

## Tall Tales

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

*The Oklahoma City Audubon Society welcomes:*

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**Telling "Tall Bird Tales" will again highlight our annual December meeting on December 20, accompanied by holiday culinary delights and camaraderie.**

Bring yourselves and your anecdotes and yarns to regale fellow members with your wonderful, beautiful, harrowing or death defying birding experiences.

Great birds have shown up in Oklahoma this past year and some truly great birders have had truly great times with those and many other birds. Come out for the fun and friendship and sharing. A good time will be had by all.

We gather in the round to relate a birding story or other personal event of interest and/or humor for the entire group.

So, get your story straight, true or otherwise, and regale us on Monday night, December 20.

**Refreshments:** Everyone is encouraged to bring something to share.

Our meetings are held September through June on the third Monday of each month (with the exception of January, when the meeting is held on the third Tuesday). 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. The Oklahoma City Audubon Society is neither a chapter of, nor affiliated with, the National Audubon Society.



*The Golden Pheasant is undoubtedly one of the most colorful birds on the planet. It is the male which is blessed with a golden yellow crest, a scarlet red breast and a mix of rust and cobalt blue tail.*

**NOTICE:** Due to scheduling conflicts at the Will Rogers Garden Center, the January meeting, usually held on the 4th Monday, will now be held on the third TUESDAY (January 18) in 2022.

# President's Perspective

## Two Years and Counting

This is my last time to write a column. As I mentioned last month, for December's meeting I plan to bring 3-4 books of reproductions of the three great early painters of the Birds of America: Audubon, Wilson and Catesby. You will have a chance to see how each of these early painters rendered their birds. You can compare paintings of the same bird by each of them.

One amazing thing that they shared was that all three of them were "self taught" artists - no training what so ever! I'll have several species tagged in their respective works for easy comparison.

I did make one unusual discovery related to Alexander Wilson. He became friends with William Bartram in South Philadelphia and often worked and studied at Bartram's home there. Today that property in south Philadelphia is known as Bartram Gardens and is a city park and event center. The original property and stone house was built by a Swedish Colonial soldier/ farmer in the New Sweden colony in the early 1650s as a tobacco farm after he ended his indentured servitude.

That Swedish soldier/farmer was Peter (Petir) Jochimsson (later Jochim/ Yochim/ Yocum) and is my 13th generation back GRANDFATHER. He arrived in the New Sweden Colony in 1643. I have been to visit the Park in Philadelphia as part of doing the genealogy of my father's family in the 1980s. Indeed a small world!

I hope that you enjoy the great paintings.

Finally I want to thank any and all the members of our bird club for your help in making my two Covid years as President a great memory.

—Hal A. Yocum



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## Connect to Birds, to Nature, and with Each Other

***Birds are everywhere, all the time, doing fascinating things.***

The 25th annual Great Backyard Bird Count will be held **Friday, February 18, through Monday, February 21, 2022**. Please visit the official website at [birdcount.org](https://birdcount.org) for more information and be sure to check out the latest [educational and promotional resources](#).

The GBBC uses eBird, one of the world's largest nature databases. It stores more than 100 million bird sightings contributed each year and is used by professionals for science and conservation. Contribute to eBird and become a citizen scientist.

**New to the Great Backyard Bird Count or to using eBird?** Explore our [How to Participate](#) on options for entering your bird lists.





## Bird of the Month - LeConte's Sparrow

*By Grace Huffman*

Fall and winter are the best times for viewing sparrows, and while I wrote about sparrows last month, a couple of recent encounters inspired me to write about another sparrow this month. While White-crowned Sparrows are fairly common and easy to find, LeConte's Sparrows can be a challenge. It's definitely worth the effort sometimes required to see one!

LeConte's Sparrows are beautiful little birds, with lots of golden & orange tones. They have high, scratchy songs and their calls are also high & sharp. They spend much of their time on or near the ground, and like to run instead of fly away from danger. And that beautiful plumage? It helps keep them camouflaged and adds to the challenge of finding them.

These sparrows breed in northern US & central Canada, where they build a nest only about a foot off the ground in dead grasses. They are believed to be generally monogamous, although it's not known how often the birds in a given pair may mate with others. If there's suitable habitat, nests may be found in closer proximity to each other. Interestingly enough, AllAboutBirds doesn't include incubation or fledgling times, but they do lay 4-5 eggs in a clutch.

In the winter, they can be found in fields with or near a body of water, and while they also maintain a winter territory, it's much smaller than in the summer. You can find wintering LeConte's from Missouri down to the Gulf Coast. Here in Oklahoma you can find them in migration and/or winter across much of the state. My very first LeConte's Sparrow was during an OKC Audubon field trip to the Wichita Mountains led by Kurt Meisenzahl a few years ago. We all walked through a field of high grass until we flushed a bird that didn't go very far before going right back down into the grass. Sure enough, there was the orange face of a LeConte's! Where walking through fields is permitted, this is a great way to find them. This year I've seen one at Drummond Flats, and a surprising 5 in a field south of Lake Overholser! Unfortunately, the spot near Overholser won't last, as it's being developed into what looks like apartments.



Le Conte's Sparrow © Grace Huffman

Habitat loss and degradation are the main reasons these birds are in decline. While currently listed as Least Concern, they lost 73% of their population between 1966 & 2015, and if the current rate of decline continues they will likely lose another 50% of the current population in under 40 years. Still, hopefully the next time you are out somewhere like Drummond Flats or Wichita Mountains this winter, you'll get to see one of these gorgeous sparrows! (References: [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org))

# Chirpings

December 2021

**By Patti Muzny**

I'm finding that time seems to be flying past me at an unusually high rate of speed at this point in my life and all of a sudden another year is behind me and it's time for another Christmas Bird Count. How can that be?

Christmas already!? Our OKC Audubon Society's CBC will be held on Saturday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, whether I'm ready or not.

Brian and I have been participating in Christmas Counts for the past 45+ years and have had some fascinating experiences and learned that indeed the birds don't read the books! Consider participating in either Oklahoma City's CBC, or some of the many other counts throughout the state. You may find a Snowy Owl in your territory. Sometimes you may find a Northern Shrike, or a Bald Eagle, or a diminutive Winter Wren, or a rare Pyrrhuloxia. The weather can sometimes be a challenge, but the rewards can be astonishing. So consider going out on December 18<sup>th</sup> and enjoy some winter birding.

The birds in our OKC back yard are coming to my safflower/black oil sunflower, although everything seems to be very late. Not long ago I found a grasshopper in the flower beds and the aphids that insist on feeding on my milkweed plants (which are still alive and growing).

Speaking of milkweed...my Hairy Balls, a.k.a. Balloon Plant, Giant Swan Milkweed. Latin Name: Gompho-



Hairy Balls Milkweed

carpus physocarpus, was responsible for giving life to 23-25 monarch butterflies, and provided Nancy Vicars' caterpillars with enough food to "fledge" quite a few more. My butterfly cage was on the dining room table and I kept hovering and hoping I would actually see the butterfly emerge from the chrysalis, but on the very last one, I left the room for just a couple of minutes and when I returned, the deed had been done and I found a newly emerged butterfly with its wings still crumpled. It quickly relaxed and hung on the chrysalis until dry. What an amazing process!

Then, I began to hover over the seed pods that usually dry and split in late summer so I could harvest seeds. I hovered and hovered and the plants had lots of pods, but were reluctant to dry and split. I am a member of the internet group, "Oklahoma Gardening Community," on Facebook and learned from my fellow gardeners and Bustani Plant Farm that the hot, dry late summer caused late seed development. I learned to tap into a little bit more patience and before long the pods did mature, turn brown and began to split. Now I have enough seeds to share and share and share. I also learned that these seeds need to experience cold in order to germinate. They can be stored in either a cellar below ground or in the refrigerator. I've attempted to start these seeds inside in the past and it just didn't happen for me. But, they would come up in the flowerbeds where they went through the winter in the ground without my hovering.

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## In Loving Memory

### Feodora DeGrasse Steward

**JULY 16, 1928 – OCTOBER 18, 2021**

Feodora Steward was a long time member of the OKC Audubon Society and a widely-traveled birder. She passed away at age 93 on Monday, October 18, after suffering a stroke.

In addition to her birding (and many other) achievements, Feodora was a long-time member of the

Oklahoma City music community. She was 2nd flute/piccoloist with the Oklahoma City Symphony, the Oklahoma Symphony and the Oklahoma City Philharmonic. Throughout her many years, she was the flute professor at several area colleges, including UCO, SNU, OCU and OU.





# Recorder's Report: November 2021

November was a warm, dry month as the winter birds began arriving. Unusual swimmers were spotted on area lakes and the Longspurs were discovered. As the shorebirds leave, winter gulls are arriving. With the nice weather many birders are out enjoying the changing bird populations.

On October 30<sup>th</sup> Mike Yough came across Lesser Goldfinch at Cushing WTP in Payne County. On November 2<sup>nd</sup> Zac

Hemans spotted Osprey at Liberty Lake in Logan County; Alex Franzen noticed Barred Owl at Ruby Grant Park in Cleveland County; Scott Loss identified Horned Grebe, Pine Warbler and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at Lake Carl Blackwell in Payne County; and Bill Diffin had Prairie Falcon at Bethany-Warr Acres WTP. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> Steve Davis photographed Least Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe and White-crowned Sparrow at



Barred Owl

Rose Lake in Canadian County. On the 4<sup>th</sup> Joe Grzybowski saw Cedar Waxwing in Norman. On the 5<sup>th</sup> J Braun viewed Black Vulture at Macomb in Seminole County.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> Amanda Boyle detected Barred Owl at Wewoka in Pottawatomie County; Braden Farris noticed Vesper Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow and Spotted Towhee at Prairie Prime Ranch in Logan County; Brian Marra and Grace Huffman observed Winter Wren, Pine Siskin, American Pipit, and Eastern Towhee at Stinchcomb WR



Eared Grebe

West; Joe Grzybowski recorded Brown Creeper in Norman;

and Stephen Ofsthun found Red-breasted Merganser at Lake Thunderbird – Little River Marina. On the 7<sup>th</sup> Rondi Large discovered Wood Duck at Hickory Hollow in Pottawatomie County; and Trina Arnold had Eared Grebe at Route 66 Park – at Lake Overholser.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> Megan Miguez got Eastern Bluebird at Stroud in Lincoln County. On the 9<sup>th</sup> Bill Diffin confirmed Sandhill Crane and Greater Scaup at Okarche Ponds in Kingfisher County; and Caleb McKinney added Sandhill Crane at Ninnekah in Grady County. On the 11<sup>th</sup> Scott Loss documented Black Scoter at Lake Carl Blackwell in Payne County; Megan

Miguez counted Herring Gull at Boomer Lake Park in Stillwater; and Braden Farris described White-winged Scoter at Lake Hefner. On the 12<sup>th</sup> Grace Huffman, Brian Marra and Eliz-

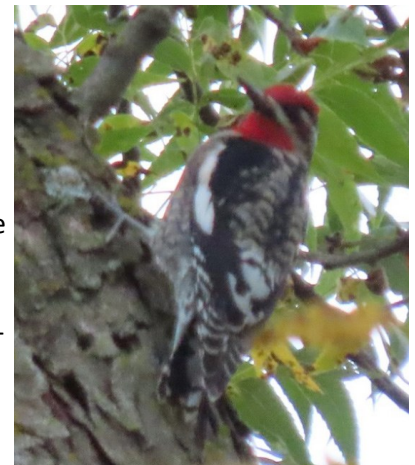


White-winged Scoter

abeth Hacker encountered Pied-billed Grebe, Chipping Sparrow and Yellow-rumped Warbler at Taylor Lake in Grady County; and Scott Loss located Lapland Longspur at Boomer Lake Park. On the 13<sup>th</sup> Mike Yough recognized Prairie Falcon at Orlando in Logan County; and Zac Hemans reported Redhead and Hooded Merganser at Seward Pond in Logan County.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> Mike Yough tallied Sora Rail and Rusty Blackbird at Cushing WTP in Payne County. On the 15<sup>th</sup> Grace Huffman and Brian Marra verified Sora Rail at Dover Marsh in Kingfisher County; and Bill Diffin detected Laughing Gull at Lake Hefner. On the 17<sup>th</sup> Larry Mays counted Greater Roadrunner, Northern Flicker and Bewick's Wren at Newcastle in McClain County; and Scott Loss re-

found what appears to be the same Red-naped Sapsucker at the OSU Botanical Garden. On the 18<sup>th</sup> Cody Delano came across Ferruginous Hawk at Ten Mile Flats in Cleveland County; Megan Miguez spotted Merlin at Cushing in Lincoln County; and Jimmy Woodward led an OKC Audubon filed trip to Eagle Lake in Del City with 13 participants and reported White-throated Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow and Greater Yellowlegs.



Red-naped Sapsucker ©Scott Loss

On the 19<sup>th</sup> D&D Norris identified Pine Warbler and Red-breasted Nuthatch at Kairworks Garden in Logan County; and Sharon Henthorn had Redhead, Bufflehead and

Ruddy Duck at the Zoo Lake in OKC. On the 20<sup>th</sup> Joe Grzybowski saw in Kingfisher County Ross's Goose at Okarche Pond, Swamp Sparrow at Dover Marsh; and at Canadian County El Reno Sewage Lagoons Rusty Blackbird; while Braden Farris detected Smith's Longspur and Golden-crowned Kinglet at Prairie Prime Ranch. On the 21<sup>st</sup> Braden Farris viewed Horned Lark at Cashion in Logan County and in Kingfisher County Brewer's Blackbird and Common Yellowthroat at Dover Marsh and Virginia Rail and Marsh Wren at N2890 Rd Marsh. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> Scott Loss noticed Smith's Longspur along West Richmond Road in Payne County.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> Scott Loss observed LeConte's Sparrow at Lake Carl Blackwell. On the 24<sup>th</sup> at Lake Hefner Brian Marra recorded California Gull; and Matt Jung found a mixed flock of Lesser Scaup and Horned Grebe at Prairie Dog Point. On the 25<sup>th</sup> Steve Stone had Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrow and Sharp-shinned Hawk at Lindsay in Garvin County; Rosario Douglas encountered Hermit Thrush at George M. Sutton Wilderness Park in Norman; and Nathan Moses had Pacific Loon at Lake Hefner northwest of the lighthouse. On the 26<sup>th</sup> Trina Arnold got Bald Eagle at Paul's Valley Lake in Garvin County; Braden Farris discovered Purple Finch, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and Hairy Woodpecker at Prairie Prime Ranch; while Geoff Butcher confirmed White-winged Scoter at Lake Overholser.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> Jason Shaw added Northern Harrier and Belted Kingfisher at USAO Habitat Area in Grady County; Trina Arnold counted Loggerhead Shrike at Bull Foot Park in Hennessey in Kingfisher County; and Bill Diffin located Bonaparte's Gull at Lake Overholser. On the 28<sup>th</sup> Grace Huffman and Brian Marra recog-



Ring-necked Pheasant

ized American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, and Cackling Goose at a pond at US-77 & E0590 Rd in Logan County; Kate Burger reported Pileated Woodpecker in Norman; Brent Barnes tallied Lesser Goldfinch

at his feeder in OKC; and Joe

On the 30<sup>th</sup> Brian Marra photographed **Northern Shrike** at Crystal Lake in OKC. Now is the time to start scouting out areas for the December Christmas Bird Counts.



Northern Shrike

In the Central Oklahoma area during November **153** species were reported with **2** new species which brings the year's total at **310**. 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). 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 November 29 & 30, 2021); occasionally from Facebook, and the OKBIRDS List. I can be contacted at [emkok@earthlink.net](mailto:emkok@earthlink.net). Esther M. Key, Editor.

## World's oldest known wild bird turns 70 and returns to Midway Atoll

Entering her eighth known decade at Midway Atoll, Wisdom, a mōlī (Laysan albatross) and the oldest known banded wild bird has returned to her winter home at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and Battle of Midway National Memorial. This year, the first observation of Wisdom at her nest site took place on November 26 — only a day sooner than her arrival date last year.

Wisdom and her mate, Akeakamai, like most pairs of albatrosses, return nearly every year to the same nest site — a behavior known as nest site fidelity.

"There have been no observations of Akeakamai this year and no evidence of a nest cup; so it is unlikely that they will nest this year," said Jon Plissner, Wildlife Biologist at Midway Atoll.

It is normal for albatrosses take a year off from parenting between chicks.

The last sighting of Wisdom around her nest cup was December 5. It is most likely that she has returned to sea.



# Minutes of the Oklahoma City Audubon Society Meeting

November 15, 2021

The meeting was opened at 7:00 PM at the Will Rogers Garden Center by Vice-president Grace Huffman. Treasurer Nancy Vicars presented a treasurer's report and distributed copies. Cash on hand as of November 15, 2021, was \$8,285.36. The minutes of the October 18, 2021, meeting were approved as published in the November newsletter.

The next meeting will be held at the Will Rogers Garden Center on December 20, 2021, at 7:00 PM.

Visitors were recognized and Jimmy Woodard reported that Bob Holbrook is the sole candidate for President. Hal Yocum did not seek reelection. All other officers have agreed to serve another term in their current assignments. Formal voting is scheduled for the December meeting.

Refreshments for the December meeting will be potluck. Members are encouraged to bring their favorite snack to share. Sue Woodson asked members to consider volunteering to provide refreshments for future meetings.

Jimmy Woodard invited members to attend a field trip to Eagle Lake in Del City on Thursday morning.

At Drummond Flats, Ring-necked Pheasants, Sage Thrasher, Northern Shrike and Rough-legged Hawk have been observed. Dover Marsh has attracted a good number of ducks.

Grace Huffman reported a King Rail and American Bittern at Hackberry Flat, and Five Sora Rails and three Virginia Rails at the Dover Marsh.

Members were reminded of the upcoming Christmas count on December 18, 2021.

Meeting time for the January meeting will be the third Tuesday, not the third Monday, due to the holiday.

The January program will be presented by Doug Wood and February will feature a program by Jay Pruett on a trip to India.

Nancy Vicars introduced our own OKC Audubon member Jerry Vanbebber, who presented another interesting and enlightening program featuring High Island, TX. The meeting was adjourned by Vice-president, Grace Huffman.

Respectfully submitted,

Patti Muzny  
Secretary

## Random thoughts concerning birds

***It's officially OK to feed the birds.***

Mostly in the Eastern part of the US there was a mysterious illness which gave birds eye and neurological issues. I have seen birds in my yard suffering on occasion over the past few years. This year it was out of control. They tested for everything. Viruses....pesticides...heavy metals. Nothing. But now it has disappeared like it came. Suddenly. Now they say its safe to put out your feeders again. At last some good news!



***Some birds have learned to fake a murder scene to keep others away from their nests.*** From the University of Oslo comes the news that blue tits began laying feathers on top of their nests rather than weaving them into the sides for insulation. Tits, flycatchers, and swallows entered featherless boxes immediately-but when they see the nests with the feathers they stopped and spent up to an hour scoping out the joint, looking for predators. Most eventually went in but the delay would be long enough for a nest owner to return and scare off the intruder. The feathers seemed to create a sense of fear in would-be intruders: "Something bad happened in this place. I should not go in." (continued next page)

# The 'Kill Bill Tanager,' a Species New to Science, Finally Has a Real Name



Researchers have discovered a new species of tanager, from the foothills of the Andes mountains in Peru and Bolivia, which is now named the Inti Tanager. The name “Inti” is the Quechua (a language indigenous to the region) word that means “sun,” referring to the bright yellow color of the bird.

Someone pointed out that its colorful plumage suggested Uma Thurman’s bright yellow jumpsuit in the 2003 Quentin Tarantino flick *Kill Bill: Volume One*, leading to an irreverent nickname: the ‘Kill Bill Tanager.’

Unlike most new bird species discovered recently, which typically differ only subtly from their closest relatives, this species is so different in appearance and genetics that they also described a new genus just for it.

The tanager family, to which the new species belongs, is one of the largest bird families in the world (with about 377 species), restricted almost entirely to the American tropics and including many beautifully colorful species.

Researchers uncovered a surprising piece of natural history about the Inti Tanager: it migrates from its breeding grounds in a little-explored valley in Bolivia to “winter” along the lower slopes of the Andes in Peru. Such migration within the tropics is rare within the tanagers.

That this unique, bright yellow bird could have gone unnoticed by ornithologists until recently attests to the remoteness of the areas where it lives and to the importance of continued biological surveys off-the-grid in South America.

## Random Thoughts, cont.

### ***Which birds are the biggest jerks at the feeder?***

From the Cornell Lab of Ornithology comes the results of 100,000 bird interactions and the decoded pecking order. Wild turkeys are at the top....the brown creeper is at the bottom.

Northern mockingbirds and red-bellied woodpeckers are pugnacious for their size, but both give way if an American Crow shows up. Hummingbirds punch above their weight, while the pileated woodpecker who resembles a pterodactyl is actually docile for its size.

Among the most common feeder visitors the American Crow is king, while tiny chickadees get pushed around by everybody. Mourning doves outweigh many rivals but are relatively peaceful. Goldfinches love to squabble but are limited by their size. Woodpeckers punch above their weight because they spend their lives hammering on trees. Another bird is not really an issue for them.

The database didn’t include interactions beyond the bird world. But if it had, experts say the data would have revealed the true king of the bird feeders: squirrels.

You can join in and report your findings at [feederwatch.org](http://feederwatch.org).

### ***There is an organization that goofs on conspiracy theories. It’s called Birds Aren’t Real.***

They claim birds don’t really exist and they are all drones replicas installed by the US government to spy on Americans. They charge themselves by sitting on wires. It’s Generation Zs attempt to upend the rabbit hole with absurdism. They put up billboards and show up at rallies and stage their own. It was created in Jan 2017. Peter McIndoe, 23, a college drop out is the founder. It’s all about holding up a mirror to America in the internet age. He stays in character to rage against those who challenge his dogma. You can read all about it in Dec. 9th NYTimes.

Merry Christmas!

—Ann