

Oxymoron Birding

(Birding High Island, a place that's neither high nor an island!)

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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:

Patricia M. Rickey, OKC

For up-to-date Oklahoma City Audubon news visit:
OKC-Audubon.org

Jerry Vanbebber will present the program at the November 15, 2021 meeting of the Oklahoma City Audubon Society.

"In April of 2021, Larry Mays, Jacob Crissup, and I took a 5-day birding trip to High Island in South Texas with a couple of detours on the way home.

High Island is a migratory hotspot and as usual, it did not disappoint. I'll be sharing images from our trip as well as a few stories. At the end of the image presentation, I'd also like to answer any bird photography questions you might have. These can be equipment questions, technique questions, or anything you feel like asking. The more interactive, the better, so come with lots of questions if you have an interest in bird photography.



Having been a photographer for over 40 years, and a birder for 17 years, a few years back I decided I should probably merge two of my favorite hobbies into one. Little did I know how rewarding and frustrating that decision would be.

I've birded from the Southern most spot in the US, the Dry Tortugas off the coast of Key West, Florida, to Nome Alaska with OCAS members. From Southern California to the UP of Michigan and many parts in between. I wish I had photographed all the birds I saw, but didn't begin actually photographing birds seriously until 2016.

I've gone through a lot of photography equipment along the way, buying and selling cameras, lenses, changing manufactures and formats. Hopefully I can save some of you the same mistakes I've made along the way."

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.

President's Perspective

Preview of December

In the last couple years I have become interested in the early American bird artist(s). Note that I used artists as plural. Most of us have heard and read about John James Audubon and the credit to him as being the "first" great painter of the birds of America. So I started there and read a biography of Audubon (*John James Audubon*, by Richard Rhodes). Like the very old saying "The more you know you find out what you don't know." It is a very interesting book and details Audubon's life and his subsequent absolute fascination with the birds that he saw when he came to Pennsylvania (near Philadelphia) in the early 1800s. I quickly learned that his father sent him there to a property that he owned, most likely to avoid the young Audubon being forced to serve in Napoleon's armies in France.

It did not take long to find out about another slightly earlier painter of American bird life named Alexander Wilson. In fact they actually met each other in Kentucky on one of Wilson's trips to the American frontier along the Ohio River where Audubon was involved in a business. They even compared some of each other's drawings and paintings. Wilson was nearly finished with his work titled *American Ornithology*. Audubon had yet to begin, but he was already drawing birds.

Once I learned about Wilson's work I investigated that as well. There are books on his life- but I had never seen nor heard of them. There were certainly a number of birds species named Wilson's this or that- no details. Reading about Wilson's work lead me to the mention of Mark Catesby and his bird drawings and paintings of one hundred years earlier, titled *Birds of Colonial America*.

Alexander Wilson's and Mark Catesby's works have also been preserved and reproduced. I obtained both the books from the same place we get everything these days - AMAZON!

With short preview of December (my final month as President) and with the open program that we usually have in December I will bring the books for all to see including two reprints of all of Audubon's plates. One is organized as Audubon did the plates and published them. The other organized in the manner of our current bird guides (taxonomic order). I will also have the books on Wilson's and Catesby's work there.

Birds of America, by John James Audubon (published between 1827- 38)

American Ornithology, by Alexander Wilson (published between 1808-1814)

Birds of Colonial America, by Mark Catesby (published in the late 1700's)

I find these works amazingly interesting , and enlightening . I expect that you will as well.

—Hal A. Yocum



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.



Bird of the Month - Harris's Sparrow

By Grace Huffman

I love the return of the cold weather in the fall. One of my favorite birds to return this time of year is the Harris's Sparrows. I had my first ones of the fall/winter season at the end of October and now it seems like they are everywhere!

Harris's Sparrows are some of the largest sparrows outside of towhees (which I also love). They breed in northern Canada

and their winter range is centered around Kansas and Oklahoma. Despite a limited normal range, they have a tendency to occasionally wander and they've shown up in every state in the lower 48. Harris's Sparrows have slight changes to their breeding & non-breeding plumages. Breeding Harris's sparrows have a gray head with a strong black bib. When we see them in the wintertime, they have a buffy face and the bib may have some white in it. If you take the time to watch a flock of them, you might notice that some of them have a larger bib than others. Those that have the larger bibs are older, and are able to command the best food and roosting sites.

Female Harris's Sparrows build a nest on the ground under short trees like dwarf alder. Once she's built her cup nest, she'll lay 3-5 eggs and incubate them for up to 2 weeks, and then the babies grow rapidly, in about a week to a week and a half. They are the only North American songbird to breed in Canada and nowhere else, and their nests weren't formally described until George Sutton did so in 1931.



Harris's Sparrow © Grace Huffman

Named by John James Audubon for his friend Edward Harris, he was unaware that Thomas Nuttall had already named it Mourning Finch. Harris's Sparrow is the name that stuck however, and if you want to attract these beautiful sparrows to your yard, they like food such as black oil sunflower seeds & millet.

While they still seem very common here in the winter, Harris's Sparrows have declined 63% from 1970-2014. Habitat loss in both their breeding and wintering grounds are the biggest problems since they have a fairly limited range. Climate change may also be a factor. Thankfully they are currently not hard to find, and you can hear them calling when you go for a walk or even from your backyard feeders!

(Information credit to allaboutbirds.org)

Christmas Bird Count

Dear CBC Party leaders
and their teammates:

This year's CBC will be held on **Saturday, December 18, 2021**. I will be attending the November 15th OKC Audubon meeting if you want to attend and confirm your participation and territory and that includes first-time counters. You can also email me at nrkuhnert@gmail.com and if I don't hear from our long-time counters, I will be doing my best to contact you.

The official CBC checklist (mandatory) for the count leaders is available as a printable/downloadable file. Go to <https://okc-audubon.org/2020-christmas-bird-count/>. 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.

As I mentioned last year, 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. Please see the newsletter article - <https://okc-audubon.org/2020-christmas-bird-count/> for last year's CBC. We (20 count teams and 45 participants) tallied 118 species on December 19th with the Mountain Bluebird being the highlight of the day.

We will not be gathering again this year for a compilation dinner but we will find a way to share results and stories at a future Audubon club meeting. Lastly, please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Nathan Kuhnert
405.496.2077



Field Trip Report: Great Salt Plains Wildlife Refuge Saturday, November 6, 2021 by Nancy Vicars

On Thursday afternoon, November 4th I received a call from the assistant refuge manager of sightings of 7 Whooping Cranes arrival at the refuge!

The Whoopers were seen on Friday by several birders but were nowhere to be found on Saturday!! Alas, it was not to be!! None the less we had a marvelous time watching and listening to the great flocks of Sandhill Cranes.

American White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, American Avocets, Mallard, Ruddy Ducks, Long-billed Dowitchers and Bald Eagle were seen from the Eagle Roost observation tower. Walking along the nature trail added Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Red and White-breasted Nuthatches, Carolina Chickadee, Blue Jay, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Carolina Wren, Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers.

After our picnic lunch we tried again by scanning the west side of the reservoir then driving the south and west perimeter roads to the Crystal Digging area. No Whoopers could be found!!

We stopped by Drummond Flats Wildlife Management area and found a pair of Ring-necked Pheasants, Western Meadowlark, Savannah Sparrow, Killdeer and Least Sandpipers. There was a post on OKBirds the next day that two birders had found an immature Northern Shrike and a Sage Thrasher on Saturday. Drat!!!

The Dover marsh is located just north of the town of Dover on Hwy. 81 so we decided to take a look before sundown. Wow, it was covered with waterfowl and a beautiful mature Bald Eagle was perched on the south shoreline. Just at sundown, a group of eight dark Ibis flew in to settle on the cattails for the night. They were a total surprise due to this late date.

We decided to celebrate our fun day by eating a fried chicken dinner at Eischen's Bar in Okarche.

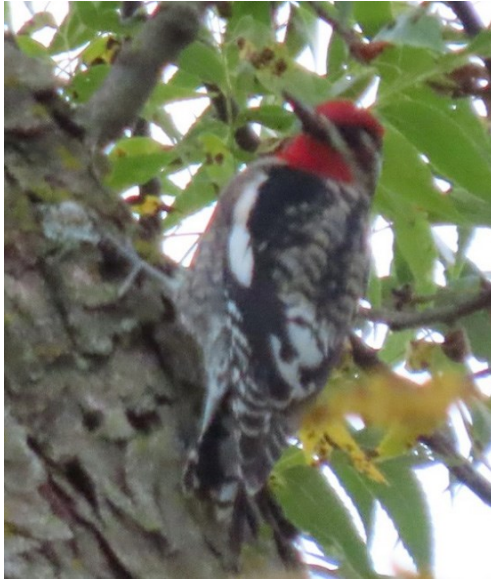
My birding friends were Nancy Reed, Mary Lane, Steve Davis, Pete Austin, John Eagleston, Cathy Chernausek and Jane Boren.

Recorder's Report:

October 2021

Migration is in full swing this month as the days get shorter and cooler weather arrives. Several exciting bird parties developed this month as new species and rarely seen species visited central Oklahoma. Several birders observed groups of birds as they gathered for migration. And then the month ended with sightings of some possible exciting winter bird species.

On the 1st Scott Loss had a well-documented **Red-naped Sapsucker** at The OSU Botanic Garden; and Bill Diffin described **Common Tern** and Laughing Gull at



Red-naped Sapsucker ©Scott Loss

Lake Hefner – Water Treatment Ponds north of the dam. Steve Davis spotted Northern Parula and Wilson's Warbler along the Mustang Road Playas in Canadian County; and Megan Migues watched a Painted Bunting along with a Common Yellowthroat and some sparrows eating seeds, plus 8 American Kestrels sitting on a power line at Stroud in Lincoln County. In Oklahoma County Mike Hudson and Ashley Dudek found Lesser Black-backed Gull at Lake Overholser – Coffey Dam; and Jimmy Woodard saw Peregrine Falcon in Midwest City; while at Rose Lake in Canadian County Deanne McKinney photographed one of 2 Sora seen and heard another one.



Sora © Deanne McKinney

On the 2nd in Norman Mark Howery encountered Brown Thrasher, Orange-crowned Warbler and Nashville Warbler; Alex Franzen added Lincoln Sparrow; and at John H Saxon

Park Jacob Kirkland recognized 30 Chimney Swift. Vonceil Harmon located Greater Roadrunner, Cattle Egret and Loggerhead Shrike at Tecumseh in Pottawatomie County; Steve Stone photographed about 140 Great Egrets at Rose Lake; and Marion Homier detected Dark-eyed Junco and White-throated Sparrow at Choctaw in Oklahoma County. On the 3rd Seth Kastner counted 28 Swainson's Hawks at Oakland-Knowles Cemetery at Crescent in Logan County; and Mark Howery reported 93 Scissor-tailed Flycatchers at the Merkle Creek Fall Roost in Norman which have been observed there since the late 1960's.

On the 4th Rod Lusey came across American Bittern at Arcadia Lake – Edmond Park; Scott Loss confirmed White-crowned Sparrow at OSU-Cross Country Course. On the 5th Rondi Large had Wood Duck, and Belted Kingfisher at Wewoka Lake in Seminole County; and Hal Yocum discovered Spotted Towhees at Mitch Park in Edmond. At the Audubon Field Trip to Mollie Spencer Farm in Canadian County Steve Davis photographed Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Northern Flicker and Abdul Dominguez got Orange-crowned Warbler and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. On the 6th Nancy Reed recorded House Wren in Cleveland County; Abdul Dominguez noticed Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Carolina Wren at Pebblebrook Park in Norman; and Landon Neumann identified Hermit Thrush at Sanborn Lake in Payne County.

On the 7th Jason Shaw tallied Cooper's Hawk at Austin Hall in Chickasha. On the 8th Landon Neumann spotted Dark-eyed Junco in Stillwater; Jimmy Woodard and 21 visitors at the Annual OKC Big Sit in Midwest City recorded 43 species including Chimney Swift, Great Horned Owl and Gray Catbird. On the 9th Brian Marra, Bill Diffin and Chad Ellis documented **Red-necked Phalarope** at Lake Hefner – north side; Robyn Parker



Red-necked Phalarope ©Chase Moxley

saw Great Blue Heron and Yellow-rumped Warbler at Shannon Springs Park in Grady County; Rebecca Korn found Northern Flicker at Agra in Lincoln County; and Jacob Kirkland encountered Semipalmated Plover and American Avocet at Rose Lake. On the 10th Chad Ellis

had Dunlin at Lake Hefner – Water Treatment Ponds; and Deb Hirt located Cinnamon Teal at Boomer Lake Park - Heron Cove.

On the 12th fall arriving Dark-eyed Juncos were observed by Larry Mays in McClain County and D&D Norris at Kairworks Garden in Logan County. Joe Grzybowski added Greater Yellowlegs, Long-billed Dowitcher, and Green-winged Teal at Lake Thunderbird – East Sentinel and along South Jenkins in Norman. Hairy Woodpecker and Indigo Bunting. On the 14th Bill Diffin counted Wood Duck, Forster's Tern, Hairy Woodpecker and House Wren at Crystal Lake in OKC. On the 15th Scott Loss documented **Eastern Whip-poor-will** at the Botanic Garden at OSU; Seth Kasher detected LeConte's Sparrow at Lake Hefner – Prairie Dog Point; Steve Davis photographed Yellow-headed Blackbird at Mustang Road Playas; while Randy Soto found and Joe Grzybowski reported Common Tern at Lake Thunderbird – East Sentinel.

On the 16th Scott Loss documented **Pomarine Jaeger** at Boomer Lake Park in Stillwater; Joe Grzybowski recognized American Kestrel along Ladd Road in McClain County and American Pipit at Ten Mile Flats in



Pomarine Jaeger © Clay Billman

Cleveland County; Larry Mays came across a small wave of migrant Vesper Sparrows at Rose Lake; and Tiffany Lam confirmed White-breasted Nuthatch at Martin Park Nature Center. On the 17th Kalder Korte discovered Northern Bobwhite at George M Sutton Wilderness Park in Norman. On the 18th Joe Grzybowski described Laughing Gull at Lake Thunderbird – East Sentinel; Brian McLaughlin had Cooper's Hawk at Bluff Creek Trails; and Scott Loss identified Brown Creeper at The OSU Botanic Garden. On the 19th Nancy Reed noticed White-throated Sparrow and Spotted Towhee in Cleveland County; Zach DuFran got Cedar Waxwing in Norman; and Bill Diffin tallied White-throated Sparrow and Lincoln's Sparrow at Martin Park Nature Center.

On the 20th Steve Davis recorded Wilson's Snipe and Northern Harrier at Bethany-Warr Acres WTP. On the 21st Rosario Douglas spotted Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at Pauls

Valley in Garvin County; Christie Stoops found White-breasted Nuthatch at Cottonwood Creek in Logan County; Cody Delano reported Bald Eagle flying over Lake Stanley Draper; and Robert Martinez located Osprey and Great Horned Owl at Lake Thunderbird – Hog Creek Campground. On the 22nd Shawn Johnson observed Chipping Sparrow at Yukon City Park; and Bill Diffin saw Harris's Sparrow and Spotted Towhee along the West River Trail on the south end of Lake Overholser Dam. On the 24th Caleb McKinney counted Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Orange-crowned Warbler near Alex in Grady County; and Braden Farris added Spotted Towhee and Northern Bobwhite at Prairie Prime Ranch in Lincoln County.

On the 26th Nancy Reed had her first Dark-eyed Junco in Norman. On the 27th Jane Wiewora encountered Wild Turkey at Wellston in Lincoln County. On the 29th Bill Diffin recognized Sandhill Crane at Lake Hefner – Stars and Stripes Park. On the 30th Chad Ellis identified Savanna Sparrow and Northern Harrier at Cashion in Kingfisher County; Tabitha Olsen noticed Golden-crowned Kinglet and American Pipit at Arcadia Lake – Spring Creek Park; while Mike Yough photographed Lesser Goldfinch, LeConte's Sparrow and Swamp Sparrow at the Cushing Water Treatment Plant in Payne County; and Jacob Kirkland discovered Mountain Bluebird at Calment in Canadian County.

In the Central Oklahoma area during October **170** species were reported with **5** new species which brings the year's total to **308**. 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>.

Refreshments

The November refreshments will be provided as follows:

SNACKS:

Terri Underhill, Jeanne Mather, Sue Woodson, and Steve Davis & Mary Lane

ICE/DRINKS: Randy & Sharon Henthorn.

Minutes of the Oklahoma City Audubon Society Meeting

October 18, 2021

The meeting was opened at 7:00 PM at the Will Rogers Garden Center by President Hal Yocum. Treasurer Nancy Vicars presented a treasurer's report and distributed copies. Cash on hand as of October 18, 2021, was \$8,285.01. The minutes of the September 20, 2021, meeting were approved as published in the October newsletter.

The next meeting will be held at the Will Rogers Garden Center on November 15, 2021, at 7:00 PM.

Patti High circulated the refreshment list for members to sign up for future meetings.

Ann Sherman reported that there was no new conservation information.

Nancy Vicars updated the possible trip to the Great Salt Plains at the end of October. This event will last all day and participants should bring lunch and make sure they have a parking pass for the state park area. Passes can be obtained at oktravel.com and you may register up to three of your vehicles. Exact date will be based on the arrival of the Whooping Cranes.

Jimmy Woodard volunteered to lead the nominating committee to procure officers for the coming year.

Jimmy Woodard also reported that 21 birders tallied 43 species of birds at his "Big Sit." And Jimmy mentioned that the OOS Fall Meeting has been cancelled. A request was made for birders needed to serve on the board of the OOS.

Hal Yocum reported that some winter sparrows were being seen at Mitch Park and metro sightings have occurred of Ruddy Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Grebes, Redheads, Red-necked Phalarope and Juncos.

Another interesting and enlightening program was given by our own Nathan Kuhnert who highlighted his recent trip to the home of his ancestors in Turkey.

At the conclusion of the program, the meeting was adjourned by President Hal Yocum.

Respectfully submitted,

Patti Muzny
Secretary

VIRGIN-BIRTH CONDORS?

By Paul Baicich and Wayne Peterson



It was a real surprise a few years ago when scientists conducting routine DNA testing among captive California Condors came up with some unexpected paternity. Two birds - known by their tracking numbers as SB260 and SB517 - were not related to their presumed fathers! Apparently, they had no known fathers at all. Fully 100% of their DNA had come from their respective mothers.

This is known as parthenogenesis, a phenomenon that has been studied in invertebrates, as well as in various species of snakes (e.g., boas and pythons), lizards, sharks, rays, and some bony fish. Yes, sometimes it even occurs in birds, such as turkeys and chickens, a subject mainly studied by the poultry industry.

The condor study, led by the much-respected research group at the famous San Diego Zoo was published in late October in the *Journal of Heredity*.

A good summary, presented by Sarah Zhang, staff writer at *The Atlantic*, can be found here:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2021/10/california-condors-are-capable-virgin-birth/620517/>

And here's the AP-wire report:

<https://kutv.com/news/local/study-finds-california-condors-can-have-virgin-births>