

Red-breasted Nuthatch

Bird of the Month

by Grace Huffman

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One of my favorite things about the winter season is the return of the Red-breasted Nuthatch. These feisty little birds love climbing headfirst down trees and zipping to and from your birdfeeders. They are irruptive migrants, meaning some winters they do not migrate as far south as others. This year happens to be an irruption year, so they have arrived in droves! I have seen them just about everywhere I've birded this winter.



© Grace Huffman

Red-breasted Nuthatches are year-round in a large part of their range, from Canada & southern Alaska to the Rockies and West Coast. Both males and females look similar, but males are brighter and are black on top

of the head, while females are slightly duller with a grayer head. They excavate a cavity for their nests, preferring softer wood like aspen, usually in the dead part of the tree. The nest itself is made with materials like grass. The entrance to the next cavity gets covered in resin inside and out, collected from coniferous trees. It's amazing they manage to keep it off of their feathers! It's well over a month before the babies hatch & grow up enough to be on their own.

Once winter comes, where they go depends on how much food there is for them up north. If there is less food up north (like this year), they come down farther and we get to see them dash in to grab a sunflower seed that they will either eat right away or cache for later snacking. Red-breasted Nuthatches (and their year-round cousins the White-breasted Nuthatches) love black-oil sunflower seeds and suet. I've had Red-breasted Nuthatches eat from my suet feeder, squirrel-proof feeders, and even come right up to my windowsill! Both my front and back yards have several trees, making the area even more attractive to them.

If you are out walking in the woods, listen for them to make their *yank-yank-yank* calls. They can be very vocal and this sound carries a long way. If you happen to spot them at a feeder, listen closely and you might be able to hear them squeaking. Thankfully these birds are listed as Least Concern, so hopefully one day while you are out this winter you get to see one, or look out your window to find one zooming in and out!

Reference: Allaboutbirds.org

President's Perspective

Go somewhere that you have not been to for a while.

We are still all concerned with staying safe until we can get the Covid-19 vaccine. One way to do that and still get out and enjoy birding in our state. There are a number of sightings reported lately of some of our more unusual winter visitors, both great invasions of and more rare isolated individuals.

There are swans at the tall grass prairie. A Lewis's Woodpecker and longspurs down in the Wichita Mountains. Mountain Bluebirds at many locations: El Reno golf course, Harding School on Kelly, in and around Stinchcomb west along 50th, in Stillwater, at Sooner Lake, and at Foss Lake. Short-eared owls are flying and hunting over the fields at dusk along the road near old Fort Reno, a female Pyrrhuloxia on the north side of Crystal Lake in southwest OKC. Large flocks of snow geese on fields and at several lakes to the west.



I was on an all day trip to Foss lake with several other members last weekend and ending at dusk at El Reno. We had over 70 species sightings including Mountain Bluebirds, an immature Bald Eagle diving on an American Coot several times. It failed as the coot dove underwater each time. We saw a Great Horned Owl; Downy, Hairy, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers as well as a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Flickers. We also saw many hawks: Northern Narrier, Red-tailed and Ferruginous. We topped of the day with a massive flock of white geese near El Reno, likely 100+ Mountain Bluebirds at the golf course and 4-5 Short-eared Owls in flight (right over our vehicle once), and sitting on roadside fences.

Definitely a day to remember. So go birding some place you have not been for a while.

Hal A. Yocum

I sincerely hope that all of our members will get the COVID-19 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). 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

Slate of Officers for 2021 Terms

The election was held by mail-in ballot and the slate of officers were approved.

President - Hal Yocum

Vice-president - Grace Huffman

Secretary- Patti Muzny

Treasurer - Nancy Vicars

Parliamentarian - Vacant

Welcome

The Oklahoma City Audubon Society welcomes:

Ginny Murphy, OKC

Biden calls for protection of 30% of America's land, oceans by 2030

President Joe Biden signed an executive order this week directing federal officials to protect 30% of the country's lands and ocean waters by 2030, part of an effort to slow the wildlife extinction crisis and curb global warming.

"This is a crucial step to stopping the wildlife extinction crisis, which threatens the future of all life on our planet," said Kierán Suckling, executive director at the Center for Biological Diversity. "We've got to preserve the most biologically rich ecosystems to have any hope of bringing nature back from the brink. Human activity got us to this heartbreaking point, and we're grateful the Biden administration will address this global crisis by working to protect 30% of the nation's lands and oceans by 2030."

Under the president's order, the Interior Department will determine how to measure the country's progress toward the 30x30 goal and outline steps to achieve it. Federal officials also will support local, state, private, and tribal conservation and restoration efforts and work to improve access to nature for low-income communities and communities of color.

Three-quarters of the planet's lands and two-thirds of its ocean have been heavily altered by humans. Habitat loss and degradation remains the largest driver of extinction in the United States and around the world. The U.S. loses a football-field worth of natural area every 30 seconds to human development, severely affecting wildlife, fresh water and clean air.

The United Nations last year said more than 1 million plant and animal species are heading toward extinction. Species are dying out at hundreds to thousands of times the natural rate. For example, there are less than 400 North Atlantic right whales left, just 14 red wolves known in the wild in North Carolina, and likely around 10 vaquita porpoises in Mexico. In the Southeast extinction looms for 28% of the region's fishes, 48% of crayfishes, and nearly 70% of freshwater mussels.

A year ago the Center launched Saving Life on Earth, a plan that calls for a \$100 billion investment to save species and the creation of new national monuments and parks, wildlife refuges and marine sanctuaries so that 30% of U.S. lands and waters are fully conserved and protected by 2030 and 50% by 2050.

Thanks to the Center for Biological Diversity for providing this news



Ian Owens tapped to lead Lab

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology announced recently that it has chosen its next executive director.

Ian Owens, a distinguished evolutionary biologist and museum director, will take the helm of the 106-year-old institution in July 2021.

Owens will take over from John Fitzpatrick, the Lab's executive director since 1995, who announced his retirement last year.

In Fitzpatrick's 25-plus years, he guided the organization from having a staff of a few dozen to its current size of 250 staff and \$35 million annual operating budget. He will remain on staff for a time at the Lab and will continue to be a professor at Cornell University.

In addition to leading the Lab, Owens will also hold an appointment as professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Cornell University's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS).

Originally from Yorkshire, England, Owens has 25 years of experience serving as a professor and departmental chair at Imperial College London, and as a director at both the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and the Natural History Museum of London.

"As the next director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ian Owens will embrace what the Lab stands for and move us forward through the 21st century, to continue the incredible successes we have made in science and outreach, and to inform conservation as no other organization in the world can," said Linda Macaulay, the chair of the Cornell Lab's administrative board and co-chair of the search committee.

Eagle Season

By Patti Muzny

After our successful eagle nest monitoring season as B.E.S.T volunteers under the guidance of The Sutton Center in 2020, Nancy Vicars and I were eagerly awaiting the 2021 season. As I've mentioned previously, Covid19 had very little effect on our birding activities. During this past year, we did not travel out of state, which we usually like to do and we've missed seeing our birding friends and family in other states, but since we've spent time together for many years, we continued to monitor eagle nests and work our Atlas blocks throughout several counties during the nesting season. We travel with snacks and lunch and rubber boots and rarely encounter any other humans.

We began our eagle nest monitoring in early January with a road trip to the Lake Eufaula area. Below the dam is always interesting in the winter and there is no predicting what might be gathering and feeding in this area. On our first visit we noticed a large flock of large dark birds at the edge of the river across from the parking area. We were fairly certain there would not be that many immature Bald Eagles splashing around at the river's edge. A check with binoculars solved the mystery – Black Vultures were hanging out at the edge of the river and some were bathing. Others were circling overhead. We had never seen vultures doing anything but soaring or perching somewhere in trees or on large dams or feeding on the ground. These birds were clearly enjoying their morning showers this fine winter morning.

Among the other birds feeding below the dam were some of my favorites – American White Pelicans! These beautiful, graceful birds are just joy to watch as they glide low along the water and gently land and begin to feed. They were competing with Bonaparte's Gulls and Double-crested Cormorants and a few Great Blue Herons. Along the river below the dam hosts our largest concentration of Bald Eagle Nests. Apparently the eagles will tolerate neighboring eagles nesting closer than usual when there is an adequate food supply, thus there are four nests in this area that we can observe. One of our nest trees in the area had disappeared. A Bald Eagle's nest is so large; it's not surprising that the nest tree reaches a point where the weight and the Oklahoma weather eventually destroy it.

On this trip we visited 10 of our nests in the Eufaula area and 7 of these nests were being used and we found eagles on the nests.

While we don't see many other people while we're out, we have met the most friendly, fun individuals and have been given permission to go onto their properties. There is a sand plant along the river near Whitefield, where there are a couple of active nests. The owners of the plant are very friendly and have allowed us to drive around behind their business to observe the eagles at the nests. We've been there enough times that they remember us and seem glad to see us visiting again.

We met some new folks near the community of Hoyt when we had stopped at the edge of a wheat field and were looking at a new nest along the river that was well over $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from us. Last year it wasn't muddy and we could drive along the edge without burying Nancy's vehicle in good old river bottom mud. This year we were looking through a scope. Along came a friendly young man and possibly his dad in a mud-covered, jacked up, four-wheel drive pickup truck. He stopped to chat and he told us who to contact in the area to gain access to more river bottom property, where there probably are more nests we are not able to see due to the very limited access along the river. He told us he was going down toward the river to hunt for arrowheads and we sort of eyed the back of his truck as a possible mode of transportation, but it was getting late and if we had been in the back of that truck, we would have been as muddy as his truck. Don't think so!!

On our second visit to Eufaula on January 18th, we met two other Sutton B.E.S.T. volunteers, Shi and Tracy, who live in the metro OKC area, but have homes in the Eufaula area, and guided them to some of our nests and a new nest for 2021, also along the Canadian River. Brian was also able to join us. The nest we were supposed to visit was not occupied at the time, but we spotted a new nest on the other side of the river that did have an eagle nearby!

We identified other species of birds on our trips, but the eagles are always an exciting find.



Recorders Report

December 2020

While Central Oklahoma has many of the same species of birds in each county there is also quite a bit of bird species diversity. Of the 306 species reported during 2020 in the Central Oklahoma Counties 63 species were reported in all twelve counties, 27 in only one county, 84 in four counties, etc. One doesn't have to travel far to find interesting and new birds. Often keeping track of bird species in one location can show a surprising wide variety during the year.

On Nov 28th Caleb McKinney saw Chestnut-collared Longspur in Grady County. On the 1st south of Guthrie along Simmons Road Larry Mays located American Tree Sparrow and Mountain Bluebird, Braden Farris got Wilson's Snipe, and Steve Davis photographed Say's Phoebe; at Lake Overholser – Coffey Dam Brian Marra identified Virginia Rail and Marsh Wren; and at Arcadia Lake – Spring Creek Park Rod Lusey reported Forster's Tern. On the 2nd Rhett Raibley tallied American Kestrel in Kingfisher County; Larry Mays spotted Purple Finch, Pine Siskin and Red-breasted Nuthatch at home in Newcastle; Bill Diffin detected Surf Scoter and Eared Grebe at Lake Hefner; and Scott Loss had Western Grebe at Lake Carl Blackwell.

On the 3rd Joe Grzybowski added Merlin at Wagner Road in Yukon and White-winged Scoter at Lake Hefner; Bill Diffin confirmed Lesser Black-backed Gull at Lake Hefner; and Braden Farris came across Wood Duck at Lake Hefner – Stars and Stripes Park. On the 5th Randolph King discovered Western Meadowlark near Alex in Grady County; John Tharp encountered Mountain Bluebird and Smith's Longspur in Norman; Chad Ellis had Lapland Longspur along the north Oklahoma and Canadian County line road; and Patti Muzny counted 8 or more Purple Finches at Byars in McClain County. On the 6th Joe Grzybowski recorded Loggerhead Shrike in Kingfisher County; at Lake Hefner Bill Carrell was unable to locate the Black Scoter, but did find five Surf Scoters, a White-Winged Scoter, an adult California Gull and in the afternoon from Prairie Dog Point a Pacific Loon.



© Bill Carrell

On the 7th Angel Carter noticed White-winged Dove in Blanchard in McClain County and Scott Loss counted Chestnut-collared Longspur along West Richmond Road in Payne County. On the 8th Dawn Miller spotted Brown Thrasher in Chickasha in Grady County; Scott

Loss recognized Common Yellowthroat at Whittenburg Park in Stillwater; Brian Marra viewed Clay-colored Sparrow at Bluff Creek Trails in Oklahoma City; and Randy observed a Long-tail Duck at Lake Hefner – Stars and Stripes Park. A smidgen outside of the central Oklahoma area Terry McGraw was driving down a county road in NW Blaine County and discovered a **Snowy Owl** perched on the edge of a big round bale of hay right beside the road.



© Terry McGraw

On the 10th Samuel Cox detected Bald Eagle at Lake R.C. Longmire in Garvin County; Chris Butler had Red-headed Woodpecker, Savannah Sparrow, and Red-head at Purcell Lake in McClain County. On the 11th Ryan O'Donnell spotted Northern Flicker and White-breasted Nuthatch in Seminole County; Brian Marra located Red-necked Grebe at Lake Hefner – Prairie Dog Point and Spotted Sandpiper at Arcadia Lake Park Office and Dam. On the 12th Randolph King tallied Canvasback and White-crowned Sparrow at Meeker Lake in Lincoln County and Chipping Sparrow and Wilson's Snipe at Wes Watkins Lake in Pottawatomie County; Braden Farris identified Short-eared Owl and Snow Goose in Kingfisher County; and Logan Carter reported American Woodcock at Lake Thunderbird.



On the 13th Brent Barnes saw an out of season Gray Catbird at Mitch Park in Edmond; and Steve Davis encountered Lesser Goldfinch at home in Oklahoma City. On the 14th Cody Delano came across Brewer's Blackbird in Grady County; and Scott Loss added Lapland Longspur at OSU-Magruder Plots. On the 17th at Lake Hefner Brian Marra confirmed Iceland Gull, California Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull; Bill Diffin found White-winged Scoter and Pacific Loon at Prairie Dog Point.



On the 18th Christine Sparks observed Prairie Falcon in Yukon. On the 19th Grace Huffman with Braden Farris and Brian Marra had Winter Wren, Brown Creeper and Golden-crowned Kinglet at Stinchcomb WR NE in Canadian County; Caleb McKinney noticed American Pipit and Pine Warbler at Lake Carl Blackwell; Larry Mays discovered

Black Scoter at Lake Hefner – Children’s Park; and Kathleen Tucker recognized Snowy Egret at Silver Lake.

On the 21st at his family’s farm in Norman Mark Howerly heard five Sandhill Cranes flying over. On the 20th Michael Kane recorded Loggerhead Shrike at Stratford in Garvin County; and Chad Ellis viewed Northern Pintail and American Wigeon at Crescent in Logan County. On the 22nd Caleb McKinney watched Mountain Bluebirds near Tuttle in Grady County; and Jason Shaw located Barred Owl at USAO Habitat Area in Grady County.

On the 24th Jacob Crissup identified Ross’s Goose east of Hennessey in Kingfisher County; and Matt Jung spotted Black-crowned Night-Herons at Lake Hefner.



On the 25th Lorna Clevenger reported Bald Eagle in Shawnee in Pottawatomie County. On the 27th Shane Clark had Pileated Woodpecker at Chandler in Lincoln County. On the 28th Kenneth Bader verified Mountain Bluebird south of Purcell in McClain County; and D&D Norris tallied Hermit Thrush at Kairworks Garden in Logan County.

What is your 2021 birding challenge: Keeping a regular yard list in eBird; working a block or two in the Breeding Bird Atlas; doing a Breeding Bird Survey or other citizen science project; planting bird, bee and butterfly friendly plants; or county birding in new county(s)?

In the Central Oklahoma area during December, **151** species were reported with no 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](https://ebird.org). 2020 eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abun-

dance [web application]. eBird Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Available: <https://ebird.org/region/US-OK?yr=all>. (Accessed: December 30 & 31, 2020). And occasionally from Facebook, and the OKBIRDS List. I can be contacted by e-mail at emkok@earthlink.net. Esther M. Key, Editor.

Great Backyard Bird Count



Each year people from around the world come together to watch, learn about, count, and celebrate birds during the Great Backyard Bird Count.

Join the national Audubon Society, **February 12-15, 2021**, when the world will come together for the love of birds.

Participating is easy, fun to do alone, or with others, and can be done anywhere you find birds. Simply **watch birds for 15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days!**

Pick the **best tool to use** for sharing your birds sightings:

If you are **new to the count**, try using the [Merlin Bird ID app](#).

If you have **participated** in the count **before**, try [eBird Mobile app](#) or enter your bird list on the [eBird website](#) (desktop/laptop).

If you are **participating as a group**, see instructions for [Group Counting](#).

Note: You can start entering bird lists at **midnight local time on the first day of the count**, anywhere in the world. **Data entry remains open until March 1**, but the information you enter should only be from the four days of the Great Backyard Bird Count.

The Winter of the Purple Finch

By Patti Muzny

This winter there has been an invasion of Purple Finches and Pine Siskins and Mountain Bluebirds. Our feeder at Byars literally rains Purple Finches!! After spending a couple of weekend afternoons selfishly glued to the

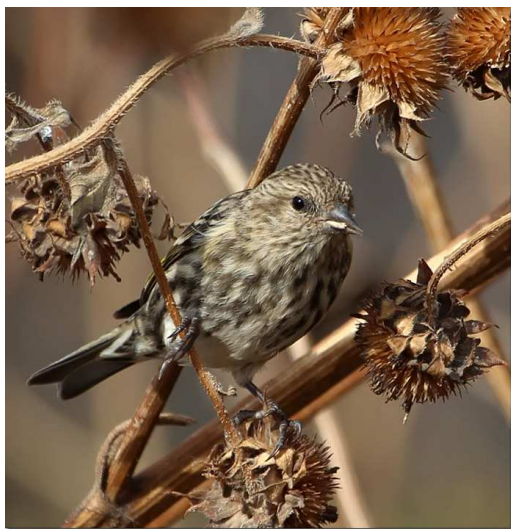


window opposite the feeder, I gathered Nancy and we headed south on a Purple Finch quest. Unless you have a feeder in a more rural area, you

don't see as many Purple Finches and there isn't usually an opportunity to really "watch" this beautiful species. We may get a fleeting glance out in the woods, but the numbers are normally not that impressive.

Prior to our visit to the cabin, we had driven to an area NE of Pauls Valley and located a nest, although it was not one to which we were assigned. We were just on a backroad trip. I was still looking for Mountain Bluebirds! At the cabin, as I had promised, it was raining Purple Finches and Pine Siskins! We built a fire in the stove, ate our

lunch and spent a few wonderful hours with our noses at the window just absorbing these beautiful feathered visitors. The finches and siskins were joined by a few American



Goldfinches, the "usual" Carolina Chickadees, Titmice, Juncos, White-throated Sparrows, Carolina Wren, and Cardinals. We

hiked around the property and found a few more species, but by far the most birds were around the feeder. There is a goldfinch that has been visiting our feeder for several weeks that has a yellowish-white head. It's a pretty pale yellow – nearly white, but with a yellow cast.

From watching the Pine Siskins we learned that they are pretty impetuous at the feeder and do not hesitate to attack each other. There was one sickly looking siskin that bore the brunt of one particular siskin's wrath, that we dubbed a bully! It was a fantastic manner in which to spend an afternoon and we reluctantly headed back to OKC, but we were happy birders!

And last but not the least bit least, on the 22nd of January, I finally had a good look at a few Mountain Bluebirds. Thanks to Steve Davis and Mary Lane, they were exactly where they reported they would be – the west side of Lake El Reno!! That was just too easy, but very impressive to have them on the ground, then perched on a low fence beside the car!! We were multitasking for the El Reno trip, which included visits to a few more Bald Eagle nests in Kingfisher County. One of our favorites here is in the middle of absolutely nowhere in a pasture near the Cimarron River. It's in a scrawny tree that we felt sure would be gone after the ice storm, but it's in good repair and had a pair of eagles standing watch. This is our favorite lunch stop and with the warm winter sun lighting up our world, we ate our sandwiches under the watchful eyes of a pair of our favorite birds! Not too shabby!!

At our OKC yard, birds keep me entertained, but there are a few squirrel adventures as well. One Monday morning, I drove into the driveway and noticed something out of place and white on a little metal chair on my front porch. I came in the house and went out on the front porch to see what somebody had left for me. Well, all I found was a torn up throw pillow with about ½ of the white polyfill stuffing gone. I looked up in the large oak at the edge of the porch to see a squirrel nest about 25 feet up in the tree with a fluffy white topping! Throughout the next few days, the wind and probably other squirrels and possibly birds scattered the stuffing all over the yard. Most of it is gone, but there is still some left.

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.