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Black-poll Warbler

Bird of the Month
by Grace Huffman

Spring migration continued to be epic all the way through the end of May, which meant that I ended

up with 24 new species from April 1st to May 31st! In last month's newsletter I mentioned that I had added quite a few shorebird species. This month I want to highlight another family I saw several of: warblers. Last month I saw 5 warbler species for the first time! It made for a very hard time deciding which bird to highlight, but I finally settled on one: **Blackpoll Warbler**.

It had already been a great warbler day (I had just seen a pair of American Redstarts and a couple of Tennessee Warblers, both lifers, at the Myriad Gardens) when a small group of birders went to the Stinchomb Wildlife Refuge. No sooner that we had gotten out of the car than Brian Marra pointed out that the high, thin call we were hearing was in fact a Blackpoll. Sure enough, the bird came into view and it was a male in beautiful breeding plumage! Going back to the refuge a couple of days later, I heard a couple of additional Blackpolls, but I wasn't able to see them. They've since migrated north, so it will be a while until I get to see any again.

Blackpoll Warblers migrate through the eastern parts of Oklahoma, with their range extending westward as they go north. Males and females look sharp in their black and white breeding plumage, with males being more striking than the females. Non-breeding birds are yellowish and much duller. They breed in Alaska and northern Canada. The males begin to sing on their way up north, and once they set up shop in their breeding grounds the females are right behind them. They are normally monogamous, and some birds will even pair with the same mate the next year! On their way down to their wintering grounds in areas like Puerto Rico and South America, they undertake a massive 1,800 mile flight across open ocean, making them record holders of the longest over-water flight of any songbird.

While they may be currently listed as Least Concern by ICUN, the fact is they are in decline. Because they breed so far North it makes it hard to establish trends in the population, but the North American Breeding Bird Survey estimates that they have lost 92% of their population between 1966-2015, and they are listed in the 2014 State of the Birds Report as being in Steep Decline. Next time they come through, make sure to enjoy these beautiful birds!



© Grace Huffman

President's Perspective

A Most Unusual Spring - 2020

Fellow birders, the spring migration is all but over now and I hope that you were able get out and see some interesting or "life" birds in spite of the near total "lockdown" of all group functions of over 5-10 people. Even those small groups were discouraged. Certainly a most unusual spring this year - 2020!

As I mentioned in a previous message our birding activities are a great way to accomplish SOCIAL DISTANCING. That is what I did, either alone or in a very small group.

For those of you that heard about all and I mean ALL, of the shore birds that gathered at Rose Lake and nearby ponds and went to see them, you really had a treat. It started with the discovery of a pair of whooping cranes and then just exploded with an unusual array of birds, from peeps, sandpipers, ducks, and many larger shore birds- willets, dowitchers, godwits, and a long billed curlew! The lucky few were treated to a peregrine falcon and Cooper's hawk visit or two.

The eastern side of the state had a wide variety of migrating wood warblers. Brian Marra and I did our own 3-day "warbler trip" to Sequoyah NWR, and south to McCurtain County WMA, the Little River NWR and the Red Slough. We had sightings or singing warblers at all stops. We notched 22 warblers, including a couple rarer ones - blue winged, palm, Swainson's, Blackburnian and hooded. Even seeing that many we missed a few seen by others - bay breasted and worm eating.

Now it is time to settle into enjoying the summer birds at your favorite spots. A very good variety can be found at Lake Thunderbird, South Jenkins Road in Norman, the ponds and fields around Rose Lake and Mitch Park in Edmond. The latter provides nice sightings of Bell's vireo, ruby and black-chinned hummingbirds, painted buntings, and yellow billed cuckoos.

We all missed our usual meetings with the talented and interested speakers that Warren arranges as well as the many planned group field trips.

Finally, our club picnic in June is cancelled. There is a possibility of having a limited social event in late August with Terri Underhill as our host. If enough of you have an interest and feel that it is safe enough for you to attend let me know. Please RSVP to me by text or call to 405-819-4852 or an email to drhal2@cox.net. If we have 20 or more interested we may just do it! (Certainly with some precautions in play).

Good birding. I look forward to possible meetings in the fall, with some programs, perhaps by our many great photographers.

—Hal A. Yocum



Welcome to OKC Audubon

Tom Stanley, OKC

There will not be a June meeting. We will be on hiatus during July and August but are hopeful to get back to together in September.

Chirpings

By Patti Muzny

May and early June 2020

In early May all was well with my backyard birds, but as we know, things can turn around so quickly. The Robins that had nested under our patio had at least three wobbly yellow gapes that would arise multiple times from their well sheltered home tucked into what seemed to be a safe place. I spent a lot of time watching the parents stuff worms and insects into those eager beaks. We left town one weekend and when I checked on them Monday morning, no Robins were to be found either in the yard or in the nest!

A few days earlier I had witnessed an altercation between a crow and our Robin pair in the lawn directly below the edge of the patio cover. Now I'm wondering if perhaps the crow returned when I was not on guard and plundered the nest. There was no way a cat could have done it and probably nearly impossible for a squirrel to reach it. Nancy Vicars related a story from many years ago when she witnessed a crow raid a Robin's nest that was built on her patio in Midwest City. The crow swooped in and grabbed the nestlings and fed them to the crow's growing family! This nest failure was the third for our yard. I miss my Robins!!



But as life marches onward, I find other species to observe. I watched the pair of Mississippi Kites build a nest in our elm tree at the south edge of our property. I'm thinking it might have

been this pair's first attempt at constructing a substantial abode from sticks when our unpredictable Oklahoma wind was howling! During one trip to the nest, I saw her fly over to a utility wire near her nest tree with a twig about a foot long and attempt to transfer it from her beak to her talons. The twig didn't cooperate and it fell to the street below. The kite watched it drift down and looked at it for a few seconds before she flew to the utility pole and sat there for a while rather than make an effort to retrieve it. If birds actually have a thought process it may have been something like, "What the heck just happened here?" As of June 6th, she's incubating eggs and the male usually perches nearby. So far Sam has not been dive bombed when he mows and she doesn't bother me when I walk on that side of the yard.

Yesterday I watched another Kite carrying a stick into a tree in



our neighbor's yard two doors down from us. Our neighborhood has mature trees that seem to be a magnet for kites. They can be seen all over. I do enjoy our kites, but when Brian told me he saw one with a larger black bird in its talons, I fear it might have been one of our Purple Martins. Can we hope it was perhaps a starling instead?

Our yard has no shortage of predators – Mississippi Kites, Cooper's Hawks, Red-shouldered Hawks, Crows and the neighbor's cat.

Our Carolina Chickadee family fledged their young, and there is at least one left that comes to the feeder with the adults. Our Downy Woodpecker pair hatched young, but we could never determine how many, if any, actually made it out of the nest before the last windstorm blew the limb with their nest out of the tree. A raucous Great-crested Flycatcher is usually the first one up and the last one to roost and we always know he's here. He usually gets quiet about the time the fireflies come out. I've also seen and heard a Yellow-billed Cuckoo in and around our yard – not once but about three times. We have had them once or twice before, but just one quick sighting. Would love to have them nesting here!

I'm still enjoying my garden, my birds and watching to see what adventures with Ma Nature arrive with each day. Sometimes she's downright cruel and sometimes she's just delightful. Have a wonderful summer!

Conservation

By Ann Sherman

In the time of pandemic when we humans retreat to our homes the wild animals are breathing signs of relief.

Turtles in Brazil are born and go to sea without the normal crush of humans there to watch the event. In Wales wild goats have reclaimed a town. They strut down the street eating the flowers in window boxes if they so desire. After all, the town now belongs to them.

A mountain lion hung out over Pearl St. in Boulder. That is the main street in town. So lacking in people the normally shy cat was seen in a tree in the middle of the entertainment district.

In our own yards have you noticed the sound of the birds in the morning is so much clearer? It's actually because human activity has been so much less. Less cars on the road. Less planes in the air. The air is cleaner. The noise pollution is much less. Light pollution has got to be down as well. It's a joy when I wake and hear the sounds in my yard. The parks are fairly empty. The birds seem much less tense when I do go out to public places. I haven't gone out to do serious birding. I'm in the yard or walking the dog in the neighborhood. We hit a park now and then. The American Bird Association advises "Keep your eyes on the skies but your butt close to home." That's the scoop on ethical birding in the time of covid. Birdwatching has grown. I've read numerous articles on how everyone is doing it now. Lets hope it remains as popular when things get back to normal.

There is a bad side to this that we need to keep an eye on. The current administration is using the pandemic to do things that are unacceptable and would normally raise a hue and cry. They are rolling back environmental protections for birds. They are allowing the air and water to be more polluted. Easing limits on auto emissions. Restricting the reach of the Endangered Species Act and eviscerating the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Ending the five-decade-old measures to prevent unintentional killing of migratory birds is likely to result in the death of hundreds of millions of birds. We do not need to sacrifice the natural world so we can drive more and get back to work quicker. These are gifts to industry they don't need. These protections of animals and people have been carefully built up over decades....watch what they are doing....not what they say. Birds don't vote. They don't write their representatives. We need to do it for them.

Thank you to Jennifer Ackerman. Author of "The Bird Way: A New Look at How Birds Talk, Work, Play, Parent and Think."

Junior Duck Stamp winners selected



Madison Grimm, a 13-year-old from South Dakota, took top honors in the Service's National Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest with her acrylic rendition of a wood duck. Her artwork will grace the 2020-2021 Junior Duck Stamp, which will go on sale June 26 and supports conservation education for students in kindergarten through 12th grade.



London Peterson won Best of State—OK and Top 10 honors with the Common Goldeneye painting in the Junior Duck Contest.

The first national Junior Duck Stamp art contest was held in 1993. The stamp encourages students to explore their natural world, participate in outdoor recreation activities, and learn wildlife management principles. Approximately 2,000 Junior Duck Stamps are sold annually for \$5 each.

Recorders Report

May 2020

May was warbler and flycatcher month. For birders that got out and about warblers were observed in various locations including a few rare visitors to our area. The quiet flycatchers were also noted and it appears one species has started nesting in two different counties. The elusive Bobolinks were reported in six central Oklahoma counties. Photo-



© Laura Madden

graphs and audio recordings are being used to document these unusual and beautiful sightings. What an interesting month!

On April 30th Laura Madden photographed a **Western Tanager** in Blanchard in McClain

County; John Tharp had **Black Terns** at Lake Thunderbird SP – East Sentinel; and Scott Loss counted **Ovenbird** at Lake Carl Blackwell in Payne County. On May 1st Brian Marra heard and recorded Ovenbird at Arcadia Lake in OKC. On the 2nd D&D Norris noticed Yellow Warbler at Kairworks Garden in Logan County; Larry Mays spotted Greater Roadrunner and Chimney Swift in Newcastle; and Landon Neumann identified

Acadian Flycatcher at the known breeding spot in Payne County. On the 3rd John Tharp verified **Ruddy Turnstone** at Lake Thunderbird – East Sentinel and heard an Ovenbird, **Wilson's Warbler** and **American Redstart** along South Jenkins;



Landon Neumann observed Black Tern, Marsh Wren and Orchard Oriole at Cushing Water Treatment Plant in Payne County; Brian Marra encountered **Black-throated Green Warbler** at Lake Hefner – Hobie Point; Scott Loss saw **Bobolink** in Stillwater and described **Wood Thrush** at Lake Carl Blackwell;

On the 4th Mike Yough confirmed **Olive-sided Flycatcher**,

Least Flycatcher and Warbling Vireo at Couch Park in Payne County; Corban Hemphill added **Gray-cheeked Thrush** at Lake Carl Blackwell; Corban Hemphill found **Black-headed Grosbeak** at Lake Carl Blackwell; and Wilson's Warbler were seen by Landon Neumann at Couch Park and Brian Marra at Arcadia Lake. On the 5th Grace Huffman, Elizabeth Hacker and Brian Marra got Black Tern, Peregrine Falcon and Fish Crow at 63rd and Kilpatrick Turnpike; John Hurd documented **Alder Flycatcher** at Stinchcomb Wildlife Refuge East; and Landon Neumann reported American Redstart at Couch Park. On the 8th Brian Marra had Ruddy Turnstone at 63rd and Kilpatrick Turnpike; Bill Diffin tallied American Redstart and Prothonotary Warbler at Stinchcomb WR west in Canadian County; Alex Harman recog-

nized **Willow Flycatcher** at OSU – Cross Country Course; and Cody Delano located **Mourning Warbler** along South Jenkins in Norman.



© Joe Grzybowski

On the 9th Carlberg had Chuck-will's-widow near Shawnee in Pottawatomie County; Charlotte Taylor came across Peregrine Falcon in Paul's Valley in Garvin County; Zachary Hemans counted Black Tern and Chimney Swift at Lake Hefner; John Tharp identified Acadian Flycatcher along Little Jim Road on its usual territory in Canadian County; and John Hurd detected Alder Flycatcher at the Kilpatrick Turnpike. At Lake Thunderbird – Sentinel area John Tharp detected the first eBird record for Cleveland county of a **Golden-winged Warbler** and was shortly joined by Joe Grzybowski, Cody Delano and Randy Soto. A bit later Joe discovered **Worm-eating Warbler** and great views were observed by the others. On the 10th Eric Duell reported **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck**, Black Tern, Bobolink, Black-necked Stilt and American Golden-Plover near Hennessey in Kingfisher County; Dala Grisom noticed Summer Tanager and Baltimore Oriole at Bell Cow Lake in Lincoln County; John Hurd detected Willow Flycatcher at Dolese Youth Park in OKC; and

Marion Homier photographed Gray-cheeked Thrush in Choctaw.



© Marion Homier

On the 11th Joe Grzybowski discovered Western Sandpiper at McClain County Sod Farm and Bobolink at Goldsby Sod Farm in McClain County; and John Tharp located Olive-sided Flycatcher, Alder Flycatcher and Least Flycatcher at Lake Thunderbird – West Sentinel.

On the 12th Brian Marra recorded Olive-sided Flycatcher, Willow Flycatcher, Wilson's Warbler and Prothonotary Warbler at the Maud Wetland in Seminole County; Rusty Derringer recognized Olive-

sided Flycatcher south of Guthrie in Logan County; Grace Huffman and Elizabeth Hacker spotted **Blackburnian Warbler**, Wilson's Warbler and Sora Rail at Rose Lake; Landon Neumann ob-



served Mourning Warbler and Magnolia Warbler at Couch Park in Stillwater; and **Caspian Tern** were seen by Branden Farris at Lake Hefner – Stars and Stripes Park; Scott Loss at Lake Carl Blackwell and John Tharp at Lake Thunderbird – East Sentinel plus John also had **Least Tern**.

On the 13th Jonathan Anderson added Swainson's Thrush in Tecumseh in Pottawatomie County; William Radke discovered **Sanderling**, Dunlin, Marbled Godwit, Black-necked Stilt and Sora Rail in Yukon; and Zach DuFran with Larry Mays, Dick Gunn and Jeremy Ross found Black-throated Green Warbler at Lake Thunderbird – South Sentinel. On the 14th Caleb McKinney encountered Black-chinned Hummingbird in Ninnekah in Grady County; and Chad Ellis tallied Gray-cheeked Thrush at Stinchcomb WR west. On the 15th Scott Loss described **Philadelphia Vireo**, Ovenbird, Alder Flycatcher, Willow Flycatcher, and Least Flycatcher at Sanborn Lake; and Braden Farris

turned up Mourning Warbler at Lake Hefner – Stars and Stripes Park. On the 16th Bill and Linda Adams had Bobolink southeast of Ninnekah in Grady County. On the 17th Landon Neumann heard **Veery** at Couch Park in Payne County; John Hurd confirmed Blackburnian Warbler at home in OKC; and Landon Neumann had **Least Bittern** at the Cushing Water Treatment Plant.

On the 18th Braden Farris viewed Olive-sided Flycatcher along south Lake Hefner. On the 19th Brian Marra had Least Tern at Lake Hefner – Hobie Point. On the 20th Erik Atwell spotted Common Nighthawk at I-35 North Bound Rest Stop in Garvin County; Rusty Derringer noticed American Redstart



and Blackpoll Warbler in southeast Guthrie; and Bill Diffin reported Black-bellied Whistling-Duck flew over Rose Lake. On the 22nd Scott Loss detected Least Tern and Common Nighthawk at Boomer Lake Park. On the 23rd Bill Diffin identified Least Bittern, Wood Duck, Alder Flycatcher and Warbling Vireo at Lake Overholser – Coffey Dam.

On the 29th Benjamin Ferraro found Chimney Swift in Shawnee. On the 30th Jason Shaw counted Red-headed Woodpecker at USAO Habitat Area in Grady County. And now it is time for Breeding Bird Survey and Breeding Bird Atlas projects. Which one(s) are you involved with?

In the Central Oklahoma area during May 2020, **222** species were reported with 26 new species bringing the total for 2020 to 284. I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds. Information is accessed at: [ebird](http://www.ebird.org/subnational1/US-OK/region). 2020 eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Available: <http://www.ebird.org/subnational1/US-OK/region>. (Accessed: May 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.

Atlasing 101

By Patti Muzny with Nancy Vicars
June 2020

So some of you might wonder just what is “Atlasing?” Well, it’s extremely interesting, educational and fun. Beginning in 1997 the Sutton Center in Bartlesville sponsored a bird atlas project. Nancy Vicars and I began five years of atlas fun. Below is information copied from Dan Reinking’s e-mail about their latest atlas project:

“Breeding bird atlas projects have been employed worldwide to survey for nesting birds using a mostly standardized and repeatable method. They typically involve surveys of all or selected portions of a state, province, county, or even country. The results are typically published as a book with maps showing the distribution of each species. The number of survey areas and the size of the region being surveyed make these bird atlas projects very labor intensive and beyond the scope of what the paid staff of any organization or agency can do on their own. That is where skilled birders come in! Atlas projects rely on volunteers to help complete the large number of surveys required. Oklahoma’s first breeding bird atlas was completed from 1997-2001 and was published in 2004 (<https://www.oupres.com/books/search?query=reinking>). Bird atlas projects are designed to be repeated at intervals of about 20-25 years, enabling tracking and comparisons of bird distributions over time.

The second Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas is being launched this year. After an unexpectedly rough start to 2020 and all of the related regulations and uncertainties, we are now ready to go ahead with the project. If you have good bird identification skills, can navigate your way around with a map, and are comfortable getting out birding with everything that is going on right now, please visit sutoncenter.org/atlas for more information or to sign up for specific survey blocks. There are 583 blocks of land across Oklahoma that need to be surveyed in one out of the next five summers, so there is sure to be one or more blocks not far from you or your favorite Oklahoma birding region.”

Nancy and I participated in the first Atlas project and we are excited to be able to grab our paperwork and binoculars and hit the road once again. Nancy chose the blocks to survey and I assist with spotting, navigating, and writing down what we see in roughly a nine square mile territory. This year we will be atlasing two blocks of land in Kingfisher County, two in Caddo County and two in McIntosh County. It takes a little over three hours to do the initial scouting of each territory. We try to confirm whether or not each species we identify is actually nesting in the blocks.

On June 3rd, we drove to our first Kingfisher County block, which is just north of the Dover Marsh area. The marsh is not in our territory, but because it was just a mile away and hosted a sizeable Cattle Egret rookery, we counted a lot of egrets flying from our area to the south. This particular block has NO exciting habitat.

It’s mostly cropland with few homes and no creeks or ponds. There are pockets of oak with elm and locust trees along the roads. There is some pasture. Probably won’t be too interesting? You’d be surprised!

We learned 20 years ago that although areas such as this don’t look too exciting, but it’s amazing what can be found with a little persistence and patience. For instance we confirmed nesting for four species on our first scouting trip. A Dickcissel made it simple for us when she landed on a fence wire at the edge of the barrow ditch with food in her mouth. We stopped and backed up a bit and she promptly dove into the ditch and emerged a few seconds later with a bright fecal sack. Bingo! Then we had a killdeer run down the gravel road toward our vehicle, acting like she was ready to take us on. No falling apart behavior, but when we backed up and sat for a minute, she marched over to the side of the road and gently settled in to continue incubating three beautiful eggs. As is usually their M.O., the nest was definitely not out of harm’s way place, especially when the road grader was working the area!!

Two more species were confirmed when we noticed a family of Chickadees on a utility wire with fledglings begging food from the parents. The next and last to be confirmed was a family of Barn Swallows doing the same thing. We know there are at least 10 more species that we could find, but that were not located in our first brief trip.

We had a total of 35 species that we presumed would be nesting in this area. We were hoping for at least 40 species for our morning’s journey, but by this time it was HOT and we were tired and ready for a shower and probably a nap.

So, if you have not signed up to do at least one atlas block, consider volunteering. It’s not complicated and unlike a Breeding Bird Survey, where you must complete your routes in a set amount of time and cannot linger to actually study the bird behavior, it allows the birder to really get to know the species in your block. And unlike 20 years ago, we now have GPS and smart phones and bird I.D. apps to add to the fun. It can be done alone, but grab a birding buddy, a little insect repellent, sunscreen, lunch and lots of cool water and hit the road. You will laugh a lot and learn a lot and why not?!! Birders are never bored.