

Tribal Environmental Commitment

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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:

Shelley Martin, OKC

Timothy Clifton, Edmond, OK

Jimmy Davidson, Edmond, OK

Suzanne McCall, Edmond, OK

The speaker for the March 16 OKC Audubon meeting will be Leah Snyder, Environmental Specialist for the Fort Sill Chiricahua Warm Springs Apache Tribe in Apache, Oklahoma. Her topic will be Tribal Environmental Commitment: Past, Present, and Future and will include a survey of how tribal identity influences environmental commitment with emphasis on Fort Sill Apache environmental programs while highlighting other tribal environmental activities and success stories in Oklahoma and beyond.

Dr. Snyder's environmental career has spanned a wide variety of projects all focused on the mitigation and recovery of impacted natural resources. Her experience in remediation of existing environmental hazards as well as managing water and air monitoring instrumentation for new hazard detection has led her to her current position as Environmental Specialist with the Fort Sill Chiricahua Warm Springs Apache Tribe. Her technical skillset has been focused through the lens of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) to best serve the Fort Sill Apache community via environmental compliance, tribal service, community education/outreach, and environmental monitoring.



Although originally from Colorado (Chemistry BS, Biology BS), she fell in love with Oklahoma's diverse ecological regions and rich tribal culture while expanding her education in Analytical Chemistry (MS) from Oklahoma State University followed by Environmental Science (PhD) from the University of Oklahoma. It is her mission to support data-driven decision making for sustainable development and natural resource conservation while helping to educate the next generation of environmental stewards. Projects have taken her to the Tar Creek Superfund site, destruction of the US Chemical Weapon Stockpile in Colorado and with Engineers without Borders in Bolivia.

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.

President's Perspective

Hello Fellow Reptilers,
Don't worry, I didn't forget who I'm writing this for. As a member of Oklahoma City Audubon, you probably call yourself a birder. However, from a biological standpoint, "reptiler" is just as accurate, because birds *are* reptiles! If we follow modern evolutionary science, every birder is out studying, counting, or watching reptiles.

Birds are not just "related to reptiles" or reptile-like. You may know that birds evolved from theropod dinosaurs, so this might not be entirely surprising. Some of you may have even heard that birds are '*technically*' reptiles, but there really is no '*technically*' about it! They are actual modern-day reptiles, just as much as crocodiles, turtles, lizards, and snakes. A fundamental principle of evolutionary biology is that you cannot evolve out of a clade. In other words: once a dinosaur, always a dinosaur, and once a reptile, always a reptile.

Modern classifications group animals by shared ancestry. To define a group like "reptiles," we pick a point on the evolutionary tree and include all descendants. For reptiles, that point is commonly where Diapsids split from mammals. As you can see in the evolutionary chart, birds are very much nested within Diapsids.

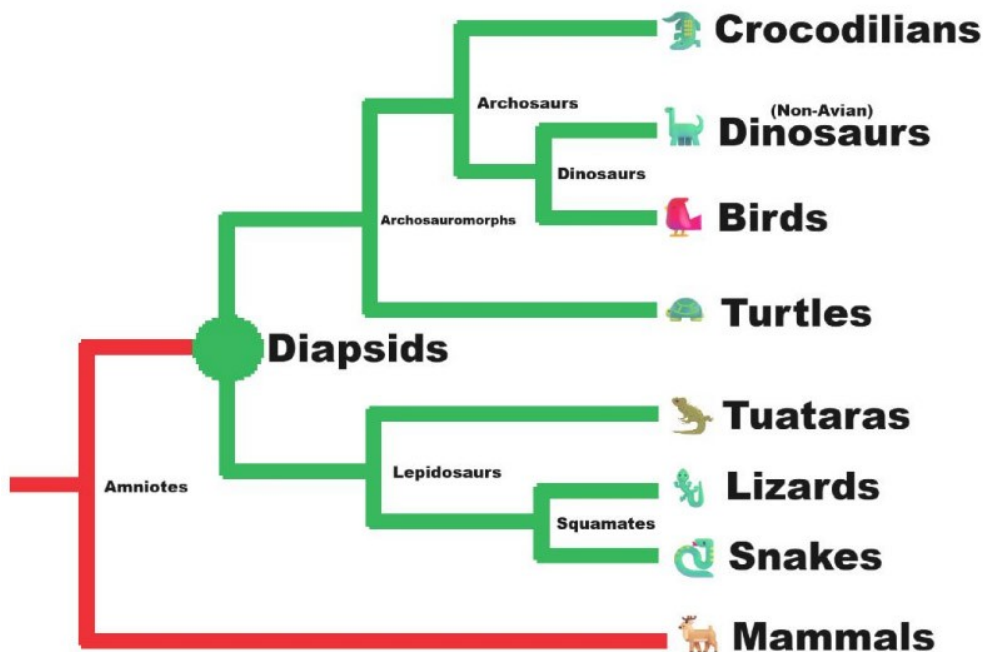
Looking closer at these relationships reveals some surprises. Birds and crocodilians are each other's closest living relatives, with turtles as the next closest. This means an alligator or a tortoise is evolutionarily closer to a sparrow than it is to any snake or lizard. Simply put, it's impossible to define reptiles *without* including birds!

So the next time you're watching a warbler or a hawk, remember: you are actually observing a reptile with feathers and wings! You may have even eaten reptile eggs for breakfast or reptile wings for dinner. If you enjoy this kind of evolutionary perspective, I highly recommend the YouTube channel Clint's Reptiles, which has excellent videos breaking down phylogeny and exploring various animal lineages. I'll leave you with a couple other claims from his channel that you might enjoy looking up yourself: "There is no such thing as a raptor" and "Whales are ungulates." Enjoy the rabbit-hole and have fun reptiling!

Cole Penning
President, OKC Audubon



IMPORTANT NOTE:
It's time to pay your
2026 Membership
Dues!
[Click here to pay](#)





Bird of the Month: American Pipit

By Grace Huffman

As winter transitions into spring, birds are on the move, and that means you might see or hear American Pipits on their way north. These small, rather plain songbirds spend their winters here and then breed in the high arctic of Alaska and Canada, or above the tree line in the mountains of the western US.

They are small “dirt birds” that are grayish above

and buffy below, ranging from heavily streaked to not streaked at all. Males arrive to the breeding grounds first to display and set up territories. Once he has a mate, he will help her build the nest on the ground by providing nesting materials. He will also provide food for her while she is incubating, although she moves away from the nest to receive it.

In the fall and winter, they migrate back south and we get to enjoy them. Overall they look similar in winter, but some are even more heavily streaked, and many may show white on the face. And since they aren’t defending a breeding territory, you can find them in large flocks! Look for them feeding in dirt or short grass fields, along shorelines, or even along the rocks along the dam. Places like the dam at Lake Hefner or Arcadia Lake often have them. I photographed this particular bird on the dam at Lake Thunderbird back in November. And of course, don’t forget to listen for them! You might just hear them announce themselves with a “pip-it” call in flight.

American Pipits are considered least concern, but their population has dropped around 30% in the last 50+ years, with the biggest threats being habitat loss due to humans and climate change. Next time you’re out birding the open fields, I hope you get to see and hear them!



American Pipit © Grace Huffman

Reference: allaboutbirds.org

Minutes of the OKC Audubon Society Meeting February 16, 2026

Meeting was called to order by newly elected president Cole Penning. Visitors attending were Eileen Grzybowski, Shelley Martin and Tim Clifton.

Treasurer's report was given by Nancy Vicars. The 2025 summary shows cash on hand for end-of-year 2024 was \$9923; end-of-year 2025 was \$9923, or plus \$776.

February treasurer's report shows influx of \$419 with no disbursements. Cash on hand as of February 17 is \$10,397.

Minutes of the January meeting were approved with the exception that the program report was left out of print. Bob Holbrook had shown us photos and discussion of a trip to Iceland. There was no other old business.

New business included snack schedule was sent around for update. No new field trips have been announced.

The Spring OOS meeting will be at Red Slough near Idabel on May 1-3, 2026. Educational speakers and field trips will be included.

The program speaker tonight was Luis Cueto, PhD candidate in Biological Sciences at the University of Oklahoma. A native of Peru, he has been studying the variation in demographics of the Andean Wren of the family Calcariidae.

The next meeting will be March 16th at 7 pm at the Will Roger's Park Garden Exposition Building. Sharon Henthorn, OCAS secretary

AGEING AND BIRDING

According to a study published last month in *The Journal of Neuroscience*, birdwatching has the capacity to reshape the brain in much the same way as learning a language or a musical instrument does. The researchers concluded that experienced birders have more structurally compact attention-and-perception-related brain areas, seemingly linked to more accurate bird identification skills.

To understand whether birding also shapes the brain, Erik Wing at York University in Toronto and his colleagues analyzed brain structure and function in 48 hobbyist birders, half experts and half novices, as judged by a screening test. Participants were aged 22 to 79, and both groups were similar in terms of sex, age and education.

Of course, more experienced birders could ID birds better than novices. (On average, they accurately identified 83% of local bird species and 61% of non-local ones. In contrast, novices correctly identified 44% of both groups of birds.) While identifying non-local birds, activity in three important brain regions increased among experienced birders, but not in novices. These brain regions are involved in object identification, visual processing, attention, and working memory. "It speaks to the wide range of cognitive processes that are involved in birding," commented Wing.

Remember, this study is only a snapshot in time. It might be that people who develop an interest in birds already have structural changes in their brains, or that there are other lifestyle factors related to brain changes that happen to be more common among bird enthusiasts.

Nonetheless, this is still interesting to consider!

Field Trip Planned

Let's revisit OKC's Northeast City Park at Zoo Lake on Saturday March 21st. Good weather is expected and we'll meet at the main parking area at 9:00 am. Enter east of the zoo from Grand Blvd. and immediate right turn to enter the park.

A guided trip with about five birders was enjoyed on February 28th when our species total was 37. Highlights were Cedar Waxwings, Eastern Bluebird, good views of White-throated Sparrow, Brown Creeper and Tufted Titmouse.

Water birds were viewed with spotting scope including Ruddy Ducks, Canvasbacks and Buffleheads. This week I also enjoyed flying and perched views of a Bald Eagle and Red-shouldered Hawk.

Come join us and see what you can find!

Sharon Henthorn

Wood Stork Delisted

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has announced the removal of the U.S. distinct population segment of wood stork from the federal list of endangered and threatened wildlife. This delisting reflects successful conservation partnerships and the administration's focus on results-driven wildlife management that returns recovered species to state and tribal stewardship.

"The wood stork's recovery is a real conservation success thanks to a lot of hard work from our partners," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Brian Nesvik.



When the wood stork was listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1984, it was on the brink of extinction. As the only stork species that breeds in the United States, its population had plummeted by over 75% since the 1930s. This sharp decline was largely due to habitat loss, especially in South Florida, where vital wetland

areas for breeding and foraging had been severely diminished.

Today, the wood stork breeding population is estimated at 10,000-14,000 nesting pairs across roughly 100 colony sites — more than twice the number of nesting pairs and more than three times the number of colonies compared to when the species was listed. Wood storks now inhabit the coastal plains of Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. They have adapted to new nesting areas, moving north into coastal salt marshes, flooded rice fields, floodplain forest wetlands and human-created wetlands.

The Service has a 10-year post-delisting monitoring plan to ensure the species' recovery is maintained.

The delisting of the wood stork was final on March 9, 2026.

Global Big Day is Coming!

Global Big Day is almost here! This worldwide celebration brings together bird enthusiasts from every continent to document as many bird species as possible in a single day, all while contributing valuable information for science and conservation.

Participation is simple: go birding anywhere for any amount of time on May 9 and share the birds you find on eBird.

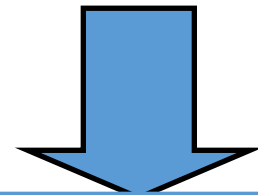
Last year, Global Big Day collected more data about birds on a single day than ever before. More than 1.7 million people participated in the celebration, observing more than 7,900 and setting [new world records](#) for a single day of birding. **Will this be the year we pass 8,000 species on a single day?**

Refreshments

Refreshment volunteers for the March 16, 2026 meeting:

Snacks: Patti High, Candaca Marshall, Jeanie Mather, Sharon Henthorn

Ice & Drinks: John Eagleston/Cathy Chernausek



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

Birds Aren't Just Declining. They're Declining Faster, a New Study Finds.

Birds in the United States are not only declining, but they are declining faster, especially in areas with intensive agriculture, according to new research. Overall drops in bird population, measured from 1987 to 2021, were sharpest in warm and warming areas, suggesting that climate change may play a role.

The study, [published in the journal Science](#), shows only correlation with intensive agriculture and temperature, not causation. But it adds to an ever more robust body of evidence that birds — one of the best measured families of animals on Earth, and a sentinel for the health of other species — are not OK.

Whatever the specific drivers, the accelerating losses make sense given society's focus on economic growth, which often comes at a cost to the natural world, said Peter P. Marra, an ornithologist and dean at Georgetown University who specializes in bird populations and was not involved with the new research. "The American dream turns into the American nightmare as we start to look at what we're doing to biodiversity and systems that we depend on as humans," he said.

In 2019, Dr. Marra and a team of scientists published landmark findings that the number of birds in the United States and Canada had fallen by 2.9 billion, or 29 percent, since 1970.

When the team analyzed and mapped the rates of decline, hot spots of acceleration lit up in California, the Midwest and the Mid-Atlantic region.

"What we found is that any metric of agricultural intensity was always the best predictor of acceleration of the decline."

Many scientists believe that trouble in the insect world, where declines are much harder to quantify, is creating trouble for birds. Most terrestrial bird species in North America depend on insects at some point in their life cycles, often when they are young. One study found that the 2.9 billion birds lost since 1970 came from species that depended on insects. Those that did not rely on insects actually increased by 26 million, an 111-fold difference, it found.

Financial Report for 2025

CASH ON HAND 12/31/2025	\$9,147.31
INCOME:	
Membership dues	1,037.36
Checking Acct. interest	264.46
Donations	492.61
Car decals	<u>5.30</u>
	1,799.73
	<u>+1,799.73</u>
	\$10,947.04
EXPENSES:	
Meeting room rent	540.00
Speaker honorarium	75.00
Membership dues	25.00
Roster Printing	21.00
Summer Social	<u>363.05</u>
	1,024.05
	<u>-1,024.05</u>
CASH ON HAND 12/31/2025	\$9,922.99



Ever wonder what goes on in a Bald Eagle nest?? You will be enlightened and entertained by watching the "Live nest cam" at [Live Eagle Camera – Sutton Center](#)