

## Whooping Crane

### Bird of the Month

by Grace Huffman

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This month, the arrival of a pair of Whooping Cranes at Drummond Flats caused quite a bit of excitement. Not only were they found there, they stayed around and even more came! As many as 12 have been seen up there, although the last report on eBird is March 25th. It was so exciting to finally get to see some of these birds, they have been a bit of a nemesis species for me.



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Whooping cranes are a conservation success story, coming back from around 21 individuals to over 660 in the wild as of 2019. There are multiple populations, 2 small non-migratory flocks in Louisiana and Florida, a small migratory flock that breeds in Wisconsin, and the largest (and only self-sustaining) flock that breeds in Canada and winters in Texas. This large population migrates through the western part of the state, but with around 500 birds in this population they are very difficult to find and cause a stir when they are reported.

Whooping Cranes are on very rare occasions reported within easy driving distance for me, but previously I've been unable to get to them or they didn't stay long enough. A trip to Salt Plains NWR this past fall was also unsuccessful. However, since at least a pair was hanging out at Drummond Flats, I had a shot. A mid-week excursion was planned rather last minute for after I got off work, and off we went. An initial pass through the middle of the Flats turned up nothing, so we went to the south side, and sure enough, there they were. I got a few shots good enough to tell what they were, and since a repositioning attempt didn't work, I thought that was all I was going to get. Boy was I wrong! Apparently while we were repositioning the cranes themselves repositioned, and they gave us a much better look. And then they began calling. It's such an incredibly wild sounding bugle!

Once they reach their breeding grounds in Canada, they will make a nest in shallow water out of vegetation that they've piled up and trampled down, sometimes on a small island with tall vegetation to hide the incubating parent. Young Whooping Cranes learn their migration route from their parents, so young birds in the eastern population are taught by following ultralight aircraft. Thankfully they are making a comeback, but intense conservation efforts are still needed to manage the population. For now, I consider myself extremely blessed to have seen those four giant white birds!

# President's Perspective

## Amazing Blackbirds

MARCH 11, 2021: This afternoon the blackbirds have overtaken my yard. Rough count, near 70-100 +, they fly in and out, up and down and all around. They literally attack all my 10 feeders simultaneously and all eat their fill.

Then up they go! They are a little noisy, but not consistent with their numbers.

There are Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, a few Great-tailed Grackles, Brown-headed Cowbirds, and European Starlings! No fighting! Just eating, walking around and then flying.

As they fly up the large black cloud moves with ease among the many trees and into the sky. Sometimes so tightly packed I imagine a crash. But none occurs. Then more loosely separated when in open sky they move like a single living thing.

They have been coming and going for well over an hour or two. I watch while standing behind only my screen door and hear them come and go. Now gone, I do hope they return as each and every one and all together they are a sight of living beauty.

*Hal A. Yocum*



## In-Person Meetings resume May 17!

Yes, after a very long year, and thanks to the dozens of members who indicated they were likely to attend, the Oklahoma City Audubon Society will resume in-person meetings on Monday, May 17 at 7 pm. Location: Will Rogers Garden Center—large room (plenty of room for social distancing). Nancy Vicars has reserved the large room for our May and June meetings.

Masks are required and no refreshments will be served.

## Upcoming Field Trip

Jimmy Woodard is going to lead a field trip to the Soldier Creek Industrial Park trails (in Midwest City) on **Wednesday April 7th**. We will meet at the SCIP parking lot at 8:30AM. The parking lot is at 7250 NE 23rd St.

For more information about the Soldier Creek Industrial Park trails, visit the [OKC Audubon Hot Spot Report](#).





# Great Horned Owls return to new nesting spot



Our own Terri Underhill is quite the “Owl Nut” (her car tag) and has hosted Barred and Great Horned Owls for several years in a nest (barrel) along the driveway of her 3-acre wooded lot in Edmond. During last October’s ice storm, the tree holding the barrel collapsed and totaled one vehicle (below) Not to be deterred, and not about to give up on owls, she climbed another oak tree and installed the barrel in a new location. Great Horned Owls found the nest and are now sitting on babies.



March 30, 2021. (above) The female Great Horned Owl takes care of her chicks in the barrel/nest.

Live streaming audio and video from Terri’s Great Horned Owl cam is available 24/7. Go to:

<https://okiebirdcam.com/owl-great-CAM.htm>

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## Mark your calendars to take part in one or more fun activities this spring.

*(contributed by Esther Key)*

Join the 2021 **Spring BioBlitz** OK at <https://biosurvey.ou.edu/bioblitzok/> and register for free. Observations can be recorded through iNaturalist, Budburst and/or eBird. Yes eBird. It is really easy. After registering with BioBlitz, all of your Oklahoma April eBird lists can be counted in the Bio Blitz by simply sharing each with “BioBlitz! OK.”

**OOS 2021 Spring Meeting** at Sequoyah State Park on April 16-18. <https://www.okbirds.org/events> .

First **Birdlam** April 17, 2021 see <https://paynecountyaudubonsociety.com/birdlam/> to register and learn about T-shirts, rules, prizes and various ways to participate in either Payne or Cleveland County.

The **Breeding Bird Survey** has several routes available <https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/RouteMap/Map.cfm#> .

Sign up for **Breeding Bird Atlas** blocks at <https://www.suttoncenter.org/research/ok-bird-atlases-surveys/second-oklahoma-breeding-bird-atlas/>.

## Study: Whooping Cranes steer clear of wind turbines

© *BirdWatching magazine*

Whooping Cranes migrating through the Great Plains avoid “rest stop” sites that are within 5 kilometers (3.1 miles) of wind-energy infrastructure, according to a study published March 7 in the journal *Ecological Applications*.

Avoidance of wind turbines can decrease collision mortality for birds, but it can also make it more difficult and time-consuming for migrating flocks to find safe and suitable rest and refueling locations. The study’s insights into migratory behavior could improve future siting decisions as wind energy infrastructure continues to expand.

“In the past, federal agencies had thought of impacts related to wind energy primarily associated with collision risks,” said Aaron Pearse, the paper’s first author and a research wildlife biologist for the U.S. Geological Survey’s Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center. “I think this research changes that paradigm to a greater focus on potential impacts to important migration habitats.”

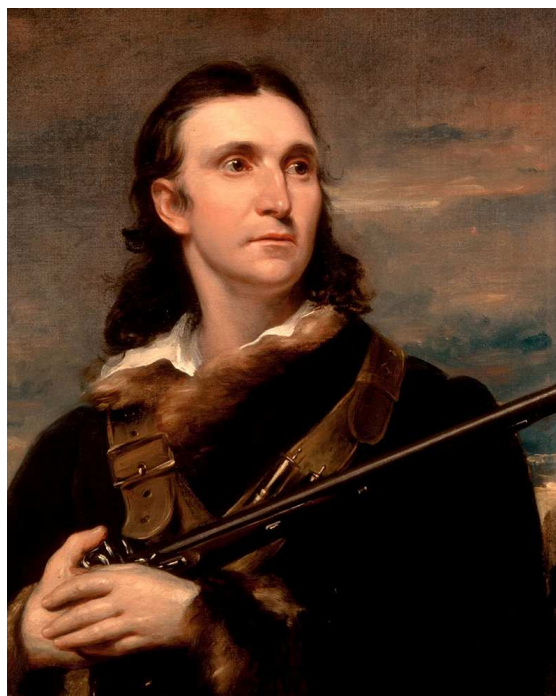
The study tracked Whooping Cranes migrating across the Great Plains, a region that encompasses a mosaic of croplands, grasslands, and wetlands. The region has seen a rapid proliferation of wind energy infrastructure in recent years. In 2010, 2,215 wind towers stood within the Whooping Crane migration corridor that the study focused on; by 2016, when the study ended, there were 7,622 wind towers within the same area.

Pearse and his colleagues note that the crane population continued to grow during the six-year study period, suggesting “no immediate population-level consequences.” However, they found that Whooping Cranes migrating across the study area in 2010 and 2016 were 20 times more likely to select “rest stop” locations at least 5 km away from wind turbines than those closer to turbines.

The authors estimated that 5 percent of high-quality stopover habitat in the study area was affected by the presence of wind towers. Siting wind infrastructure outside of Whooping Cranes’ migration corridor would reduce the risk of further habitat loss not only for the cranes but also for millions of other birds that use the same land for breeding, migration, and wintering habitat.

## What Do We Do About John James Audubon?

John James Audubon was a man of many identities: artist, naturalist, woodsman, adventurer, storyteller, myth maker. A now-legendary painter who traveled North America



in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, in an epic quest to document all of the continent’s avian life, he is above all known as a champion of birds.

Last summer, the Sierra Club denounced its first president, John Muir, as a racist unworthy of organizational adulation.

Muir is a founding father of the American wilderness movement; he also characterized Blacks as lazy “sambos” and Native Americans as “dirty.” The National Audubon Society followed suit, stating that Audubon, too, was a racist and a white supremacist (who played up his own physical “perfection.”) He enslaved at least nine people. He mostly referred to them as “servants” and “hands,” but never seemed especially concerned that the people helping him could be bought, sold, raped, whipped, or killed on a whim.

There have long been lingering questions about Audubon’s own racial identity. His birth in Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) to one of his father’s two mistresses on a sugar plantation suggests he may have shared some measure of African descent. The truth of that may be impossible to know for sure even now. The founding father of American birding soared on the wings of white privilege. The birding community and organizations that bear his name must grapple with this racist legacy to create a more just, inclusive world.

*Excerpts (Letter from the Editor, essays): Audubon Magazine, Spring 2021*



# Recorders Report

February 2021

Congratulations!! This year all 12 counties took part in the Great Backyard Bird Count in spite of the record-breaking storm that descended on us. And now there are 22 species reported in all 12 counties. Make a list of the bird species that you think were recorded and see how many you get correct.



Also check out all the fun activities happening this spring. What project can you do to help the birds while having fun?

On January 13<sup>th</sup> Rachel Overturff photographed **Red Crossbill** in Edmond; and on the 31<sup>st</sup> Curtis Stewart found Cedar Wax-

wings and Hairy Woodpecker at Bull Foot Park in Kingfisher County.

On February 1<sup>st</sup> Megan Miguez located Belted Kingfisher near Stroud in Lincoln County; D&D Norris photographed Ruby-crowned Kinglet at Kairworks Garden in Logan County; John Tharp discovered Lesser Goldfinch in Norman; Joshua Huling reported Pyrrhuloxia and Mountain Bluebird at Crystal Lake; and Joe Grzybowski tallied six species of gulls at Lake Overholser including Lesser Black-backed, California and Iceland Gulls. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> Jennifer Neugebauer added Red-tailed Hawk at Seminole State College. On the 4<sup>th</sup> Calvin Rees recognized Loggerhead Shrike and Northern Harrier west of Cashion in Kingfisher County.



On the 5<sup>th</sup> Calvin Rees photographed an Oregon Dark-eyed Junco at Lake Langston in Logan County; and Joe Grzybowski identified Wilson's Snipe in Ten Mile Flats in Cleveland County. On the 6<sup>th</sup> Braden Farris spotted Smith's Longspur around Fort Reno; and Mike Yough spotted Greater Yellowlegs at Ghost Hollow in Payne County. On the 7<sup>th</sup> Randolph King turned up Golden-crowned Kinglet at Wes Watkins Lake in Pottawatomie County; Landon Neumann described Black Scoter at Lake Carl Blackwell in Payne County; and Patti Muzny counted 35 to 45

Purple Finches at her feeder near Byars in McClain County. On the 9<sup>th</sup> Sharon Henthorn observed **Blue-winged Teal** at the Northeast Zoo Lake Park. On the 11<sup>th</sup> in Kingfisher County Curtis Hart recorded Snow Goose at Bison and Sandhill Crane at Okeene; while Sean Washington had Winter Wren and Spotted Towhee at Martin Park Nature Center in Oklahoma City.

## Great Backyard Bird Count February 12 – 15, 2021

On the 12<sup>th</sup> Manning Wilson came across White-crowned Sparrow and Pine Siskin at Paul's Valley in Garvin County; Martha Newman got Prairie Falcon at Meadow Sage Farm in Logan County; Braden Farris detected American Pipit at NW 63<sup>rd</sup> & Kilpatrick Turnpike in Canadian County; Rachel Wrenn and John Tharp recorded Common Goldeneye and Hooded Merganser at Lake Thunderbird—Alameda Drive Bridge in Cleveland County; and Leslie Miller photographed Purple Finch in Payne County. In McClain County Miranda Beatty encountered Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in Newcastle; and Jana McCord noticed Bewick's Wren and Purple Finch in Blanchard.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> Abigail Hobbs photographed Hermit Thrush, Purple Finch and Fox Sparrow at Bowlegs in Seminole



County; Megan Miguez viewed Hairy Woodpecker at Stroud in Lincoln County; Tracie Verkler saw Brewer's Blackbird at Kingfisher Park; Caleb McKinney confirmed Common Merganser and Ruddy Duck at the S-curved Pond in Grady County; and Zac Hemans verified Pied-billed Grebe and American White Pelican at Liberty Lake in Logan County. On the 14<sup>th</sup> Tanya Smity found Lincoln's Sparrow in Pottawatomie County; Angel Carter photographed **Yellow-headed Blackbird** in Blanchard in McClain County; and Matthew Adams identified American Tree Sparrow in Guthrie in Logan County.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> Melody Hobbs tallied White-breasted Nuthatch, Chipping Sparrow and White-throated Sparrow at Bowlegs; Logan Carter recognized Ruddy Duck and Greater White-fronted Goose at Shawnee; Larry Mays located Red-breasted Nuthatch at home in Newcastle;

Melissa Shackford added White-winged Dove in Logan County; Joe Grzybowski and Dick Gunn discovered American Kestrel along South Jenkins in Norman; NancicomN MollNancicomNM documented **Common**

**Redpoll** in Edmond in Oklahoma County; and Manning Wilson described a Purple Finch at Paul's Valley in Garvin County. Scott Loss spotted Glaucous Gull at Lake Carl Blackwell and reported the lake was mostly frozen, roads into the park were passable with past experience



driving on snow but the road out to ski point was covered with deep drifts and impassable; and he also reported several ice-bound dead or dying water birds. In spite of the severe winter weather storm over the weekend, birders were able to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count in all 12 Central Oklahoma Counties.

The new species seen in all 12 counties during February in addition to the American Crow and Canada Goose for January included Gadwall, Mallard, Ring-necked Duck, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Great Blue Heron, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, Carolina Chickadee, Northern Mockingbird, American Robin, American Goldfinch, Dark-eyed Junco, Harris's Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, Red-winged Blackbird, and Northern Cardinal. How many did you have on your list? Which ones will be added in March and April?

On the 16<sup>th</sup> in Logan County Natasha Sodowski came across Savannah Sparrow; Jeff Tibbits found Eastern Towhee; and Christie Stoops encountered Fox Sparrow at Cottonwood Creek. On the 17<sup>th</sup> Eric LoPresti had Trumpeter Swan at Boomer Lake Park in Stillwater; and Hal Yocum added Yellow-rumped and Orange Crowned Warblers as occasional visitors in Edmond. Along South Jenkins Dick Gunn described the snow as still 8 to 10 inches deep, soft and fluffy. The creek was one of the warmer and unfrozen bodies of water and was holding hundreds of ducks. On the 18<sup>th</sup> Allen Codding documented **Trumpeter Swan** and **Tundra Swan** at the J-M Ranch Lake in Oklahoma County.



On the 19<sup>th</sup> Joe Grzybowski detected Savannah Sparrow, Lapland Longspur and Western Meadowlark along Ladd Road in McClain County; while John

Sterling drove around the country roads in the Washita River Valley where he located over 100 Lapland Longspurs in small flocks as well as some Horned Larks and Bald Eagle. Dick Gunn reported it was still cold with no melting yet crunchy snow along South Jenkins and lots of ducks on the creek, some Wilson's Snipe, Greater Yellowlegs, a couple of Carolina Wrens and Pileated Woodpecker. On the 20<sup>th</sup> Randolph King confirmed Ross's Goose north of Piedmont in Kingfisher County; Les Calger photographed Northern Shoveler at Shannon Springs Park in Grady County; and Aaron Milligan identified Northern Bobwhite and Greater Roadrunner in Pottawatomie County.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> Nathan Moses counted Northern Shoveler and Killdeer at Liberty Lake; the OU Ornithology Class and John Muller got Song Sparrow and Hairy Woodpecker along South Jenkins; Mike Yough noticed **Evening Grosbeak** at home in Stillwater; and Jacob Crissup observed **Glaucous Gull** at Lake Hefner. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> Rosario Douglas recorded Ross's goose at Washington in McClain County; and Zach



DuFran turned up Green-winged Teal and Pileated Woodpecker along South Jenkins. On the 24<sup>th</sup> Landon Neumann spotted **Fish Crow** at Windrock Creek in Stillwater; and Hollis Price had a quick encounter with two Pyrrhuloxia in her yard in Jones. On the 26<sup>th</sup> Mary & Lou Truex lo-

cated Glaucous Gull at Lake Overholser; and Hal Yocum observed Turkey Vultures and a surprise Black Vulture cruising over Mitch Park. On the 27<sup>th</sup> Braden Farris reported Glaucous Gull and **Purple Martin** at Lake Hefner—Prairie Dog Point.

In the Central Oklahoma area during February, **154** species were reported with **9** new species which brings the year's total to **168**. I appreciate those who help provide the history of central Oklahoma birds. Information is accessed at: [ebird](http://ebird.org). 2021 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: February 27 & 28, 2021); occasionally from Facebook, and the OKBIRDS List. I can be contacted at [emkok@earthlink.net](mailto:emkok@earthlink.net). Esther M. Key, Editor.



## Three species added to ABA checklist

### Hooded Crane (*Grus monacha*)



*Hooded Crane. February 10, 2012, Greene County IN. © Greg Neise*

A Hooded Crane was shot by a hunter in the Delta Junction area of Alaska in September 2020. The Alaska records committee accepted the record, and the ABA Checklist Committee followed suit.

### Northern Giant-Petrel (*Macronectes halli*)



*Northern Giant-Petrel in offshore Pacific Co, Washington waters. 6 Dec 2019. Photo © Zed Blue.*

### Mitred Parakeet (*Psittacara mitratus*)



*Mitred Parakeets in Miami, Florida. 24 April 2011. Photo © Gregory Smith.*

This species was added to the ABA Checklist following a similar action of the Florida records committee.