your annual membership for 2014. 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.

REFRESHMENTS

Nadine Varner, Nancy Vicars and Sue Woodson will provide refreshments for the March meeting.



In Loving Memory

James M. Bates, Jr. passed away on the morning of February 27, 2014, in Oklahoma City. Jim was born April 22, 1949, in Durham, North Carolina, to James M. Bates Sr. & Cordelia (Eldridge) Bates. Jim graduated from Thomas Worthington High School in Ohio (1967). Jim went on to receive a Bachelor of Science in Zoology from DePauw University in Indiana (1971), a Master of Science in Oceanography from Old Dominion University in Virginia (1976), as well as a Master of Science in Biostatistics from The University of Oklahoma (2001). He worked as a research scientist at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center for the past thirty-four years, specializing first in the field of genetic diseases and most recently in nephrology. As part of the research team his laboratory was the first in Oklahoma to successfully implement the knockout model technique for investigating specific diseases. Jim and his wife, Francesca Morandini, met at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA and were married on May 12, 1973. Jim spent much of his time outdoors, camping both with his family and the Boy Scouts. He was an avid birder throughout his life - accumulating a life list of 432 different species. Jim was a prominent member of the Oklahoma City Audubon Society as well as an active member of Mayflower Congregational United Church of Christ, enjoying his role in the church choir. Jim is survived by his wife, Francesca; his children, John, Maria and Justin Lee, Cristina and Brian Byrne; and a grandson, Henry Byrne due May of 2014.

Chirpings

By Patti Muzny

The month of February has sort of catapulted across our lives with an amazing spectrum of weather extremes. Humans must center their activities around what Mother Nature throws at us, as do our feathered friends. I think we're better prepared than the birds and other critters.



Maybe. My idea of what to do when we get an early March freezing rain, thunder sleet, snow and howling north wind weather event on a stay-at-home Sunday, is watch my hubby bundle up and fill the feeders and dig out the heat lamp, while I sip green tea from my perch inside the house.

During the beautiful weather we've had off and on, our feeder activity slowed down and everything started singing. The day before the cold came in, the Bewick's Wren was tirelessly singing at every nest box in the yard. The Robins, Mockingbirds and Cardinals followed his lead. White-winged and Collared Doves were also singing and chasing each other. Green things began to peek out of the ground in anticipation of warmer weather. I planted a few early spring seeds and we cleaned up most of our yard debris.

We have acquired a Redshouldered Hawk in the neighborhood and in late February, Brian saw our resident Cooper's engage in a rather intense territorial confrontation. The Cooper's seemed to win that one. On his way to work



Brian also saw a Merlin perched along SW 59th Street and I-35. Our House Finches have finally begun to sing in our yard and also at the State Capitol.

Then came Sunday's reality check. If something's trying to grow beneath the ice and snow, it doesn't need me to supervise it!



The heat lamp is out and the saucers filled with crushed pecans. The Mockingbird found the lamp and pecans and has spent quite a lot of time just absorbing the warmth of the light. The lamp and nuts are placed up under our covered patio and close to the den windows. The House Sparrows and blackbirds tend to avoid coming so close to the windows, so these nutty offerings last much longer. The rest of the birds utilize the feeders with sunflower seeds that are along the fence, and the heated water dishes.

Spring is trying to make an appearance and it seems we will have to just be patient.

Oklahoma City Audubon Society

Officers 2014

President	Bill Diffin	722-3778
Vice President	John Shackford	340-5057
Secretary	Sharon Henthorn	521-9958
Treasurer	Nancy Vicars	831-1945
Parliament	Ted Goulden	354-3619
Programs	Warren Harden	364-3491
Recorder	Esther M. Key	735-1021
Conservation	Dave Woodson	601-622-3467
Field Trips	Mark Delgrosso	445-2300
Newsletter Editors:		
	Pat Velte	751-5263
	Carla Brueggen	495-3259
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 Oklahoma City Audubon news between newsletters and meetings visit: OKC-Audubon.org

Recorders Report – February 2014

Oh Spring, Where art thou

February roared in like a lion with snow storm after snow storm, but then it warmed up for the GBBC (Great Backyard Bird Count) which was conducted on Valentines weekend with a really nice date night surprise. As little green things poke the tips of their leaves out of the soil, will spring come or another freeze? What migration surprises will arrive this month?

On January 29th at Lake Hefner Bill Diffin reported there was much more bird activity with Red-breasted Merganser, Common Goldeneyes, Glaucous Gull, at least 2 Lesser Black Back Gulls, and Bonaparte's Gulls. On the 1st Joe Grzybowski poked around the Oklahoma City lakes and found a Thayer's Gull, 3 Lesser Black-backed Gulls at Lake Hefner and at Lake Overholser there were 2 Thayer's Gulls, a likely swarm hybrid gull, 2 Lesser Blackbacked Gulls, and on Morgan Road there were maybe 3,500 geese with estimations of 2,200 Cackling Geese, 800 Canada Geese, 400 Greater White-fronted, 1 Snow



Goose and 2 Ross's Geese. Later at the airport he found 2 Ferruginous Hawks and about 20 Redtailed Hawks. In Seminole County Terri Underhill, Pat Velte and Bill Diffin had two Turkey Vultures, and at River

View Ranch along the Canadian River in western Canadian County John Hurd saw a small flock of **Mountain Bluebirds**.

On the 3rd Steve Davis and Mary Lane drove by the airport and located 2-3 Short-eared Owls in the pre-dark overcast, and on the 4th they were surprised by 2 Black-crowned Night Herons in the trees along Lake Hefner's water inlet. On the 5th Scott Loss checked Boomer Lake in Stillwater and located a Swan probably the Trumpeter's Swan seen a few weeks back. On the 7th along Lake Hefner Bill Diffin identified a 1st winter Kumlien's Gull. On the 9th Mary and Lou Truex saw a **Vesper Sparrow** along the Cimarron River Bridge in Logan County, and Esther Key had a Wilson's Snipe on Purcell Lake.

On the 11th Sharon Henthorn took a turn around Lake Hefner and counted 14 Great Blue Herons, and Bill

identified a 2nd winter Kumlien's Gull. On the 12th Matt Jung made a pass around Lake Hefner and noticed a mature Bald Eagle sitting in a tree plus two immature Bald Eagles sitting on the sheet of ice in the lake. On the 13th Jimmy Woodard and 19 intrepid birders checked Lake Stanley Draper for woodcocks, instead they saw a Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, beautiful sunset, and gorgeous moon. In Pottawatomie County at Wes Watkins Lake Campground Mary and Lou Truex located Common Loon.

On the 14th at Carlberg Acres in Pottawatomie County R E Carlberg identified Hairy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker and Brown Thrasher. In Tryon in Lincoln County Nikki Lake located a Tufted Titmouse, Yellow-rumped Warbler and Fox Sparrow. Dakota Reid spotted a Great Egret at Boomer Lake Park, and Jordan Mitchell saw an **Eastern Screech-Owl** in



Stillwater. Meanwhile, in Tahlequah Mia Revels and James Waffle spent their Valentine's date night watching for American Woodcocks and were rewarded by spotting a few. The next night they saw a complete display and activity. She loves turning in American Woodcocks on her GBBC list.

On the 15th Steve Trammell saw **Pine Siskin** in Meeker in Pottawatomie County; Sally Sims located a Field Sparrow in McClain County; in Grady County, Dakota Walls observed a Prairie Falcon; at Lake Hefner's Prairie Dog Point T K spotted a **Dunlin;** and at Lake Carl Blackwell Eric Duell had a Winter Wren, and Tim O'Connell had a Swamp Sparrow. On the 16th in Kingfisher County Eric Duell identified a Sharp-shinned Hawk, Harris's Sparrow, and American Goldfinch, and at Taylor Lake Gary Binderim noted a Black Vulture. In Payne county at Sanborn Lake Michael Hollie located Sandhill Crane; at Whittenberg Park Scott Loss had a Barn Owl and Tim O'Connell had a Horned Lark at the OSU Cross Country Course.

On the 17th James Hubbell, Dave and Bonnie McNeely located the Lewis's Woodpecker at Taylor Lake. In Logan County Austin Gatlin noticed 22 Wild Turkey. On the 21st Sharon Henthorn, Jimmy Woodard, Nadine Varner, Joyce Varner, Dolores Smith, Jim and Tony Solario observed **American Woodcocks** at Lake Stanley Draper.

Preliminary GBBC reports after the count weekend showed 131 countries turned in reports; over 4,296 bird species were observed.

Continued on page 7

Recorder's Report (cont.)

The top ten most frequently reported species (# of checklists) were Northern Cardinal, Dark-eyed Junco, Mourning Dove, Blue Jay, Downy Wood-pecker, American Goldfinch, American Crow, House Finch, Tufted Titmouse, and Black-capped Chickadee. Check their web site for photos and other interesting information.

On the 22nd Alex James encountered over 60 Rusty Blackbirds at Babcock Park in Stillwater. In Pottawatomi county at Twin Lakes Mary and Lou Truex discovered Redhead, **Chipping Sparrow**, and Brewer's Blackbird. On the 24th Steve Davis



and Mary Lane had a young Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in their Oklahoma City backyard. At the Dolese Sand Pit in Guthrie John Hurd spotted an **American Wigeon**, and Killdeer, and James Hubbell had a **Blue-winged Teal** along North Morgan Road.

On the 25th Dick Gunn reported a Wood Duck on South Jenkins, and Jennifer Kidney pointed out a fly over **Fish Crow**. At Rose Lake Deanne McKinney discovered Greater Yellowlegs, American Pipit and **Longbilled Dowitcher**,



and Jack Hurd had a Brown Creeper at Lake Hefner's Stars and Stripes Park. Purple Martin scouts were reported by David Arbour at Red Slough. How long before they arrive here?

In the Central Oklahoma area for February **136** bird species were reported with **11** new species which brings the total for the year to **155**. I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds and can be contacted by e-mail at <u>emkok@earthlink.net</u>. Esther M. Key, Editor.

TOP 25: the great Albatrosses

FAMILY: Diomedeidae **RANGE:** breed on islands of the southern hemisphere **HABITAT:** open ocean in the southern hemisphere, except when breeding **STATUS:** Vulnerable (IUCN)

A 'Great' Albatross is the designation given to either of the 2 (or more, see below) giants of the albatross family: the Royal (Diomedea epomophora) and the Wandering (Diomedea exulans). Though they are hard to distinguish from each other, their huge size - like gargantuan gulls - sets them apart from other seabirds. To see these beasts you must normally go out - far out into the blue water of the open ocean. On the longest wings of the bird world these great gliders sail. With hardly a flap of these wings these pelagic creatures cruise over the world's seas and are as much a component of the ocean world as any fish or whale. Every now and again they alight upon the water surface, to grab a morsel or perhaps rest - but otherwise these birds remain aloft - hours, days, weeks. Indeed, only mating and chickrearing bring them to solid ground. For a landlubber such as myself the albatrosses symbolize an ultimate freedom - a soaring of the soul over a bright blue world.

Their life histories, too, are exceptional. They live a *long* time for a wild bird - up to 50 years, perhaps more. Indeed, because of this longevity these birds seem to live life in slow motion - they don't even become sexually mature until about 10 years - a time when lesser birds are senior citizens or dead. They are also monogamous - loyal to the same, single mate throughout their breeding lives. A single egg is laid every other year for *both* parents lavish care upon their child for up to 11 months. This includes foraging up to 1000 miles from the nest site!

Traditionally there have been only 2 species of these great birds. Recently the splitters have run amuck and sliced them up into about 7. They (whether it be 2 or 7) are all difficult to tell apart when cruising over the waves. However, there will be no mistaking their hugeness and solitary grace as they skim the deep blue of the southern sector of the world's oceans. Oklahoma City Audubon Society c/o Patricia Velte 1421 NW 102nd Street Oklahoma City, OK 73114

Field Trip Schedule:

APRIL 19: <u>Yukon City Park</u> : join Jimmy Woodard on a birding tour of his (former) stomping grounds. If interested, meet for breakfast at the IHOP (I-40 and Mustang Rd.) at around 7am - otherwise meet at the Park around 8am. *Leader:* Jimmy Woodard [j.woodard@cox.net; 405 365 5685]

early MAY: Tulsa birding hotspots: Leader: Jimmy Woodard [j.woodard@cox.net]

MAY [Memorial Day weekend]: <u>Quivira Nat'l Wildlife Refuge</u>: on to Kansas and Quivira for possible breeding Black Rails- possible side-trip to Cheyenne Bottoms. *Leader:* Mark Delgrosso (405 445 2300 or mark-delg94@gmail.com)

Spring (APRIL or MAY): <u>McGee Creek WMA/McCurtain County Wilderness</u>: two productive, birdy areas with many specialties, the most notable of which is OK's sole population of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. Also on the menu are Prairie Warbler, Bachman's Sparrow, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and abundant Chuck-wills-widows. Because of the distance from OKC this trip will be planned for a [2 or 3 day] weekend. *Leader:* Mark Delgrosso (405 445 2300 or email at: markdelg94@gmail.com) - details and dates TBA

June: Club Picnic

Adopt-A-Park Clean Up

Saturday, March 1st litter pickup at Prairie Dog Point: Two birders cleaned up the westernmost shoreline roadside for about two hours in the fog at 37-40 degrees, followed by a well-deserved brunch and coffee break at Jimmy's Egg on MacArthur. Weather-permitting, we will plan to do litter patrol again on Saturday March 22. —Sharon Henthorn