

Red Phalarope

Bird of the Month

by Grace Huffman

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Earlier this month I went up to Lake Carl Blackwell with former president Betsy Hacker and Brian Marra. We initially went there to look for a Red-necked Grebe, although the night before photos had been posted of an odd-looking phalarope there too. We searched the dam with Braden Farris but were unsuccessful in locating the grebe. Working our way around the lake we went over to Ski Point to scan over the lake again, and that's where Braden found the phalarope. While initially reported as a Wilson's Phalarope, this bird was in fact a Red Phalarope, the rarest of all phalaropes here in Oklahoma.



Phalaropes are unusual shorebirds. According to Sibley, they have lobed toes which help them swim in the water. This also aids in their feeding technique, where they will spin around in circles stirring up small items in the water for items like small insects and crustaceans. Watching a large group spinning makes me dizzy! In all phalarope species the females are brighter than the males, and do all of the wooing. Once they've chosen a nest site and she's laid the eggs, she leaves the male to incubate the eggs and raise the young. Meanwhile, she's possibly with a second male to lay another clutch. Red Phalaropes nest in the Arctic regions of northern Alaska and Canada, and migrate as well as spend the winter down both coasts. Of all three phalarope species (Wilson's, Red-necked, and Red), Red is the least likely to turn up here in Oklahoma, so when one does show up it's a big deal.

This time of year all phalaropes are in nonbreeding plumage, and the one at Carl Blackwell was no exception. It was mostly white, black, and gray, with a tiny bit of yellow at the base of the bill. It was right up next to the edge of the shore, bobbing about, feeding and acting like it was oblivious to the four birders staring at it and taking photos (I took over a hundred shots). It was so close to us at times I didn't even need to crop most of my photos when editing! *(continued on page 6)*

President's Perspective

Modern Technology: Using DNA to Establish Relationships among birds that appear similar

I've had the good fortune to have seen several warblers that many of us think are likely closely related. These warblers are: GOLDEN CHEEKED, TOWNSEND'S, BLACK-THROATED GREEN, BLACK-THROATED GRAY.

I recently came across some reference articles that discuss that very subject. It is the concept of SUPERSPECIES. This idea is not new. (Mengel, 1964, SPECIATION). Actually his idea was that these 4 warblers and also the HERMIT Warbler were as a group likely all descended from one common ancestor- the BLACK-THROATED GREEN, living in the south eastern deciduous forests. It eventually expanded across the country to all the coniferous forests. With the Pleistocene Age as the glaciers advanced across the land the birds became isolated in widely separated mountains and forests and the black-throated green slowly evolved into the other 4 separate species we have today.

More recent work based on molecular analysis (DNA) (Klicka & Zink, 1997 - Speciation) tells a different story. It was the BLACK-THROATED GRAY that was the true "basal branch" from which the others evolved. (Bermingham et al. 1992 - Speciation). Currently it is recognized that it actually occurred much earlier, some millions of years before the late Pleistocene.

This kind of work is being employed to develop a true understanding of many bird relationships.

In late October I took a trip to southeast Arizona in hopes of seeing the Hermit Warbler during migration south. That was not to be as the key area to see them, Mount Lemmon, sustained severe fire damage at the higher elevations and the birds could not use that area as there was no remaining food supply. I did see 108 species, 40 year birds and 10 life birds on the trip. I used Southwest Airlines to Phoenix and back. The plane had excellent Covid restrictions and very light passenger loads, 40 going west and 75 on the return. I did have to follow that with a 14 day quarantine from all family members, except my wife. NO COVID SO FAR!

—Hal A. Yocum



Slate of Officers for 2021 Terms

President Hal Yocum asked Jimmy Woodard, Betz Hacker and Bill Diffin to serve as a nominating committee in order to present a list of members willing to serve as officers for the calendar year of 2021.

President - Hal Yocum

Vice-president - Grace Huffman

Secretary- Patti Muzny

Treasurer - Nancy Vicars

Parliamentarian - Vacant

Welcome to OKC Audubon

Rebecca George, Norman, OK

Christmas Bird Count

This year's CBC will be held on **Saturday, December 19, 2020**. I attached a map and already sent standardized checklist to the leaders. Leaders will have the choice of emailing me back the checklist or using snail-mail. And like last year, I will also be asking for documentation on birds that are not expected for the Oklahoma City area in mid-December which will also satisfy Audubon's regional CBC leader.



Loons, grebes and scoters have already been making their presence at Lake Hefner this fall. And interesting land birds too have been showing up including those with more of a Mountain West presence. I believe we have more experienced and active birders canvassing the OKC area lakes, river bottoms, parks and additional nooks and crannies than ever before. I think some of this is a testament to the birding culture that former CBC compiler John Newell brought to the OKC area years ago as well as advances in digital photography and social media apps.

Please see the newsletter article - <https://okc-audubon.org/2019-christmas-bird-count/> for last year's CBC. We (26 count teams and 50 participants) tallied 115 species on December 14th with the Lesser Goldfinch being the crown jewel.

We will not be gathering this year for a compilation dinner but we will have a Zoom/virtual compilation party/story-telling session at 7pm on **Tuesday, December 22**. The Zoom meeting is open to everyone. Contact Warren Harden at wahar@yahoo.com for Zoom access.

Lastly, please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Resources:

Oklahoma CBC Schedule—page 7

CBC OKC Count Area Map—page 8

Sincerely,

Nathan, CBC compiler

405.496.2077

nrkuhnert@hotmail.com or nrkuhnert@sbcglobal.net

Nonprofit rescinds sale of Valley preserve

Except from Border Report and ABA.org

The head of a nonprofit that owns Salineno Wildlife Preserve, a coveted birding preserve in remote western Starr County, Texas, told Border Report on Friday afternoon that its board has decided not to sell the land to the Trump administration for border wall construction.

Debralee Rodriguez, executive director of [The Valley Land Fund](#), said that the nonprofit's board of directors held an emergency meeting on Friday and decided not to sell the Salineño Wildlife Preserve despite the organization having already agreed on a "set price" with the federal government.

"At this point in time, all negotiations with the U.S. government are off the table," Rodriguez said via phone.

The board's emergency meeting came after Border Report on Thursday was first to report that a deal had been reached for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to acquire the Salineño Wildlife Preserve's full 2.5 acres. The news brought outcry from environmentalists nationwide and prompted the meeting, Rodriguez said.

The president of the American Birding Association had posted Border Report's story on social media and on Friday morning told Border Report that his 12,000-member-strong organization of birders was devastated to learn that a coveted birding preserve in South Texas that he calls "hallowed ground" had been acquired by the federal government for border wall construction.

Jeffrey Gordon, who leads the Delaware-based ABA, said his members sent "hundreds of letters and emails" to the Valley Land Fund in recent weeks urging its board not to sell. The ABA is against border wall construction, saying it is harmful to birds, especially in the Rio Grande Valley, which he says "is one of the top two or three destinations on the continent of North America" for birders.

Muzny/Vicars Kingfisher County Road Trip

November 12, 2020

By Patti Muzny

After surviving without power for eight days and spending hours cleaning up tree debris from our crippling ice storm, it was w-a-y past time to “get out of Dodge” and go birding!

The morning of Wednesday, November 12, dawned sunny and without our usual Oklahoma howling wind. This was just the fitting incentive for Patti and Brian Muzny and Nancy Vicars to plan a road trip to Kingfisher County to the areas where they have monitored Bald Eagle nests and participated in the Sutton Center’s breeding bird Atlas project for 2020. We had a wish (or whine) list of species we hoped to find and we had an outstanding day of expected birds and some pleasant surprises that were not even on the whine list.

We were headed for the Kingfisher/Dover area via the NW Highway. When we turned off of Highway 81 south of Dover we checked out the successful eagle nest we had monitored this past spring. The nest had survived the ice storm, but no eagles were found at the nest, but as we turned east, Brian spotted an Osprey hunting over one of the Dolese sand pit lakes.

We drove north for a few miles toward the Dover Marsh where we had found a large rookery of mostly Cattle Egrets nesting during the summer. Along the road we found a small pond where a couple of Greater Yellowlegs were hanging out. Dover Marsh attracts many waterfowl, but access is very limited due to oilfield well sites that are off limits to visitors. There were a few American Pelicans and we also spotted an injured pelican in the adjacent wheat pasture. We guessed from the position of its wings, that it might have had a collision with the power lines along the road. It could hop and flap its wings a little, but could not fly. I made some ludicrous remark about trying to capture it, but that injured bird could hop and flap a lot faster than we can run these days, so we scratched that idea and wished it well. A little later, we saw that it had made it to the water.

While watching the marsh waterfowl, an adult Bald Eagle flew over the water, scattering waterfowl and delighting humans. Eagle was at the top of our whine list for the day. Another county road surprise was a Loggerhead Shrike that was hunting from its perch on top of a large roundbale. Also in this pasture were numerous Western Meadowlarks – one of my favorite prairie birds. I so enjoy their musical song and we had a relaxing serenade.

After a lunch stop in a pullout carpeted with pesky sand-burs, we drove back south on Hwy. 81 and went west to Elmer Thomas Lake. Nancy had visited this site several years ago and the winter birding was pretty good. ‘Twas not to be for this visit. We got out and hiked a little and finally found a Towhee and Fox Sparrow and a Kingfisher to add to our list. Well, we should have a Kingfisher – we were in Kingfisher County!

At the top of MY whine list was Mountain Bluebird, but that didn’t happen, nor did we find any Cedar Waxwings, although we found flocks of Robins and Yellow-rumped Warblers feeding in and around clumps of cedars.

Our next stop was Lake Hefner, where we drove in along the canal toward Prairie Dog Point. The canal was **the place to be** for dozens of Great Egrets. They were perching in the trees and feeding in the water. Around Prairie Dog Point we added Com-

mon Loon, Hooded Merganser, Buffleheads, Horned and Pied-billed Grebe, Red-heads, Green-winged Teal, Canvasback and Bonaparte’s Gull. A Pied-billed Grebe is fairly common here in the winter, but they are



©Brian Muzny

such fun to watch. They are just CUTE! They make you smile. If you can be close to these industrious little guys, watch them dive and pop up right in front of you and shake the water droplets from their heads and not smile, you probably need to consider hanging up your binoculars!

We drove around the lake on the dam road and found three more Common Loons

Our species list rounded out at 61, which is pretty good for a 7-hour road trip. Although this part of our beautiful state is not particularly scenic nor does it have a lot of variety in habitat, if you take the time to drive our dusty country roads and appreciate weeds and less than magnificent trees, it’s amazing how many species of birds can be found. Stay healthy everyone and safely enjoy our winter birds wherever they may be found.

Recorders Report

October 2020

Events during the month included the Fall BioBlitz, Jimmy's Big Sit, October Big Day and a massive ice storm. Red-breasted Nuthatches, Purple Finches and other unusual birds are popping up all over so watch your feeders closely, someone different may briefly appear. This is the best time to be out and about birding.

On September 29th Scott Loss discovered Palm Warbler at OSU – Magruder Plots; and Brian Marra, Elizabeth Hacker, and Grace Huffman observed Virginia Rail at Lake Hefner southernmost cove. On October 1st in Norman Joe Grzybowski noticed Broad-winged Hawk and John Tharp saw Swainson's Hawk; while at Carl Reherman Park in Edmond Rod Lusey spotted Osprey. On the 2nd Bill Diffin found Warbling Vireo and Gray Catbird at Yukon City Park. On the 3rd Linda Jones watched White-throated Sparrow at her feeder on the Lazy J in Lincoln County; and Mike Yough detected Sora Rail at Cushing Water Treatment Plant in Payne County. During the **Oklahoma Fall BioBlitz** Steve Davis and Priscilla Crawford reported Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and Least Sandpipers at the Mustang Road 'playas' in Canadian County. On the 4th William Radke

identified Pileated Woodpecker, Vesper Sparrow, and Lincoln's Sparrow at Rose Lake; and Frank Walker photographed red Eastern Screech-Owl in their owl nest box.

On the 5th Caleb McKinney had Nashville Warbler at Ninnekah in Grady County; and John Tharp documented **Sabine's Gull** at Lake Thunderbird SP – East Sen-

tinel. On the 6th Larry Mays located Red-breasted Nuthatch in McClain County; Scott Loss recorded Black-throated Green Warbler at Sanborn Lake; and Braden Farris verified a Sora Rail at Lake Hefner – Prairie Dog Point. On the 8th Chris Butler turned up Ruddy Duck at Wiley Post Memorial Lake and Tree Swallow at Purcell Lake in McClain County. Meanwhile Joe Grzybowski and John Tharp were conversing at Lake Thunderbird – Sentinel Point when a different gull appeared amongst the Ring-bill Gulls. After extensive discussion the current perspective is that the combination of size, leg color, bill structure, and overall plumage rule out Herring, Lesser Black-backed and California Gull and, therefore; it was most likely Thayer's Iceland Gull; also seen was Caspian Tern.

On the 9th Jimmy Woodard and Nadine Varner had a **Big Sit** in their yard in Midwest City with 16 individuals attending. Some of the species reported were Belt-



ed Kingfisher, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Black Vulture, and Cliff Swallow for a total of 49 species and 2,197 individual birds. On the 10th Benjamin Ferraro tallied Brewer's Blackbird in Shawnee; and shortly before noon Nathan Kuhnert began noticing modest

numbers of Turkey Vultures and Swainson's Hawks migrating south over Norman. On the 12th Brian Marra and Elizabeth Hacker viewed American Goldfinch, Vesper Sparrow, Spotted Towhee, Orange-crowned Warbler and Nashville Warbler at Lake Elmer in Kingfisher County; and Christie Stoops recognized House Wren at Cottonwood Creek in Logan County.



On the 13th Clay Bliznick got Eastern Screech-Owl at Lake Thunderbird – Little River Marina. On the 14th Scott Loss confirmed Greater White-fronted goose at Babcock Park in Stillwater. On the 15th Deborah Kaspari described an adult male **Evening Grosbeak** visiting her birdbath in the Norman Silk Stocking Neighborhood. On the 16th Brian Marra counted Red-breasted Nuthatch and Eastern Towhee at Stinchcomb Wildlife Refuge Gate 2 in Canadian County. Later Brian, Grace Huffman, and Elizabeth Hacker added Black-throated Green Warbler at Stinchcomb Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma County while Someone came across Sedge Wren in Norman.

On the 17th during **October Big Day** the state of Oklahoma recorded 156 species in 29 counties. The total species reported in each Central Oklahoma county were: Canadian 75; Oklahoma 71; Cleveland 59; Payne 58; Logan 7; Pottawatomie 3; and Grady 1 for a total of 112 different bird species. On the 18th Nancy Vicars visited the Myriad Gardens Center in downtown OKC and discovered some newly arrived winter visitors

including White-throated, Lincoln's and Field Sparrows, Winter Wren and Orange-crowned, Nashville and Common Yellowthroat Warblers. On the 19th Jacob Crissup located **Western Grebe** amongst 1,000s of Franklin Gulls at Lake Hefner West Shoreline Drive; and John Tharp encountered American Golden-Plover at Lake Thunderbird SP – East Sentinel.



© Jacob Crissup

On the 20th Joe Grzybowski reported Whooping Crane at Lake Thunderbird SP – East Sentinel found by Randy Soto and photographed by Cody Delano even as Brian Marra documented an Iceland Gull at Lake Hefner – Dam Road. On the 23rd John Sterling identified three Purple Finches in a flock of Chipping Sparrows north of Pauls Valley. On the 24th Mike Yough recognized Black-bellied Plover at Cushing Water Treatment Plant in Payne County. At the Myriad Gardens Nancy Vicars observed Gray Catbird, Ruby and Golden-Crowned Kinglets, Brown Creeper, but the biggest surprise was Wilson's Snipe. On the 25th Randolph King spotted Dunlin at Lake Thunderbird SP – East Sentinel.



© Cody Delano

On the 26th a historic massive **ice storm** hit central Oklahoma. For three days rain and sleet fell on trees loaded with fall leaves and as the ice built up tree tops bent to the ground, limbs broke, and power lines went down. Nancy Reed photographed **Common Redpoll** at her feeder in Cleveland County; and in Kansas apparently an American Woodcock migration was interrupted with multiple birds



being reported on the ground. On the 27th Joe Grzybowski described **California Gull** at Lake Thunderbird SP – East Sentinel; and Cody Delano recognized American Woodcock at 77 and Cemetery Road in Cleveland County. On the 29th Scott Loss identified **Red-necked Grebe** at the south end of Boomer Lake among a diverse mix of waterbirds including Horned and Eared Grebes, Common Loons, several duck species and Bonaparte's Gulls. On the 31st Branden Farris confirmed White-winged Scoter at Prairie Dog Point at Lake Hefner. Now It is time to gear up for the annual Christmas Bird Count. Interesting birds are normally found on count day so find a CBC and join the search.

In the Central Oklahoma area during October, **184** species were reported with **5** new species bringing the total for 2020 to **296**. I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds. Information is accessed at: [ebird](https://ebird.org/region/US-OK?yr=all). 2020 eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Available: <https://ebird.org/region/US-OK?yr=all>. (Accessed: AM October 30, 2020). And occasionally from Facebook, and the OK-BIRDS List. I can be contacted by e-mail at emkok@earthlink.net. Esther M. Key, Editor.

were reported with **3** new species bringing the total for 2020 to **290**. I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds. Information is accessed at: [ebird](https://ebird.org/region/US-OK?yr=all). 2020 eBird: An online database of bird distribution and abundance [web application]. eBird Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Available: <https://ebird.org/region/US-OK?yr=all>. (Accessed: September 29 & 30, 2020). And occasionally from Facebook, and the OK-BIRDS List. I can be contacted by e-mail at emkok@earthlink.net. Esther M. Key, Editor.

Red Phalarope (cont.)

According to AllAboutBirds.org, it's difficult to monitor the overall population of Red Phalaropes because they nest so far north. However, they are currently listed as Least Concern, although being ocean birds they are at risk from oil spills. Hopefully the next time one wanders into Oklahoma you will be able to see it!

References: The Sibley Guide to Birds 2nd edition, AllAboutBirds.org

Christmas Bird Count Schedule

as of 11/25/2020

Count	Date	Status	Contact
Chickasaw N.R.A. (OKCH)	N/A		Ron Parker 580-622-7234 ron_parker@nps.gov
Red Slough (OKRS)	12/14/2020	Open	David Arbora: arbour@windstream.net
Hulah Reservoir (OKHR)	12/19/2020	Open	Don Wolfe dwolfe@suttoncenter.org
Oklahoma City (OKOC)	12/19/2020	Open	Nathan Kuhnert nrkuhnert@hotmail.com
Tulsa (OKTU)	12/19/2020	Open	Jeff Cox 918-629-2140 jeffacox54@gmail.com
Norman (OKNO)	12/27/2020	Open	Mark Howery mkhowery@juno.com
Tishomingo N.W.R. (OKTI)	N/A	N/A	Charles Brown 918-812-3878 charles-brown@utulsa.edu
Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge (OKWM)	12/21/2020	FULL	Mike Husak michaelh@cameron.edu
Arkansas City	N/A	N/A	Eugene Young 580-628-6209 Eugene.Young@noc.edu
Broken Bow Reservoir (OKBB)	N/A	N/A	Mia Revels revels@nsuok.edu
Stephens County (OKSC)	1/2/2021	Open	Kurt Meisenzahl 580-585-0199 meisenzk@sbcglobal.net
Kenton (Black Mesa) (OKKE)	N/A	N/A	Jimmy Woodward 620-229-3876 j.woodward@cox.net
Tallgrass Prairie Preserve (OKTP)	1/2/2021	Open	Don Wolfe 918-397-4885 dwolfe@suttoncenter.org
Arnett (OKAN)	1/4/2020	N/A	William Diffin okiebirder@gmail.com
Fort Gibson Reservoir (OKFG)	12/28/2020	N/A	Nadine Varner gallinuleofpurple@yahoo.com
Sooner Lake (OKSL)	N/A	N/A	John Couch jrcouch60@yahoo.com
Stillwater (OKST)	N/A	N/A	Tim O'Connell tim.oconnell@okstate.edu

OKLAHOMA CITY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT AREA

