

Life with Racing Pigeons

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

Welcome

The Oklahoma City Audubon Society welcomes:

Debra Bomar, OKC

Mike Sharp, Bethany, OK

Long-time racing pigeon expert Rick Mardis will be the guest speaker at our June 15th meeting. Now retired, he has spent 60+ years raising and promoting the sport.

Racing pigeons are domestic Rock Pigeons that have been selectively bred for centuries to find their way home from long distances (sometimes hundreds of miles); fly efficiently and maintain high speeds; have strong orientation abilities using a combination of the sun, Earth's magnetic field, landmarks, and possibly scent cues.

Rick just turned 78 and has been racing pigeons since he was 12 years old. He grew up in Dallas, Texas, and began racing pigeons in 1960.



He's been fortunate to travel the world through his involvement with pigeons. He raced birds in Belgium and has traveled to Europe more than 150 times. He was also one-third owner of a weekly Belgian newspaper dedicated to racing pigeons.

In 1987, after moving to Oklahoma City for a business opportunity, Rick started the Continental Breeding Station, where he sold pigeons worldwide. At the peak of the business, he employed seven people and bred up to 5,000 birds a year. At one time they had approximately 12,000 clients. Rick was also instrumental in bringing the American Racing Pigeon Union headquarters and the pigeon museum to Oklahoma City.

Rick retired in 2013 and passed the business on to his son, Steve. He has three children, six grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

Come out and enjoy the camaraderie and bring a friend. Our meetings are held September through June on the third Monday of each month with the exception of January. 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.

Is There Dusting At Your House?

Jerry Wayne Davis

Is there dusting going on at your house? No, I am not checking to see what kind of housekeeper you are and if you have been running around with a rag and a can of Pledge or Endust.

What I am asking is, do you have a place in your yard for the birds to do their dusting, sunbathing, and anting? We are not meeting our bird's needs just by providing nest boxes, feeders, and water. Dusting is important to help remove external parasites, dry feathers, and help realign feather barbs and barbules. And anting has been observed in over 250 species of birds and is said to rid or reduce bird external parasites and possibly soothe skin irritations. You may have observed birds sunbathing by spreading their tail and wing feathers. This can also help drive out external parasites and increase body temperature.



It is insightful for me to watch various residents and migratory birds going through the dusting and sunbathing behavior. I have even had a family of eastern cottontail rabbits, and several species of lizards come on an almost daily basis to stretch out in the hot sand for maybe some of the same reasons.

If you do not already have a dusting and sunbathing area for your birds, it may be time for you to consider it.

Go into that beautiful green monoculture lawn that you have worked so hard to weed, feed, water, and mow. Select an area close to your bird bath(s) and / or feeders, where the birds are already coming. Pulverize the area to about a foot deep so that it looks similar to a horseshoe pitching trap; a size 4 feet by 4 feet square is a start. If you are lucky enough to already have sandy soil, that is a plus. If not, you may need to dig out the fertile soil that you have cultivated for so long and replace it with fine white sand. The smaller the sand particles and the higher the reflective value, the better it will be for dusting and sunbathing. The sand is droughty enough to discourage grass and weeds, but if you need to retard grass encroachment, you can put a border around it. If you do not have a natural source of sand, you can obtain mortar sand from a ready-mix company or use the play sand sold at home supply or landscape retailers. The finer the grain size the better it will be for dusting and the whiter it is the better for sunbathing and heat radiation.

Once this is in place, sit back and enjoy the insight that you can gain from yet another habitat element in the bird's world, and rabbits, squirrels, and other wildlife use will be an extra bonus.

Note: OCAS President Cole Penning has been traveling this spring. His regular column will return in September

Vacation Time!

The Oklahoma City Audubon Society will be on hiatus following the June meeting. We'll return September 21, 2026.





Bird of the Month: American Robin

By Grace Huffman

As the migrants push north, the birds that stayed here all winter have been hard at work raising babies, and the first babies of the year are out and about. You might even have them nesting in your backyard. One of my favorite babies has always been the American Robin. With adults being gray above and reddish below, they are one of the most recognizable birds across the United States.

While heralded as a sign of spring, robins are actually seen year-round in much of the lower 48. They are breeding visitors across Alaska and Canada, and show up in winter across the far southern reaches of the US and into Mexico. You've probably come across a nest in your yard or in a park somewhere. I used to see them nest in the climbing trumpet vine next door to the home I grew up in, or for many years they built a nest on top of a light on a back porch just over the fence. I've also found nests hidden in a dense group of branches. But in other places they may even nest on cliffs or on the ground! The pair may raise more than one brood in the same nest.



Babies resemble their parents somewhat, but they have light speckles above and dark speckles below. It can be a bit confusing to see the older ones acting like proper adults running around in the grass looking for worms, while still in all of their spotted baby plumage!

When fall comes, they will flock together, even numbering in the hundreds. Places like Spring Creek Trail at Arcadia, Martin Park Nature Center, or Stinchcomb Wildlife Refuge are good spots to be absolutely surrounded by robins in the fall and winter as they feed on berries. Listen for a high, whistled "seeeah" call amongst the flock (you will often hear much of the area go quiet as well). This is an alarm call, and more often than not as I look around, I will come across a hawk nearby.

American Robins are thriving, with numbers even increasing as they have adapted very well to living around humans. They are susceptible to pesticides however, so avoid using those on your lawns if you want to help keep the population healthy! And enjoy their babies as they frantically chase their parents across your yard begging for food this summer.

American Robin, fledgling © Grace Huffman

References: allaboutbirds.org

Minutes of the OKC Audubon Society Meeting May 18, 2026

President Cole Penning called the meeting to order and welcomed guests and new members. Nancy Vicars reported treasury account of \$10,441 which is stable.

Reports of recent sightings / field trip reports.

- The Oklahoma Ornithological Society had its spring meeting at Idable May 1-3 with visits to Red Slough and nearby nature walks
- A trip to S. Jenkins Road in Norman was fruitful as usual with grassland and woodland birds but was cut short by a rainstorm.
- A guided tour of Mollie Spencer Farm in Yukon was well-received.
- The Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge was visited May 4th and was a resounding success.
- A previously discussed birding presentation at First Unitarian Universalist Church will be done by Steve Davis.

New business: we were reminded that the Oklahoma State Parks Dept. has a 62+ senior parking pass which requires renewal each year and is available at any state park entrance.

Lake Arcadia BioBlitz is set for May 29-30 with multiple field trips. Registration is required and is free.

A planned field trip at the Zoo Lake will be rescheduled for June 6th to avoid parking conflicts during the NCAA softball tournament.

Our summer club picnic will be held June 20th at Terri Underhill's home in north Edmond. Further details to come.

Meeting was adjourned for a snack break followed by our speaker for the evening. Kathleen Tucker is a bird lover and photographer living in the Silver Lake neighborhood. Her home is in viewing range of a large variety of backyard and lake birds. Her photos were excellent and the variety was amazing.

Our final spring meeting will be June 15 at 7 pm at the Will Rogers Park Garden Exposition Building.

Zoo Lake Field Trip Report

Eight birders assembled for a potentially-rainy day on Saturday June 6th. The showers held off leaving us with a humid and cloudy day. Visibility was also limited by the foliage and dreariness of the clouds.

However, each of us enjoyed the variety of birds and the camaraderie among birders with varied experience levels, most of whom were previously unfamiliar with this park.

The best-seen birds were three Black-crowned Night Herons that flew into a tree on the Zoo side of the lake. Two very vocal Red-shouldered Hawks stood atop the tallest zoo building near the lake and were easily seen through the scope.

Two Belted Kingfishers entertained us on the overhead wires that cross the lake.



Even though the viewing was limited, the birds were active at all times. Easily seen were Red-bellied Woodpecker, Mourning Dove, Common and Great-tailed Grackles, Brown Thrashers, American Goldfinch, Barn Swallows, Chimney Swift, Red-winged Blackbirds, and Brown headed Cowbirds. Combining the viewed and audible, a total of 41 species were identified.

A well-worth-it outing.

Sharon Henthorn

By Kent Fiala, Carolina Birding Club

Four-letter codes are commonly (and too often incorrectly) used as a short-hand way to write a bird name. Two different sets of codes are in use. The first codes were created by the Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL) for use by bird banders in submitting data; consequently the codes are frequently referred to as “banding codes”. A slightly different set of codes has been published by the Institute for Bird Populations (IBP).

The basic codes were derived from a simple set of rules for reducing a name to four letters. A major problem is that the rules can create “collisions”; cases where two (or more) different names reduce to the same four letters. In these cases, different codes had to be created ad hoc. Unfortunately, if you want to use the codes, you simply must memorize the special cases; there is no way around it. Worse, the BBL and IBP code sets differ in some of these ad hoc codes.

I preach against use of band codes for two main reasons: They are a barrier against communication with the general birding public, and they are subject to errors—When you are reviewing today's records twenty years from now, you don't want to be puzzling over what you were thinking when you recorded an observation of REHA.

Here is a summary of the basic rules:

If the name is one word, the code is the first four letters.

DICK Dickcissel

SORA Sora

If the name is two unhyphenated words, the code is the first two letters of each word.

MODO Mourning Dove

AMRO American Robin

If the name is three words, the code is the first letter of each of the first two words, and the first two letters of the third word. A name of three hyphenated words is treated the same way.

GCFL Great Crested Flycatcher

AWPE American White Pelican

CWWI Chuck-will's-widow

If the name is a word and a pair of hyphenated words, the code is the first two letters of the unhyphenated word and the first letter of each of the hyphenated words.

Hyphenated word first (coded essentially the same as a three-word name):

BTGR Boat-tailed Grackle

RTHU Ruby-throated Hummingbird

RTHA Red-tailed Hawk

Hyphenated word last:

EASO Eastern Screech-Owl

EAWP Eastern Wood-Pewee

There are a very few bird names where the first word contains two capital letters. Such words are treated like a hyphenated word:

LCSP LeConte's Sparrow

MGWA MacGillivray's Warbler

If the name has four parts, either separate words or hyphenated parts, the code is the first letter of each part

BCNH Black-crowned Night Heron

NRWS Northern Rough-winged Swallow

BBWD Black-bellied Whistling-Duck



Northern Shrike, top, Northern Shoveler, bottom
which one is NOSH using basic BBL codes?

Note that it should go without saying that in order to use these rules, you MUST know exactly what the bird's name is. You MUST know that it's American Robin, not just Robin. You MUST know that it's Tricolored Heron, not Tri-colored Heron.



Hatch Highlights: First Chick Emerges From Egg At The Hellgate Osprey Nest | June 11, 2026

First egg hatches for Iris, the oldest nesting Osprey

The Birds & Blooms article [Meet Iris: The Oldest Nesting Osprey](#) profiles Iris, the oldest known nesting Osprey, estimated to be nearly 30 years old—remarkably older than the typical osprey lifespan.

She has become famous among birdwatchers and researchers. She has been returning to the same nest in Montana's Hellgate Valley since the late 1990s. A webcam installed at her nest turned Iris into a global bird-cam star. Thousands of people follow her annual migration, nesting attempts, and family life.

Over her lifetime she has raised more than 20 chicks, making her an important contributor to the local osprey population. Because ospreys eat fish, Iris and her offspring have helped scientists monitor pollution and ecosystem health in the Clark Fork River watershed. Researchers use osprey nests as indicators of environmental contamination.

The many challenges Iris has survived—storms, nest failures, predators, and changing mates—which has made her a symbol of persistence for many viewers.

The article portrays Iris as more than just an old bird: she is a celebrated wildlife ambassador whose longevity, reproductive success, and public webcam have connected people around the world while also supporting long-term conservation research.