



# Oklahoma City Audubon Society

OKC-AUDUBON.ORG

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## Southern Africa: Its natural history with a focus on birds

**Join us November 19 when Mike & Rosario Douglas will be the guest speakers at the Oklahoma City Audubon Society meeting.**

Their talk will describe southern Africa, focusing on the countries of South Africa, Namibia and Botswana. After noting some of the region's better-known botanical and zoological aspects, they present some of the interesting birding areas and what foreign tourists are likely to find novel about the bird fauna. They also discuss some of the interesting seasonality aspects of birding in the region, and the necessary compromises when planning travel to the area.

Dr. Mike Douglas is a retired NOAA research meteorologist with an interest in climate and the underlying vegetation. However he has had an interest since elementary school in birds. His wife Rosario has been an active birder for many years and has degrees in Biology and English Literature. A native of Chile, Rosario spent 13 years in Panama. Later, after a year and a half stay in Montreal, Canada, learning English and some French she moved to the US to finish a Bachelor's degree at Florida State.



Birding and photography are two main activities they pursue when they travel extensively. Mike has been interested in photography since he was a teenager and Rosario was introduced to birding in the early 90's when she took Ornithology courses as part of her course work for her Bachelor's degree in Evolutionary Biology and Ecology at the University of Colorado. Their interests include: astronomy, botany (especially carnivorous and succulent plants), insects and geology (Mike's undergraduate degree was in Geophysics). Rosario also enjoys learning about the history, gastronomy, music, crafts and the culture of the places they visit.

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). Meetings begin at 7 p.m. Visitors are always welcome.

### **Meeting Location:**

Our meetings are held at the Will Rogers Garden center, located at the intersection of NW 36th Street and I-44.

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## President's Perspective

By Betsy Hacker

It's been a beautiful autumn for birders. The weather has cooperated and migrating birds, many that we don't ordinarily see in OKC, have flown in and attracted attention!

Birders are often asked "What is your favorite bird?" I use Dave Woodson's answer, "The last I've seen." Most people who are not birders may not understand that in the United States, there is estimated to be more than 850 species of birds and may fail to understand our excitement over a Wilson's warbler at the Myriad Gardens or a marsh wren at Lake Overholser.

When my husband and I relocated to OKC from the Colorado, which is nationally ranked 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> (depending on the year) for number of bird species, I worried that I'd not see many birds here. I'm embarrassed to admit that I don't know OK's ranking but it's not in the top 5 which is unfortunate because I've seen more bird species here than in Colorado and truly am surprised that OK is not more of a birding destination.

### Project Bluebird



Western Bluebird, © Elizabeth Hacker

Earlier this month I attended a volunteers dinner at Will Rogers and had the opportunity to talk with Park Director, Scott Copeland. His first words were: "Is OCAS interested in putting up bluebird boxes at Martin Nature Center?" I assured him that I would bring it up at our next meeting.

We discussed birding in the metro area and I asked him if there would be any interest in

establishing habitat corridors to connect fragmented park habitats like Will Rogers. I noted that while it's common to see bluebirds at the Martin Nature Center and Stinchcomb Reserve, that none have been reported at Will Rogers or the



Myriad Gardens for some years. I suggested that these are fragmented landscapes and while we see birds in the parks, we might see many more if there were connective corridors. Scott seemed excited and open to discussing it and asked me to follow up with him.

### Display Cases at Will Rogers

WOW...there are now TWO display cases devoted to birds at the Will Roger's Garden and Event Center. A big thank you to Bob Hollbrook for putting spectacular poster of birding stamps of the world together and park staff member Bob Trobaugh for organizing the beautiful display! On going thanks to Terri Underhill for her amazing owl photos.

BTW, Bob and his birding friend Floyd, spotted a yellow-bellied sapsucker just outside the Event Center the day he brought over the display. Bob being the consummate birder that he is, suggested that we should have a birding checklist for the park.

It's our volunteers that help to promote birding and their volunteer hours off-set the cost for our meeting room which in-turn, keeps our membership low. It's not too early to begin thinking about our next display! THANK YOU to all who have contributed to making OCAS a dynamic club that attracts and welcomes birders.

*Respectfully, Betz Hacker*

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## Oklahoma City Audubon Society

### Officers 2018

President	Elizabeth Hacker	638-6210
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	Nancy Vicars	831-1945
	Jimmy Woodard	365-5685
	Hal Yokum	819-4852
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 visit:  
**OKC-Audubon.org***



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## Bird of the Month



By John Shackford

The field marks of the **Sedge Wren** (*Cistothorus platensis*) are relatively ambiguous and do not allow for easy identification. Since field marks of the Sedge Wren play significantly in the discussion below, I urge you to seriously consider them, at least for a few moments. In identifying any

possible Sedge Wren, first, identify the bird in question as a wren, not a sparrow (not always easy to do). Next rule out House Wren and Winter Wren, thus leaving only Marsh Wren and Sedge Wren as possibilities. Then begin to look for the following Sedge Wren field marks: (1) eyeline, which is weak and buffy (when compared to that of the Marsh Wren, which has a strong white eyeline), (2) narrow white stripes on the crown and back (Marsh Wren has less extensive stripes on crown and back), and (3) buffy overall coloration (Marsh Wren has darker crown and back).

I have seen Sedge Wrens only twice and both times it was on our annual Oklahoma City Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs). Both times were an unforgettable experience. The first record was on the west side of Stinchcomb Wildlife Refuge at Lake Overholser, only about 100 yards north of the N.W. 39<sup>th</sup> Expressway. That day I squeaked up a wren into a small buttonbush in a stand of cattails not far from the shallow edge of that marshland. I saw just enough, before the bird disappeared, to make me strongly suspect a Sedge Wren. My car was only about 20 yards away and I raced to it, to look up specific field marks of the Sedge Wren in my bird book, then raced back to the line of cattails. I “squeaked” again and the bird popped up for a moment—just long enough to get my binoculars on it for about two seconds, and long enough to verify to my satisfaction that this was indeed a Sedge Wren. Bent (1964, *Life histories of North American nuthatches, wrens, creeper, thrasher and mockingbird*, p. 271) says that if we see one and then “approach for a closer look he dives into the nearest and thickest cover and we may not see him again”; so I was very lucky that day!



Sedge Wren. © James Arterburn

My second time for a Sedge Wren was also on our CBC, while counting birds with Kurt Meisenzahl of Lawton. We were near a small pond that is about half way between the Purina Feed Plant in north Oklahoma City and the (former) Purina “Smith’s Longspur field” to the north of the plant. Kurt and I were in some quite low and heavy vegetation, about 15-20 yards east of the small pond. It was late in the evening when a small bird jumped up, flew a relatively short distance and dropped back into the vegetation; this occurred a couple more times, and the only species I was coming up with was Le Conte’s Sparrow. I think I had already passed judgement that this bird almost surely was a Le Conte’s Sparrow when the bird flew to a small patch of cattails at the edge of the pond: this changed things in a hurry! Kurt got a good look at the bird and said—I need to look at my bird book (which was back in his car) and then I can tell you what it was. After doing this he gave

the ID—a Sedge Wren! From my bag of possibilities, I had no problem at all with this ID! Interestingly, Sibley (2000, *The Sibley guide to birds*, p. 388) says that the Le Conte’s Sparrow “often shares habitat with Sedge Wren; quite similar in overall appearance...”. This made me feel a little better about my preliminary and erroneous ID!

In conclusion, there are several reasons

why the Sedge Wren is an Oklahoma bird species that slips beneath the radar of most of us most of the time: it is small and retiring; uncommon; usually found in habitat that is poorly researched in our state (the “sedge edge” of marshes—sedges have three-sided stems and are often found in only damp or shallow-water “marshy” habitat, rather than in deeper water habitat where cattails and Marsh Wrens are usually found); and, as discussed above, it—the Sedge Wren—has rather ambiguous ID points. So now you may see why I have urged you to dwell on the field marks of the Sedge Wren—so that if you do come upon one on our CBC, or otherwise, you won’t have to rush back to your bird book to verify it!

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## Melynda Hickman Named Biologist of the Year

(excerpt of ODWC press release)



Wildlife biologist Melynda Hickman educates a youngster during a Selman Bat Watch program. (Blake Podhajsky/ODWC)

Wildlife biologist Melynda Hickman with the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation was named 2018 Wildlife Biologist of the Year by the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA) during the organization's annual meeting in Mobile, Ala.

Hickman works in the Department's Wildlife Diversity Program. She began her career with the Department 28 years ago.

Oklahoma's Wildlife Department Director J.D. Strong said there is no one more deserving of this honor. "Melynda is a tireless worker, a tremendous ambassador for the ODWC and well respected among her peers and the public we serve," Strong said. "In a profession that's often focused on the hook-and-bullet crowd, Melynda has a unique ability to energize folks about bats, bluebirds, butterflies and the importance of conserving ecosystems as a whole."

Hickman is the Department's Watchable Wildlife Program leader. She has started and continues to lead several important conservation education efforts. One of those, now in its 23rd year, is the Selman Bat Cave Wildlife Management Area bat watch program, which has enabled more than 10,000 people the unique opportunity to experience the nightly emergence of a million Mexican free-tailed bats.

Hickman was a driving force in developing a state-of-the-art multipurpose educational facility at Hackberry Flat Wildlife Management Area in southwestern Oklahoma.

The center and its programs have given countless students the opportunity to immerse themselves in wetland education. She organizes seasonal events hosted by the Hackberry Flat Center, including a monarch butterfly watch and tagging program; shorebird, raptor and grassland bird-viewing events; and an annual Hackberry Flat Day.

Hickman earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Appalachian State University. She was an educator in Norman schools and worked with the Oklahoma Museum of Natural History before beginning her Wildlife Department career.

## New Reports on Birding Hot Spots

We're excited to announce two additions to the Birding Hot Spot reports on the OKC Audubon website thanks to Zach Poland who recently contributed detailed articles about the Northwest OKC Sludge Lagoon and Lake Elmer in Kingfisher County.



Lake Elmer. © Terri Underhill

Zach describes Lake Elmer: *"To date, over 85 species have been recorded at Lake Elmer. This species count is fairly low due to its lack of attention by birders, rather than a lack of species diversity. Habitat present at Lake Elmer includes: standing shallow water, tall-grass prairie, brush, wooded lowlands, cedar thickets and large deciduous trees."*

Drop by the OCAS website and read more about Lake Elmer and the other 20 Birding Hotspots.

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## Minutes, October 15, 2018

Meeting was called to order by President Betz Hacker. Guests welcomed were Jonathan Henry and Sally Crawford.

Treasurer's report by Nancy Vicars: \$5714.44 in the account.

### Old Business:

Recent birding events included the unofficial Big Sit at the home of Nadine Varner and Jimmy Woodard in Midwest City and this weekend's walk through Myriad Gardens.

Bill Diffin reminded us of the upcoming technical meeting of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society to be held October 18-21 at UCO, Edmond.

### New Business:

A field trip is planned for Tuesday, October 23, to meet at 8 am at the Lake Overholser Police Station.

A nominating committee volunteered to pursue candidates for the coming year's officers. Jimmy Woodard, John Shackford, Nancy Vicars will be contacting potential candidates.

Jerry Davis announced an upcoming field trip to Costa Rica in February is already filled, but Mike Mather announced another will be in April in Cuba.

The meeting was adjourned and a brief snack break followed.

After the break, a presentation was given by Susan and Bill Schmidt on their family's ongoing project of water gardens in their back yard. They showed us how their yard has taken shape over the years with attention to plantings, fish, weather, and water conservation.

The next meeting of the OCAS will be the third Monday of November, which is the 19<sup>th</sup>. Meeting will be at 7:00pm-9:00pm at the usual meeting site at the Will Rogers Garden Exposition Building.

*Sharon Henthorn, Club Secretary*

## Christmas Bird Count

This year the count will be held on Saturday, 15 December 2018. Most of you, I hope, will repeat counting in the same areas you did last year. Call me or try to attend the November 19<sup>th</sup> meeting if you do not recall what that was and we will try to work it out. For other questions, please contact me through the contact information given at the bottom.

Last year we had 21 count teams and counted **127 species**

(71,881 individuals) that included a Snowy Owl!

Please check

out last year's count summary that is posted on our website at <https://okc-audubon.org/2017-cbc/>



I'm sure we broke our all-time species count record! However, I did not receive any documentation so it is possible the number got reduced so please be sure to document any unusual sighting! I will bring checklists to the November meeting but also encourage you to download them at <https://okc-audubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/CBC-OKC-2017-Checklist.pdf> For those of you that use eBird, I do not mind if you instead send me a copy of your list and possible documentation(s) via email or snail-mail. I will be sure to get the information back to you if you did not make a copy. The same applies for those of you that find exclusive count-week birds (three days either side of 15 December), but you must find a way to directly get me the data. (continued on page 8)

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## Oklahoma City Audubon Society Welcomes New Member

Sally Crawford, Edmond

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## REFRESHMENTS

Snacks - Patti Muzny and Jeanne Mather  
Ice and Drinks - Terri Underhill



## Recorders Report October 2018

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cale Corley found Gray Catbird at Sanborn Lake in Payne County. On the 4<sup>th</sup> Caleb McKinney noticed Carolina Wren at Shannon Springs in Grady County. On the 6<sup>th</sup> Roy McGraw spotted White-faced Ibis at Rose Lake; Rachel Wrenn tallied Sandhill Crane in Norman; and Scott Loss determined Broad-winged Hawk at the Botanic Garden at OSU. On the 7<sup>th</sup> Russell Goodin discovered Palm Warbler at the Myriad Botanical Garden in downtown OKC; Emily Hjalmarson viewed Yellow Warbler and Indigo Bunting at Northeast Lions Park in Norman; Scott Loss had Pine Warbler and Summer Tanager at Lake Carl Blackwell. On the 8<sup>th</sup> Brian Marra came across Osprey and Ruby-crowned Kinglet at Sportsman Lake in Seminole County.



On the 10<sup>th</sup> Jimmy and Nadine hosted a Big Sit in Midwest City that was attended by 14 people and recorded 45 species. Between 0900 and 1200 there was a big flight of Turkey Vultures in groups of 50-100 birds and Swainson's Hawks in groups of 25-50 birds moving rapidly from NNE to SSW and groups of 17, 52, and 57 of American White Pelicans. After 1030 there was a good movement of Monarch and other butterfly species. Brian Muzny saw several birds on his walkabouts including Winter Wren, Wilson's Warbler, and Eastern Towhee. Meanwhile, at Dolese Youth Park John Hurd watched Broad-winged and Swainson's Hawk and at the Myriad Botanical Garden Larry Mays documented Canada Warbler and Russell Goodin observed Grasshopper Sparrow.



On the 11<sup>th</sup> John Hurd recognized a Field Sparrow at Historic Fort Reno in Canadian County. On the 13<sup>th</sup> Hal Yocum counted Eastern Wood Pee-wee, Yellow Warbler, American Redstart, and Black-throated Green Warbler at Stinchcomb WMA

East (Gate 1). Zach Poland located Blue-headed Vireo at his home in Logan County; Pat Velte identified Lesser Black-backed Gull at Lake Hefner; John Tharp reported Pine Warbler at Geronimo Drive in Norman; Rachel Wrenn verified American Avocet and Long-billed Dowitcher at Lake Thunderbird's Alameda Drive Twin Bridges. On the 14<sup>th</sup> Scott Loss got Palm Warbler in Payne County. On the 15<sup>th</sup> Deb Hirt added Solitary Sandpiper at Boomer Lake Park; and Brian Marra confirmed **Least Bittern** at Lake Overholser, a first report in many years.



On the 16<sup>th</sup> Chris Butler detected Barred Owl and Orange-crowned Warbler at Meeker Lake in Lincoln County; and Corey Riding noticed American Pipit at Meridian Technology Center in Stillwater. On the 17<sup>th</sup> Jason Shaw discovered Swainson's Hawk at USAO Habitat Area in Grady County; and Donna Kinney came across Red-headed Woodpecker at Arcadia Lake. On the 18<sup>th</sup> Scott Loss found LeConte's Sparrow at OSU-Research Range Headquarters in Payne County; Lindi Langman saw Double-crested Cormorant at Taylor Lake; Calvin Rees had Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at Rose Lake; and Emily Hjalmarson determined Hermit Thrush and Brown Creeper at 24<sup>th</sup> Ave NE Ponds in Norman. On the 19<sup>th</sup> Ben Sandstrom spotted Blue-headed Vireo and Gray Catbird at the Northeast Zoo Lake Park; and Scott Loss tallied Common Loon at Lake Carl Blackwell.

From the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> the Fall OOS Meeting was held at UCO in OKC and recorded 50 species including at Myriad Botanical Garden Hermit Thrush, Orange-crowned Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Dark-eyed Junco and at John Marshall School Pond Eared Grebe and Forester's Tern. On the 21<sup>st</sup> Zach Poland documented House Wren, American Pipit, White-throated Sparrow, and Western Meadowlark at Lake Elmer in Kingfisher County and Eastern Towhee at his home in Logan County. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> on the Tuesday morning OCAS field trip led by Bob Holbrook and Bill Diffin, Grace Huffman photographed Sora Rail and had a glimpse of an unconfirmed Black Rail; and at Goldsby Sod Farm in McClain County Ben Sandstrom observed Ferruginous Hawk.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> Bill Diffin detected Virginia Rail at Lake Overholser's Coffe Dam. On the 25<sup>th</sup> Brian Marra verified the Least Bittern again at Lake Overholser. On the 26<sup>th</sup> Joe Grzybowski located Pine Siskin at Goldby Sod Farm in McClain County; Brian Marra verified Sora Rail and Swamp Sparrow at Lake Overholser; and Zach Poland counted Pleated Woodpecker, Brown Creeper and White-throated Sparrow at Couch Park in Stillwater. On the 27<sup>th</sup> Brian Marra identified Sora Rail at the N2890 Road Marsh in Kingfisher County; Christie Stoops got Redhead Duck and Ruby-throated Hummingbird at Cottonwood Creek in Logan County; and Nathan Kuhnert confirmed Winter Wren, Marsh Wren and American Pipit at the Coffe Dam on Lake Overholser.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> Zach Poland added Horned Lark, Fox Sparrow and Franklin's Gull at Lake Elmer; and Joe Grzybowski reported Red-breasted Nuthatch in Norman. On the 29<sup>th</sup>



Chris Butler recognized Brown Creeper and Vesper Sparrow at Purcell Lake in McClain County; and Nathan Kuhnert located Ovenbird at Myriad Botanical Gardens. On the 30<sup>th</sup> Bill Diffin observed Greater Scaup at Lake

Hefner Prairie Dog Point. On the 31<sup>st</sup> Larry Mays counted White-crowned Sparrow and Harris's Sparrow at his home in McClain County; and Brian Marra located Fox Sparrow, Golden-crowned Warbler and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at Martin Park Nature Center.

During October of 2018 in the Central Oklahoma area **166** species were reported with **1** new species bringing the total for the year to **278**. I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds by making reports at <http://ebird.org> (an online database of bird distribution and abundance from Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York.) Data for this report was accessed in eBird on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018 and at various times on Facebook and the OKBIRDS List. I can also be contacted by e-mail at [emkok@earthlink.net](mailto:emkok@earthlink.net). Esther M. Key, Editor.

## Field Trip Report: October 23

Ten participants showed up on Tuesday morning at 8:00 on the East side of Overholser for a beautiful, pleasant non-windy morning. Everything went along quite smoothly and quietly for the first couple hours till we decided to walk up to the far end of the island/spit.



Soon we were tracking down several Marsh Wrens, then all of sudden a quick burst of wings nearly at our feet revealed a very small BLACK RAIL that was seen by 4-5 of the group. That was followed by a very visible Sora (as the morning went on we were to see/hear several more of these neat birds). Then along the north dike we not only had additional Sora but a call of a Yellow Rail!



Over at Rose Lake we had hundreds of ducks covering nearly all the dabbling species, several calling Marsh Wrens), a quick glimpse of a Sora (or maybe a Virginia Rail)

and wrapped up the trip over at the Yukon Parkway ponds (Express Ponds) with 5 Wilson's Snipes.

Needless to say, several in the group added life birds during this spectacular morning. Our final count topped 50 species total.

*Marsh Wren, Sora. © Grace Huffman*

-- Bob Holbrook

Oklahoma City Audubon Society  
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## CBC (cont.)

With all of the recent rain events, I do not expect too many mudflats around the area lakes but maybe the cattails will be more vibrant with the extra moisture. As John Shackford (OKC CBC Compiler Emeritus) pointed out last year, as we lose habitat diversity—especially most extensively in the northwest part of our count area—it presents an increasing challenge for us to maintain a very high species count. Nonetheless, we appreciate everyone's efforts and always look forward, especially, to the unusual species we seem to come up with every year. And it should be remembered that although the rarities are the icing on the counting day cake, most of the usefulness of Christmas Bird Counts relates to what is happening with expected species. For example, CBC numbers of duck species help wildlife manager's set bag limits, aimed at protecting individual waterfowl populations that are declining.

This year we plan to have our after-count party at Johnnies Restaurant, **2652 W Britton Rd.** in Oklahoma City. The new location that John secured will work out better and it is about a half-mile east of Lake Hefner. We have a private room there from 5-8 pm. I will plan to read the list about 6:30 pm. I intend to court Pat Velte again to attend the tally and help me with the data compilation aspects! We do encourage members to bring a dessert—always some great ones—and what we do not eat at Johnnies, we can bring to our regular bird club meeting the following Monday night.

Again, call with any questions about the count you may have.

Happy Counting!

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