

# An Introduction to Araneology and the Spider Families of Oklahoma

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

## Our speaker for our March 17 OKC Audubon meeting will be Colton Herzog.

His presentation will include a brief overview of spider taxonomy, life history strategies, and their ecological roles in terrestrial food webs, followed by identification techniques and descriptions for common spider families in Oklahoma.

Colton is a PhD candidate at Oklahoma State University in the Wilder Lab. Originally from Idaho, he earned his associate and bachelor's degrees before moving to Oklahoma to complete his master's at OSU. His current research focuses on how understanding how spiders cycle nutrients through ecosystems and other vital roles they occupy in food webs.



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.



## Bird of the Month: Bufflehead

*By Grace Huffman*

Many birds are beginning their migration north, but some of the winter birds are still hanging around - for now. One of the winter ducks still likely to be around is the Bufflehead, a small duck that can be found all over the state. They are cute, small diving ducks. The males are striking black and white, while the females are a more muted brown with white spot on each cheek.

Buffleheads breed primarily in Alaska and Canada. Because of their size, they can use old woodpecker holes that are too small for other tree-nesting ducks to utilize. They might also take advantage of a nest box if it's the

right size. Unusual in ducks, Buffleheads are largely monogamous and may stay with the same mate year after year.

Their winter range includes much of the lower 48 and extends down into Mexico. Here in Oklahoma I have seen them on many different bodies of water, ranging from our large lakes to farm ponds. A drive around Lake Hefner or Overholser should turn up several of these tiny divers. I shot this photo of a pair at Overholser during the last cold snap.

Bufflehead is listed as a species of least concern, with populations steadily growing. With fossil records indicating the existence of these ducks for at least 500,000 years, they've been here a long time and are currently thriving!

Reference: [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org)



Buffleheads © Grace Huffman



# In Praise of the Great-tailed Grackle



In the beginning, the Mexican legend goes, Zanate, the Great-tailed Grackle, had no voice. This would not do. Being a tricky and striving sort of bird, he stole himself seven songs from the sea turtle, leaving the turtles silent and himself bursting to the brim with chatter: tunes of joy and sorrow and rage. There is the tinkling, liquid murmur the birds make while bedding down on transmission wires and parking lot trees. There are the complex and tapping whistles, and the calls like the rending of sheet metal. And then there's the showstopper: a looping crescendo that pleasantly combines the cock of a shotgun with the tones of an interstate car crash. It is a remarkable repertoire, and one that a subset of the human population hates.

Those unfamiliar with birds often mistake grackles for crows, or members of the extended crow family. Fair enough: Despite belonging to the new-world blackbirds, grackles have a strong corvid energy, exuding both intellect and mischievousness. (The word grackle even derives from the latin 'graculus,' originally referring to the jackdaw, a Eurasian relative of the crow. That the grackle has smoothly usurped the name

seems somewhat in character.)

What makes Great-tailed Grackles particularly interesting, however, is how perfectly comfortable they are around people. All three of our grackle species can be spotted in urban areas, but the Great-tailed thrives among humans. And in that sense, the bird is something rare in North American ecology: a native species that has adapted to urban life with absolute and slightly terrifying gusto. By contrast, the majority of familiar urban birds in America are naturalized transplants, hailing from Europe—sparrows, starlings, pigeons—while the North American songbirds that get by in cities do so by necessity rather than preference.

Arguably, the Great-tailed Grackle is one of the New World species that has profited the most by human spread. Originally hailing from the jungle lowlands of Central America, the Great-tailed Grackles were brought into Central Mexico for their feathers under the reign of the conquering Mexica emperor Ahuitzotl. The birds happily bred in the plazas of Tenochtitlan, found Central Mexico to their liking, and eventually Texas as well. Between 1880 and 2000, their range expanded a staggering 5,530 percent, following agricultural and urban corridors. The Great-tailed Grackle now can be found from Colombia up into California and over to Minnesota. Beyond food, there's nothing this grackle likes quite so much as a plaza with a few handy trees—which is to say, in much of urban America, parking lots.

# The Do's and Don'ts of Birding Fashion

## **DO go for clothing that is all about function**

Since you're out on the trail for hours, or even all day, you'll want everything right at your fingertips. Some of the best clothes for function include cargo pants, birding vests, and sturdy, comfortable footwear. Cargo pants are a must for birders.

## **DO go for comfortable, relaxed fit clothing**

When it comes to birding fashion, comfort is top of the list. It should go without saying, that the more comfortable your clothes are, the longer you'll want to stay out in the field.

## **DO wear camouflage**

While you certainly don't need to wear army fatigues, experienced birders know that blending in with the habitat is key to exploring the area. If you choose to go birding during hunting season it's important to follow the recommended guidelines so you stay safe.

## **DO wear all-weather gear**

Always choose clothing that you don't mind getting wet, dirty, or just plain ruined. After all, professional birders are known to do anything they can for a good look at the birds even if it means crouching in the mud or rubbing against scratchy bushes.



## **DON'T wear brand new shoes**

Avoid wearing brand new shoes out for long excursions. You'll want to ensure they are worn in so you don't get blisters or chafing.

## **DON'T wear heavy restrictive clothing.**

Too restrictive or heavy clothing can be irritating and uncomfortable, so go for lightweight, breathable fabrics. Try to dress in layers so as the temperature changes throughout the day you'll be able to adjust accordingly without interrupting your activity.

## **DON'T wear loud clothing**

This may seem a bit silly, but the quieter your clothing can be, the better. Buckles, accessories, and even loud zippers that rattle can all be distracting and impede your birding experience.

## **DON'T forget to cover your head**

Wearing a hat is a good idea because it breaks up the outline of your face for better disguise near wary birds.

## **DON'T wear UV reflective clothing**

Birds can actually see UV light and they will act accord-



# Minutes of the OKC Audubon Society Meeting February 17, 2025

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by President Sharon Henthorn.

Attendance: 32 members, including 3 new members

Treasurer's Report: Nancy Vicars presented the report, which was approved as read. Cash on hand: \$9,340.59.

January Minutes: Read and approved.

Field Trips:

Saturday, March 1 @ 8AM - Community Trails at Northeast Health Clinic 2600 N.E. 63rd St. We will likely visit the nearby Pigeon Museum after birding.

Saturday, March 8 @ 8AM - Mitch Park in Edmond - Hal will lead a walk, meet near the skate park.

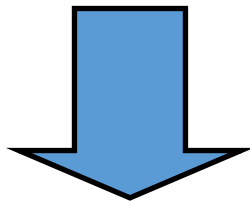
OOS Spring Meeting will be April 11-13 at Lake Murray State Park. Visit OKBirds.org for more info.

Please make sure to renew your membership dues! You can pay online or in person to Nancy.

Dr. Leslie Cole gave a fantastic talk about the ongoing Avian Influenza outbreak.

Next meeting will be Monday, March 17, 2025, where Colton Herzog will give a presentation on spiders.

—Cole Penning, Secretary



## DUES NOTICE

It's time once again to renew your annual membership. 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, 2341 NW 160th St., Edmond, OK 73013



## Owls vanish the day my husband dies

By Terri Underhill

On January 15th my husband Keith died suddenly from a heart attack. We were married 42 glorious years, and I wasn't ready for him to go. And for whatever reason the Great Horned Owls that had nested for eight years in my yard vanished the same day leaving me so very lost.

So [this video](#) was the last time Jack and Carol were seen. Some of you might have already watched it.

I believe my owls were shot. I hope my owls are keeping Keith company in heaven.

## Bird flu kills thousands of Sandhill Cranes in Indiana

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI; bird flu) has caused the death of some 1,500 [Sandhill Cranes](#) in Indiana. In January and February, biologists with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources counted hundreds of dead cranes across the state. At least 500 of the birds were found dead in Jackson County, in the south-central part of the state, in early January. Since then, as the birds have begun heading north ahead of the breeding season, deaths have been reported in other parts of Indiana. Officials have said that the estimated 1,500 dead birds is likely an undercount.