



Oklahoma City Audubon Society

OKC-AUDUBON.ORG

September 2011

Birding Adventures in South Africa



June Ketchum will be our presenter at the September 19 meeting of the Oklahoma City Audubon Society. The topic of her presentation will be "Birding Adventures in South Africa" and will include a short history of the country and will talk about plants and animals, including birds, and habitat based on her recent travels to South Africa.

Birders from around the world go to South Africa to experience both the great variety of typically African birds, migrants, and Endemic Birds. Of the approximately 850 bird species recorded in South Africa, about 725 are resident or annual visitors, and 50 of these are endemic or near-endemic and can only be seen in South Africa. Apart from resident birds, South Africa hosts a number of intra-African migrants such as cuckoos and kingfishers, as well as birds from the Arctic, Europe, Central Asia, China and Antarctica during the year.



June is a long time member of Oklahoma City Audubon. She was our club secretary for several years prior to moving to Duncan and is a world traveler and avid birder. She has been a registered Clinical Laboratory Scientist for the past 27 years, currently working at Duncan Regional Hospital; she taught high school Biology and Chemistry before that. June's husband Leonard manages the ranch and cattle operations at Ketchum Ranch, founded by Leonard's grandfather.

Come out and bring a friend for a good evening of camaraderie and birds and great refreshments. Our meetings are held September through June on the third Monday of each month. They begin at 7:00 p.m. at the Will Rogers Garden Center, I-44 and NW 36th Street. Visitors are always welcome.

Upcoming Field Trips:

September 24: OKC Lakes and Prairie Dog Point Cleanup.

Meet at east side of Overholser Dam at 8AM. We will bird around the lake and then head to Lake Hefner for birding. Anyone who wants to stay and help cleanup around P Dog Point is welcome. Clean up should start around 11AM. Pat Velte will provide gloves and trash bags. It should take no more than an hour or two. We may get together for lunch afterward. Field trip leader TBA.

October 8: Yukon City Park.

Our focus will be to help any beginning and/or young birders as we stroll around the park. Meet at 8 am at the west side parking lot. Bring extra binocs, books, etc., to share with others. Leader TBA. We need some hands on helpers to share knowledge and show others how to bird.

President's Perspective

By Bill Diffin

Those of you who have never taken up an insect hobby may have noticed as I have a diffuse but persistent encouragement in that direction. We have had two insect programs during the past 12 months, "Bugs for Birds", by Elaine Gregory, and "Butterflies ... Here Today, Gone Tomorrow?", by Bryan Reynolds. At the zoo a year ago, Dr. Douglas Tallamy gave a lecture stressing the connection between insect populations and native plant populations, the main point being to encourage landscaping with native plants. Some of the subscribers to the OKbirds listserv regularly include sightings of popular insects in their posts, and the linked photo galleries contain many beautiful insect images. The connection between the health of insect populations and the health of bird populations is obvious to every birder. So why aren't more birders involved in an insect hobby? The main obstacle may be explained by the following quote from Kauffman's "Field Guide to Insects of North America". *"Think warblers are difficult? They are a cakewalk compared to identifying ichneumon wasps (family Ichneumonidae). This is by far the largest family in the order Hymenoptera (i.e. wasps, bees, ants and sawflies). Well over 3,300 species are known north of Mexico, and there are probably many more that remain undescribed to science. Most images submitted for this book could not be identified even by experts."*

In other words, identifying most insects at the species level is difficult simply because the number of similar species is so great that even experts can be overwhelmed. Given the current state of available guide books, species level identification is not practical for many categories of insects. Amateurs relying on field guides must often be content with a family or subfamily level identification, a situation which is anathema in birding. There is, however, an internet resource sponsored by Iowa State University Entomology, bugguide.net, which promises more, and which already delivers it in many cases.

The core of bugguide.net is a taxonomically arranged photo gallery of insects. The gallery has been built by registered users of the site who have submitted identified photos, or who have used the ID Request section to submit photos for identification by experts. The site is already incredibly useful for tribe, genus and



species level identifications of the lesser known insect types. Still, the site is far from complete with few or no photographs for many taxa.

Registered users have the opportunity to contribute to the growth of a significant internet resource by submitting photos. Registration is not necessary to conduct searches on the site. The key to efficient searching is the "Browse" feature. A search must start with an identification at some taxonomic level. Once the page for that taxon has been located, clicking the Browse tab produces information for the taxonomic level just below including a gallery of photos for each immediately subordinate taxon. This allows a user to search efficiently down through taxonomic levels for the taxon that is the best match to an unidentified subject.

For me, the first earnest hunt for multiple insect IDs started in the middle of this infernal summer when I went out to the back yard for a nature fix and noticed an amazing variety of small pollinators on some flowering poke-weeds. I looked for some insect references at the public library, a great place to enjoy some fine air conditioning by the way, and found two books that are very useful in reducing the amount of taxonomic tree that has to be searched on bugguide.net.

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Oklahoma City Audubon Society

Officers 2011

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The Oklahoma City Audubon society is neither a chapter of nor affiliated with National Audubon.

For Oklahoma City Audubon news between newsletters and meetings, be sure to log onto:

OKC-Audubon.org

Bird of the Month

By John Shackford



We usually see the Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*), an endangered species, as spring and fall migrants in central Oklahoma, at Lakes Hefner and Overholser; our lakeshore beaches provide migration habitat for them. Migration through central and eastern Oklahoma has been

“recorded chiefly from July 14 to

October 12, and from April 18 to May 15” (Sutton, 1967, Oklahoma Birds). This is a species that is always rare enough to be fun to see, as well as encouraging, because of its endangered species status. Another endangered species we similarly host only during migration is the Whooping Crane. A good number of their total population usually stops at the Great Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge each spring and fall.

Piping Plover identification is usually quite satisfying because there are enough clear-cut points that it usually does not leave you with the impression of relying too heavily on “mushy” points, as is the case for some “peep” sandpiper IDs. This plover has one breast band or partial breast band eliminating the Killdeer, which has two breast bands. It has legs that remain yellow all year long, eliminating the Snowy Plover, which has grayish or blackish legs. The Piping Plover’s back color is the color of dry sand, and this eliminates the Semipalmated and Wilson’s plovers, which have a back the color of wet sand (OK, so this is a little “mushy”). In breeding plumage, the Piping Plover has a stubby yellow bill with a black tip that helps firm up the identification (in winter plumage the bill can be all black, but stays stubby).

The species nests in two widely separated places: along the Atlantic coast from North Carolina northward into southern Canada, and in the interior North America “on salt flats around lakes and rivers on northern prairies” (Kaufman, 2000, *Field Guide to Birds of North America*). No doubt this latter population is where most of the birds found migrat-

ing through Oklahoma come from. The species is “[listed as endangered in Canada and the inland United States, as well as “threatened along [the U.S. Atlantic] coast” (Internet, The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, All About Birds). It has become endangered primarily because of incompatible human uses of shorelines where the plover tries to nest—people, pets, 4-wheelers and the like disrupting them along beaches.

The nesting range of the interior plovers has been given as southward to Nebraska, but a number of years ago, for several years, it nested southward to Lake Optima, in Texas County, Oklahoma. I have never quite understood why it has not been found



nesting at the Great Salt Plains National Refuge in northern Oklahoma on occasion, but so far as I know, that is the case; I think it should be watched for there, where many of the similar Snowy Plovers are found nesting.

As for “odd” records, there is one of a single Piping Plover on 24 June 1961 along the Canadian River near

Norman; it was seen in the vicinity of nesting Snowy Plovers and Least Terns. I once found a male Piping Plover doing courtship flights during the middle of the breeding season at a sand pit adjacent to the Cimarron River north of Guthrie, in Logan County. He would fly up into the air maybe 25 feet, then slowly descend, doing graceful “butterfly” wingbeats, until finally settling back on the sand. I saw him doing this on several days, but alas, no mate ever showed up. If you get a chance to witness this behavior, it is quite a remarkable performance.

In winter the species can be found along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts from the Carolinas to the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico, some spreading into the Bahamas and West Indies.

Chirpings

By Patti Muzny

September 2011

A l-o-n-g, hot and dry summer does very little to inspire me, but in spite of the oppressive heat, Mother Nature did her best to provide inspiration. As the heat continued to scorch our state, I thought many times of the long-term effects the lack

of moisture and lack of natural feel the drought would have on our wildlife, especially the resident birds and those who would migrate to and through Oklahoma, hoping to find food.

Our Oklahoma City front yard Eastern Bluebird pair nested a couple of times and successfully fledged at least one offspring. Every morning when I left for work, I drove down the drive with a smile on my face. One of the bluebirds nearly always had his/her head peeking out of the nest box. Most of the time it flew out of the box and escorted me out into the street with a flash of blue. That's most definitely smile material.

Because of the acute heat, the Muznys only visited our Byars habitat a couple of times during the entire summer. A July visit found a dry pasture and a rapidly shrinking pond. Our little creek has been completely dry for quite some time. The hardy oaks seemed to have survived well and I found few that looked extremely drought-stressed. Very few birds were found, although at nearly 100 degrees, hiking up and down our hills did not appeal to me at all. When the afternoon temperature reached 108 in the shade, we bailed for home!

The cracks in our pasture were large enough to hold the Troll, Billy Goat Gruff and all of their relatives, friends and neighbors. Should I be inclined to frighten small children, I could threaten to toss them into the cracks! I had to watch where I put my feet or I'd trip.

Our most recent visit was during the Labor Day weekend when the much-anticipated cool front arrived. My excitement at being cool was dampened somewhat because of a wildfire that burned along the south and west edges of our property. The neighbor west of us was bailing hay on Friday and something stuck a piece of metal in the field, causing a spark that rapidly ignited the meadow and a wildfire roared through the



pasture and into our woods before the volunteer fire department extinguished it. I have a new respect for the hard work and dedication of these men and women who fight wildfires in over 100 degree temperatures. Their diligence prevented the blaze from burning a few hundred yards farther to engulf our little cabin.

We had arrived late on Saturday night and I went out early on Sunday to see what was damaged. The scene reminded me a little of Mt. St. Helen's with all of the blackness and ash. As I hiked through the field and woods that had burned, I found a couple of hot-spots that had begun to smolder again with an increase in the wind. Sam and I managed to dip some water from the shrinking pond, shovel some sand, saw down a couple of smoking stumps and eventually extinguish the threat of more fire.

The good news is...the area that burned really needed a controlled burn. And...while walking around on top of the burned hill, I spotted a Prairie Falcon hunting in the neighbor's burned pasture. It flew down and grabbed something small and ate it on the wing. Then it perched in a tree and allowed me to observe it much better. Was this the same Prairie Falcon that we found on our OKCAS Woodcock Watch trip? One of our neighbors told me he has seen a pair of these birds near his pond. I also got a brief glimpse of another smaller falcon – possibly a Merlin?? It was too high and going too fast into the sun for me to identify.

There were casualties – I found two armadillos that had been unable to escape the flames. The gophers fared the best – we saw fresh piles of dirt and tracks.

During the night on Saturday, the only bird I heard was a Barred Owl. During the day, there were no cicada's calling and in the evenings, no katydids, which are usually screaming in the oaks that surround our cabin. The Chickadees and Titmice didn't call early in the morning and I never heard a Cardinal, although Brian saw one. The absence of bird song was disturbing.



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Minutes of the June 20, 2011 Meeting

President Bill Diffin called the meeting to order. Bill asked for any additions or corrections to the May minutes as published in the June newsletter. Minutes were approved as published. Treasurer Nancy Vicars presented the June Treasurer's Report:

Cash on Hand 05/16/11	\$6,295.64
Deposits	97.03
Disbursements	-108.42
Cash on Hand 06/20/11	\$6,284.25

Treasurer's Report was accepted as read.

President Diffin welcomed our first time visitors.

Committee Reports:

Jimmy Woodard stated the OKC Audubon picnic and field trip were a success. He reported there were Nightjars on the NE side of Draper Lake. Jimmy thanked Bill Diffin for cooking the hamburgers and hot dogs. He thanked John Cleal for cooking the chicken.

Jimmy announced the Field Trip Committee would meet July 9 to discuss upcoming field trips for 2012. Members may suggest upcoming ideas for field trips to Jimmy Woodard.

New Business:

Nealand Hill has four caps for sale.

Nancy Vicars would like approval to order fund raising calendars. She stated last years profit was \$103. Nealand Hill made a motion to discontinue the calendar sale. Pat Garrison seconded the motion. A discussion followed. Motion passed by 12 in favor and 9 opposing to discontinue calendar sales.

Adjourn for snacks.

Warren Harden brought three articles for all to view. Warren reminded the group there would be no meetings in July and August. The next meeting will be held in September. He stated the list of fall speakers is exciting.

Warren introduced tonight's guest speaker, Bryan Reynolds. Bryan gave an outstanding presentation on butterflies.

Nancy Reed, Recording Secretary

President's Perspective (continued)

One is the Kaufman guide, which contains a handy selection of photos for developing an initial short list of reasonably close species. The other is Peterson's "A Field Guide to Insects, America north of Mexico", simply titled "Insects" on the front cover and spine. Peterson's is full of drawings of physical attributes like wing veins, antennae, and body segments which allow technically supportable identifications down to the family or subfamily level. It is now 40 years old, but it is still an invaluable aid apart from the occasional problem due to name changes. Most of the attributes illustrated in Peterson's are also visible in many photographs. This makes the guide much more useful than most of the identification keys used by experts. Such keys frequently rely on things like bumps on claws, details of mouth parts, and other minutia which are rarely visible even in photos of wild subjects.

Chirpings (continued)

Another species that we haven't found at the pond in quite some time was Solitary Sandpiper. During the day on Sunday and Monday, a pair of them patrolled the muddy edges of the pond. With Sam mowing the pond dam and Tim working to remove the sand that



had filled in the shallow area of what was once the pond, the busy little birds continued to eat. When I saw two, I thought perhaps their name was misleading, but although there were two, one fed on one side of the pond and the other stayed on

the other. If one flew too close to its counterpart, a disagreement ensued and they quickly separated. "Solitarily" they each claimed their little section of shoreline.

Mississippi Kites must have nested on our property, because we've seen and heard them each time we've been there. Brian found an Orange-crowned Warbler, Summer Tanager and a few Indigo Buntings. We also heard Gnatcatchers, a Nuthatch and the usual resident birds. I think our total species was around 25, which is very low. We saw or heard no sparrows or meadowlarks.

Here's hoping the coming weeks will be blessed with a lot of liquid sunshine!

Recorders Report: Summer 2011

Hottest and Driest !!

The 2011 nesting season was a challenge in central Oklahoma as the drought expanded from moderate to severe, and it became the hottest on record. The 100 degree day record was set in 1980, but 1936 had hotter temps overall when both the highs and lows are calculated. That is until 2011 when there were 60 days of 100° F or higher temperatures with 20 of those days breaking the record for the high temperature of the day. The average daily temperature in July broke the national record as the hottest ever setting up this as the hottest summer on record. Did any juvenile birds hatch, fledge and survive?

JUNE

On June 1st at Lake Hefner Steve and Mary located two Black-necked Stilts and at Lake Overholser Bill Diffin discovered a Willet, White-rumped Sandpipers, Forster's Terns, Bonaparte's Gull, Franklin Gulls, and a few Ring-billed Gulls. On the 3rd in Stillwater Timothy O'Connell had a singing Cassin's Sparrow, and on the 7th about 1 km away he heard an Acadian Flycatcher. Pete Janzen of Kansas reports multiple posts on Cassin's Sparrows in at least six Kansas counties where they had NEVER been recorded before. Speculation is that the drought has changed the habitat enough to cause their movement further east this year.

On the 15th Jimmy Woodard looked out the window at his home and saw a Blue Jay pecking a large brown bat. The blue jay flew away leaving it struggling on the ground. When Jimmy and Nadine investigated, they discovered the bat had two small babies clinging to its underside.

On the 12th Bill reports water is rushing into Lake Hefner where he spotted a Neotropic Cormorant and Caspian Tern.



On the 16th Lindell Dillon reports a nesting Orchard Oriole and Eastern Kingbirds at Lake Thunderbird. On the 22nd James Hubbell report the water is still flowing in fast at Lake Hefner's canal and the water level is almost back to full. He located both a Least Tern and Gray Catbird, while on the 23rd Dick Gunn saw Least Terns on the Canadian River at South Jenkins in Norman. On the 23rd Tim posted an unconfirmed report of a Crested Caracara west of Stillwater along 44th east of the N/S

Hackelman Road. Seems like this species has had unconfirmed reports in previous years. On the 30th Matt Jung checked Lake Overholser and located American White Pelican.

JULY

On the 2nd Matt Jung discovered two Prothonotary Warblers at the Coffey Dam, and in Stinchcomb West an Eastern Wood Pewee, Blue Grosbeaks, a male Baltimore Oriole feeding two fledglings, and lots of Carolina Chickadees and Tufted Titmice feeding fledglings! On July 3 Dick Gunn, John Raeside, and Anais Starr saw a White-breasted Nuthatch on South Jenkins. On the 8th while walking the berms at Lake Overholser, Matt saw 2 early Redhead Ducks, and on South Jenkins Dick saw a Solitary Sandpiper.

Mark Howery reported many fledgling birds in his Norman back yard – Baltimore Orioles, Mourning Doves, Blue Jays, Brown Thrashers, American Robins, House Finches, Northern Mockingbirds, Northern Cardinals, and Carolina Wrens. Nesters across the street included a Red-bellied Woodpecker in a river birch and Chimney Swifts in the chimney. From the 8th to the 10th Matt saw Red-headed Woodpecker, Great Crested Flycatcher, two Northern Flicker family groups feeding fledglings, and heard Fish Crows.

On the 9th Jimmy's had a brief glimpse of what looked to be a male Rufous Hummingbird at the feeder outside the kitchen window. On the 11th Jennifer Kidney was shocked to discover a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker who should be in Canada or some such place now. She especially did not expect to see such birds in this wretched drought and heat wave. On the 16th James Hubbell reports Lake Overholser water levels are low, and shorebirds are arriving to occupy the mudflats.

AUGUST

On the 3rd Joyce Konigsmacher in Stillwater reports about 6 Black-chinned Hummingbirds are coming to her feeders. At the Lake Overholser puddle, Jim Bates observed Wilson's Phalaropes, Stilt Sandpipers, lots of peeps, and a flock of about 20 Buff-breasted Sandpipers. On the 5th Dick Gunn and Jennifer Kidney reported two Tri-colored Herons along South Jenkins.

On the 6th at Lake Overholser Jim Bates scanned the edge of the lake from his car and saw Least Tern, Black Tern, Forster's Tern, Marbled Godwits, Wilson's Phalarope, Spotted Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, Stilt Sandpiper, and American Avocet, and on the west central part of the lake, an island is appearing where there are a few Buff-Breasted Sandpipers and a Black-bellied Plover.

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Bug Camp

Carla Brueggen

I had heard great stories about the summer birding short course at Bug Camp, also known as the University of Michigan Biological Station, from friends Karen & Chris, and our daughter Beth. With their encouragement, I signed up, packed my bag for cooler weather, and flew/drove to the biological station on the shore of Lake Douglas, east of Pellston, Michigan. I checked into my comfy cabin (think youth camp when we were kids), Tuesday afternoon, June 14. At our first class meeting that evening, I learned that our group of 13 ranged in birding expertise from the novices who had borrowed binoculars to try their hand at this new sport to experts with the latest in optics. Dr. Mary Whitmore and her trusty sidekick and breakfast cook, Bob Hess, would be our guides & leaders for the trip. We laid our plans to start early Wednesday morning.

Did I mention early? 5:30 a.m. and mid-50s in temperature we met in the cafeteria for a quick cup of hot coffee or tea. At Dingman Marsh we watched Black Terns circling over the water where Ring-necked and Wood Ducks were swimming. We found our first pair of Sandhill Cranes in some reeds near the west shore. Around 10 a.m. we stopped for a field breakfast of eggs, bacon, potatoes, & the works complete with "cowboy coffee." This is great warbler country—we found Nashville, Chestnut-sided, and Pine Warblers, along with Common Yellowthroats. We also found Song Sparrows,



and White-throated Sparrows in this area. We returned to camp in time for a late lunch, a nap and packing to head up to the Upper Peninsula tomorrow.

Thursday began with a stop at Cheboygan, on the edge of Lake Huron. There we saw several Mute Swans. These non-natives have mostly displaced native Trumpeter Swans. We heard, but were unable to draw out, a Least Bittern. Other species found were Great Egret, Double-breasted Cormorant, Osprey, Cedar Waxwing, Warbling Vireo, Common Yellowthroat, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, and American Gold-

finch. At nearby Cheboygan State Park we saw our first Bald Eagle. New species were Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Red-breasted Nuthatch. Nashville, Magnolia, and Black & White warblers were seen & heard.

Recorder's Report (continued)

On the 14th Jimmy visited Lake Overholser and discovered Marbled Godwits, Willet, White-rumped Sandpipers.

On the 7th in Stillwater John Polo went to the OSU arboretum and located Louisiana Waterthrush, Warbling Vireo, and just off Virginia Avenue he saw two American Kestrels. On the 18th Doc Garland found an Upland Sandpiper and Lark Sparrows on a gravel road in the Payne/Logan County area; and in Norman Nancy Reed photographed a beautiful female Black-headed Grosbeak in her yard.

On the 19th Larry Hancock of Ardmore had a pretty little Empidonax Flycatcher hanging around the yard.

On the 21st Jimmy, Nadine, Larry Hancock and Rebecca Renfro went birding around Lake Overholser and saw Semipalmated Plover and 2 Peregrine Falcons. Alicia Riddle at Lake Arcadia observed an immature male Rufous Hummingbird at her feeders.



On the 23rd Garey located a Swainson's Hawk in Logan County, and on the 24th Dick had a Loggerhead Shrike on South Jenkins. While at Chickasha Lake Larry Hancock ob-

served Swainson's Hawks, an Upland Sandpiper, plus lots of wildflowers and insects – current and future food for migrating birds. On the 26th Jan Waldrop saw a Pileated Woodpecker in her yard near 115th and Eastern. On the 28th Jimmy and Bill Diffin birded Lake Overholser by walking out onto the mudflats in the middle of the lake where they found a Red-necked Phalarope in partial breeding plumage.

During the Summer a total of 128 bird species were reported including 6 new species which increased the 2011 Central Oklahoma area total to 253 species. I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds by turning in reports. I can be contacted by e-mail at emkok@earthlink.net.

Esther M. Key, Editor.

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Oklahoma City Audubon Society
c/o Patricia Velte
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Bug Camp (continued)

We reached Seney National Wildlife Refuge in the Upper Peninsula in time for a couple hours of birding before we checked into a local motel. The man-made wetlands pools were originally built in the 1800s to drain land for farming. The soil being unfit for farming, it became a national wildlife refuge in 1935. In the late 1980s Trumpeter Swans were reintroduced. Bob Hess described how they flew eggs in from Alaska, incubated, raised, and released them. A favorite sight was the pool where the young “teenager” swans hang-out. There were hundreds of them! We saw several that had paired off. From their synchronized courtship dances, it was clearly time for some of a few of these pairs to move out of the dating scene.

In some reeds near another pool a Virginia Rail responded very quickly to Dr. Whitmore’s first call. Before the afternoon was over we had also seen a Black-crowned Night Heron, Spotted Sandpiper, Wilson’s Snipe, Bald Eagles and Northern Harriers along with Common Loons, Blue-winged Teal, & Wood Ducks.

The next morning we spotted a Merlin and several Sandhill Cranes. A Virginia Rail and a Sora Rail cooperated to give us good views within a few feet of each other. Later in the morning, an American Bittern responded to calls.

Wilderness State Park was warbler paradise. We saw Northern Parula, Nashville, Cape May, Black-throated

Blue, Blackburnian, Black & White, & Canada Warblers. Later, along a public beach south of the park, we found nesting Piping Plovers.

As it was well marked and protected by woven wire fencing for protection from predators, it was not hard to find. On our way back into camp from our last foray into the wilderness, we stopped near a farm and spotted a Northern Mockingbird—very rare this far north. The Michiganders were excited. I politely allowed them all to take the first views through the scopes.

We ended with 118 species on our list. At “graduation” I learned that no one has successfully completed the course and all are invited back again. I hope to return. In the meantime, I gladly greet the neighborhood mockingbirds on my morning walks.

Cookie Patrol

Refreshments for the September meeting will be provided by: Paul Cook, Matt Jung & Steve Davis.

Welcome

We welcome Don Hirsch to the Oklahoma City Audubon Society!