

## Mountain Bluebird

### Bird of the Month

by Grace Huffman

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As I'm sitting here writing this article right before Christmas, the song "Winter Wonderland" comes to mind. Specifically the line "gone away is the bluebird, here to stay is the new bird" and how, at least this winter, the song has it completely wrong.



© Grace Huffman

Our Eastern Bluebirds are here year-round, but here in central Oklahoma we've got new birds that are blue too! Mountain Bluebirds are coming very far east this year, possibly due to the drought in the west.

Mountain Bluebirds can be found over a large portion of the western US, breeding as far north as Alaska and wintering in Mexico. Their winter range includes much of western Oklahoma as well. I've seen them around the Wichita Mountains, but they typically don't come this far east. This year they are coming east seemingly

in droves, and I love it! The first local reports I heard were the day after Thanksgiving, and I saw over a dozen that day at that location. They stayed around there almost 2 weeks before moving on. I have also seen reports of a large flock in the Norman area, with some observers noticing more bright birds on some days than others, so the number could have been larger. And finally, to top it off, they were reported in the Oklahoma City Christmas Bird Count this year! I was able to go out to the location they had been seen the next day and had 30 of them!

Mountain Bluebirds are beautiful cousins of our common Eastern Bluebirds. The most striking difference is that the males are a solid bright blue, no orange to be seen anywhere. Females and immatures have much more limited blue on the wings and tail, and are gray all over. They are very active feeders, flycatching insects from perches in the summer. And even watching the birds here, they move about quite a bit while they're feeding in the cedars. According to [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org), females choose males based on good housing in the area, not how good he looks or sings. They nest in tree cavities or nest boxes, and the male will often feed the female while she's on the nest. *(continued on page 5)*

# President's Perspective

## 2020: What A Year— Pluses and Minuses!

Most of us have been totally surrounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and its demands on our lives and activities. To be sure it was a "real downer" that we shall not soon forget, even when we try. There are many POSITIVES to the year - other than your COVID-19 test.

**Many scientific advances.** Much learned about the pandemic that will aid future planning. Much learned about the things that are truly important to us - family, friends and each other.

**As far as birding goes:** Many ways to make it a good or even great year, #1 being more time to go birding. It was easy to follow all those restrictions and still go birding. Have a mask, keep away from others at least 6 feet, get out and get exercise, wash our hands and use hand sanitizer. Most of the time I was out birding I did not have to wear my mask as I was alone. But I always had it with me!



Zoom meetings and discussions about birding were soon figured out and enjoyable.

Finally, the bird world was such that several really nice and new birds came right here to Oklahoma: Mountain Bluebirds, Purple Finches, Red Crossbills (near Tulsa), and irruptions of Pine Siskins. I saw several flocks of 30-40 birds and many smaller groups. A Williamson's Sapsucker in Kenton, and a Limpkin at the Red Slough! Lake Hefner had the return of the scoters, along with Red-necked, Western and Clark's Grebes. Recently there has been a Long-tailed Duck and Pacific Loon reported there. How many of those beauties did you go look for or actually see!

Now there is one more amazing positive: the rapid development of several COVID-19 vaccines in less than a year. THEY ARE HERE NOW and vaccinations are being done. Many of us are in the 3rd group—OLDER (over 75 or over 65). Please contact your personal or family physician regarding when they will be available to you/ us.

I sincerely hope that all of our members will get the vaccine, when available. The officers have currently cancelled IN-PERSON meetings of the OKC Audubon Society until at least May. LET ME KNOW when you have received the vaccine (email: [drhal2@cox.net](mailto:drhal2@cox.net)). I will keep the list with a check or "V" by your name on our membership list. If you have concerns, get educated, call your physician, get answers.

—Hal A. Yocum, MD

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## Slate of Officers for 2021 Terms

President Hal Yocum asked Jimmy Woodard, Betz Hacker and Bill Diffin to serve as a nominating committee in order to present a list of members willing to serve as officers for the calendar year of 2021.

President - Hal Yocum

Vice-president - Grace Huffman

Secretary- Patti Muzny

Treasurer - Nancy Vicars

Parliamentarian - Vacant

# Christmas Bird Count

## Dec 19, 2020 OKC Audubon CBC Summary

A cold front swept through the metro area shortly before midnight on Dec 18 and quickly dropped unseasonably warm temps in the low 50s down to the mid-to-upper 30s, coupled with a brisk but manageable north wind (~ 8-15 mph) by sunrise. However, the wind calmed down by noon and by mid-afternoon, with a bright sunny sky along with the temps creeping into the upper 40s, the afternoon became increasingly pleasant for the field warriors still out counting.

**Our unofficial species count is at 116** (still waiting on a few lists) with about three Count Week (CW) birds. And we had 20 count teams comprised of 43 participants which is impressive considering the pandemic!

Preliminary noteworthy sightings/misses I detected primarily from studying the lists and listening to members on our 12/22 virtual meeting are as follows:

I'm calling the Most Valuable Bird (MVB) on this year's Count considering the excitement it's created in Oklahoma this season a **Mountain Bluebird**! Steve Davis and Mary Lane found 10 in the junipers at Harding High School, 102<sup>nd</sup> and Kelley. Grace Huffman found 30 Mountain Bluebirds the next day also near Harding.

Jumping into Lake Hefner, both the Mays and Diffin teams closely coordinated at leveraging their respective party-hours and cleaned up on several species of uncommon to rare diving ducks as well as waders. In addition to a **Pacific Loon**, all three species of **scoters** including **seven Surf Scoters** were found! Also, Diffin's team counted **340** Greater Scaup and a **Long-tailed Duck**. Consensus is building that the ever-increasing population of zebra mussels in the lake is becoming a major attraction for these species. The Mays team also counted **17 Black-crowned Night Heron** at the Bluff-Creek Canal inlet, another positive trend.



Speaking of waders, moving over west to Silver Lake, Tucker's team counted a whopping **57 Great Egrets** and one out-of-season **Snowy Egret**. Tucker's team also found one of the six Bald Eagles reported from four separate teams so far.

American White Pelicans, where do we begin?! High counts of **480, 523, 135** from just three of the teams where double-counting appears to be minimal is remarkable! Maybe our Club can conduct a coordinated pelican survey soon.

Ted Goulden's team logged a tardy **Yellow-headed Blackbird** mixed in with thousands of starlings and smaller flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds at the compost facility off Morgan Road. Betz Hacker had found likely the same bird earlier in the week for back-up if needed. Woodard's team later found a late **Franklin's Gull** mixed in with hundreds of Ring-billed Gulls also at this location.

The Woodard team found a **Mute Swan** that I'm planning to add to our official list but may be consulting with some of you guys in the interim. Kuhnert's team at the Overholser rollover dam found a Tree Sparrow which of course is much more difficult to find these days.

Multiple teams including Shackford and Yocum found Vesper Sparrow(s). Impressions I received as well as reading lists indicate that kinglets were up this year. As expected, due to earlier reports starting back in November, multiple teams found unusually high numbers of Purple Finches and Pine Siskins. Also, multiple teams reported small flocks of Greater White-fronted Geese that some years are hard to find.

I took note of an observation from Hower's team covering the zoo area. They logged an impressive 16 Carolina Wrens but the interaction between both the males and females calling back-and-forth they mentioned was a good reminder for me to slow down and soak up behavior and other general observations which arguably is just as rewarding than numbers alone. Their team also got a lone Greater Roadrunner and found **57** Ruddy Ducks!

Misses include Barred Owl as well as Greater Yellowlegs, Eastern Towhee, Orange-crowned Warbler and Common Yellowthroat. Other misses turning into trends include Common Mergansers. We do have at least four CW birds including Orange-crowned Warbler (Huffman), Lesser Goldfinch (Davis) and **Iceland** and **California Gull** (Marra).

*(continued on page 6)*

# Recorders Report

November 2020

For the first time in recent years the species total for the year for Central Oklahoma counties has reached and surpassed 300 species and the year isn't over !!!!

On October 30<sup>th</sup> in Grady County Caleb McKinney added White-throated Sparrow, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Vesper Sparrow and on the 31<sup>st</sup> LeConte's Sparrow; while in McClain County Larry Mays saw Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at his home. On the 1<sup>st</sup> Branden Farris observed **Mountain Bluebirds** at Lake Hefner



for five minutes before they flew off; John Tharp discovered Eared Grebe and White-winged Scoter at Lake Thunderbird; Scott Loss had Chestnut-collared Longspur in Stillwater and Mike Yough identified **Prairie Falcon** in NW Payne County. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> Hal Yocum noted the arrival of the awaited Harris Sparrows at Mitch Park in Edmond; Zach DuFran spotted Marsh Wren at

Goldsby's wooded trails in McClain County; in Payne County Scott Loss had Lesser Black-backed Gull at Whittenberg Park; and Landon Neumann detected Red-necked Grebe at Boomer Lake Park. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Nancy Reed found 6 Purple Finches and 2 Red-breasted Nuthatch at her feeder in Norman.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> Bill Diffin described **Clark's Grebe** swimming near a Western Grebe at Prairie Dog Point. On the 5<sup>th</sup> Aaron Mechem counted 40-50 Red-breasted Mergansers at Lake Overholser, and Brian Marra came across Golden-crowned



Kinglet at Lake Overholser. On the 6<sup>th</sup> Bill Carrell verified Surf Scoters at Lake Hefner; and Scott Loss watched Red-necked Grebe, Western Grebe, Eastern Towhee and a late Grasshopper Sparrow at Lake Carl Blackwell. On the 7<sup>th</sup> Hal Yocum encountered Red-breasted Nuthatch and Purple Finch at Mitch

Park in Edmond; Randolph King got Bonaparte's Gull, and Forster's Tern at Purcell Lake in McClain County; in Canadian County Braden Farris had Common Loon, Western Grebe, and Surf Scoter at Lake Overholser Canadian County. On the 8<sup>th</sup> Randolph King confirmed Bonaparte's Gull, Franklin's Gull, and Fox Sparrow in Pottawatomie County. On the 10<sup>th</sup> Neva Damron located Ring-billed Gull at Lake R.C. Longmire in Garvin County.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> Larry Mays recognized Blackburnian Warbler at Lake Thunderbird; and in Pottawatomie County Zach DuFran recorded Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, American Pipit at Wes Watkins Lake, and Pied-billed Grebe at Shawnee Reservoir-Upper Section. Meanwhile at a distance when walking along the dam at Lake Carl Blackwell, Melanie Whitmore photographed a swimming bird. When Jim Arterburn looked at the eBird photos, he suspected it was an unusual bird and requested local birders check it out. The next morning in the fog Scott Loss couldn't find it but instead he reported Western Grebe and **Say's Phoebe**.



© Grace Huffman

Later in the day the **Red Phalarope** first photographed by Melanie was documented by several birders, and Landon Neumann also discovered **Pacific Loon**.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> D&D Norris added Golden-crowned Kinglet at Kairworks Garden in Logan County; Rod Lusey spotted Dunlin at Arcadia Lake – Spring Creek Park; Joe Grzybowski documented Pacific Loon, and **Black Scoter** at Lake Hefner; while at



© Joe Grzybowski

Stinchcomb WR east Brian Marra watched as Blue Jays twice flushed a **Long-eared Owl** and then America Crows drove it out of the refuge. On the 13<sup>th</sup> at Lake Hefner Michael Kane observed Black Scoter

mixed in with a raft of Buffleheads, Scaup, and White-winged Scoter; and Bill Diffin detected Surf Scoter. At Lake Thunderbird John Tharp discovered **Long-tailed Duck**, Blackburnian Warbler and Joe Grzybowski viewed Palm Warbler. In Payne County Tim O'Connell identified Mountain Bluebird west of Lake McMurtry; and Mike Yough saw Sandhill Crane along Richmond Road. On the 14<sup>th</sup> Richard Hasegawa found Merlin along Turner Turnpike at Chandler in Lincoln County; and Brian Marra counted Prairie Falcon at Howard Farms near Deer Creek in Oklahoma County. On the 15<sup>th</sup> Braden Farris located Lapland Longspur and Sedge Wren at Stinchcomb WR east. On the 16<sup>th</sup> Mike Yough noticed Surf Scoter at Lake Carl Blackwell – Dam. On the 18<sup>th</sup> Allen Coddling had Barn Owl in Edmond.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> Emily Card came across Bufflehead along the HE Bailey Turnpike near Chickasha in Grady County; and Mark Peterson got Mountain Bluebird, Ruddy Duck, and Greater Scaup near Orlando in Logan County. On the 20<sup>th</sup> Joe Grzybowski reported Western Grebe at Lake Thunderbird – South Dam. On the 21<sup>st</sup> Joe Grzybowski described a California Gull and verified Black Scoter at Lake Thunderbird – Little Axe Area; John Muller and Nu Perera captured an American Tree Sparrow while banding in the fields behind the Museum of Natural History in Norman; and in Pottawatomie County Aaron Milligan viewed Wood Duck and White-crowned Sparrow in Macomb; and Dala Grooms watched Purple Finch in Bethel Acres. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> Caleb McKinney encountered Hooded Merganser in Grady County; and at Lake Carl Blackwell Scott Loss photographed a juvenile

**Magnificent Frigatebird** perched at the fish house (near the lake store) taking handouts.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> Wyatt Egelhoff recognized Greater White-fronted Goose along I-40 in Seminole County; and Caleb McKinney spotted Smith's



© Scott Loss

Longspur, Purple Finch, and Merlin in Grady County. On the 24<sup>th</sup> Scott Loss flushed a female Ring-necked Pheasant and Rusty Blackwell at Lake Carl Blackwell; and D&D Norris detected Hermit Thrush at Kairworks Garden in Logan County. On the 25<sup>th</sup> Brian Marra photographed a possible Rufous Hummingbird at Arcadia Lake – Spring Creek Park

and viewed Chestnut-collared Longspur at Howard Farms. On the 26<sup>th</sup> Geoff Butcher encountered Mountain Bluebird along 50<sup>th</sup> Street in Canadian County. On the 27<sup>th</sup> Nick Rosen found Sharp-shinned Hawk along I-35 near Paul's Valley in Garvin County; and Brian Marra reported Lapland Longspur at NW 50<sup>th</sup> and Morgan Road in Canadian County. On the 28<sup>th</sup> Mike Yough described Rough-legged Hawk along Pleasant Valley Road in Payne County and Hooded Merganser at Mulhall in Logan County. And now it is time to take part in a Christmas Bird Count.

In the Central Oklahoma area during November, **171** species were reported with **10** new species bringing the total for 2020 to **306**. I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds. Information is accessed at: [ebird](http://ebird.org). 2020 eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Available: <https://ebird.org/region/US-OK?yr=all>. (Accessed: November 29 & 30, 2020). And occasionally from Facebook, and the OK-BIRDS List. I can be contacted by e-mail at [emkok@earthlink.net](mailto:emkok@earthlink.net). Esther M. Key, Editor.

## Mountain Bluebird (cont.)



Their populations declined an estimated 24% from 1966-2015, but the species is listed as Least Concern. Much of the decline is linked with the decrease in logging and grazing practices, but as land use has stabilized, so had their population. They also must deal with competition for nest sites from other bluebirds and cavity nesters.

A lot of times people ask me the question: "What's your favorite bird?" Usually I don't have an answer, but after this winter it's easy: Mountain Bluebird!

Primary source: [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org); photo credit: Grace Huffman

# What To Do When You Notice People Noticing Birds

by Ted Floyd, excerpt from *aba.org*

The whole world seems to have started to notice birds, a phenomenon that has been widely reported in major newspapers, on network news, and at online information sites. Outreach has understandably focused on all the folks who are going outside and noticing birds for the first time, and we at the ABA are proud to have been among the earliest emissaries of information during the COVID-19 crisis.

With this little primer, we're going to suggest three strategies for engagement. First, the initial contact. Second, what to say. And third, if we may be so bold, what not to say. Without further ado:

1. **You see somebody, or somebodies, plausibly or definitively bird-noticing.** The very first thing to remember is that this is 2020, not 2019 or 2018, or 2009 or 1999 or 1989. You can't simply skip or prance forward, shake hands or embrace, and offer a look through your bins or scope. You need to keep six feet away, and you need to be wearing a mask.
2. **Break the ice with a question or other inquiry, not a statement of fact.** For example: "What are you guys looking at?" Rather than: "That's a Northern Flicker, an ASY female of the *auratus* subspecies group *sensu stricto*." The latter approach, we find, tends to be dismissed with a shrug, whereas the former is, in our experience, so often an opening for sharing and wonder. "Thanks for pointing that out that bird to me," you say. "It's a Northern Flicker," you continue . . . and then what?
3. **Don't go all bird-nerd at first,** do go all-out with heartfelt delight. There's a Least Flycatcher or something perched just beyond the flicker, and the last thing you want to do is point that out. Look, we at the ABA are totally into Least Flycatchers; we've written articles and whole books on such matters. But this isn't the time for that. A flicker, even a comparatively muted female, is objectively brilliant and fantastic, a Least Flycatcher less so. "IT'S A FLICKER!" you reiterate.

**3—cont'd.** More on that heartfelt delight thing. Any bird, even a Least Flycatcher, does amazingly cool,

**3—concl.** Just one more thing about heartfelt delight. It is impossible to overstate the value of blatantly beautiful birds in the service of birderly ambassadorship. Along with flickers: adult male American Goldfinches and House Finches; most water birds and *any* raptor; and *always* an adult male Red-winged Blackbird swaying on a cattail. Birds that are *doing* things—singing and fighting and feeding—are the best of all.

## CBC Recap (cont.)

I look forward to our monthly meeting (virtual) in January for wrap-up. Also, Ed Godfrey of The Oklahoman wrote a really nice story (link below) leading up to this year's Count - <https://oklahoman.com/article/5678192/oklahoma-outdoors-eagles-and-mountain-bluebirds-have-arrived> and we might see a post-Count story in the Sunday paper. An official list will be made available on the OKC Audubon Society website and in the January newsletter if room is available. Thank you for making this a very special Count and stay safe as better times are right around the corner!

Participants include John Cleal, Marion Homier; Steve Davis, Mary Lane; Bill Diffin; Carla Bruggen; Feodora Steward; Neil Garrison; Mark Howery, Sharon Henthorn; Patti Muzny, Nancy Vicars, Brian Munzy; Hal Yocum; Cheryl Allen; Brian Marra, Branden Farris, Grace Huffman; Betz Hacker, Robert Holbrook; John Sterling; Larry Mays, Chad Ellis, Aaron Mechem, Jan Fisher-Bachman; Morton Payne, Matthew Payne, Johnson Hightower, Steve Parker; John Shackford, Warren Harden, Terri Underhill; Jimmy Woodard, Nadine Varner, Valerie Bradshaw, Emily Muns; Nathan Kuhnert, Susan Prescott, Allison Jones, Nathan Jones; Kathleen Tucker, Valerie Kepler, Deanne McKinney and kudos to Warren Harden for his time and patience in getting our club more acclimated to Zoom.

*Nathan Kuhnert, Compiler*

## DUES NOTICE

It's time once again to renew your annual membership for 2021. 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.