



# The Scissortail

NEWSLETTER OF THE

Oklahoma Ornithological Society

ISSN: 0582-2637

Volume 65, Number 12

Summer Issue

June 2015

## President's Message

Greetings!

My second President's Message is going to be about the weather. I know that is a topic that most people turn to when they can't think of anything else to talk about. But, Oklahoma weather lately has been all that anyone has been taking about. This past May was the wettest month on record with Oklahoma averaging 14.40 inches of rain statewide. Not the wettest May on record, the wettest MONTH ever recorded. The previous wettest month was October 1941 at 10.75 inches. This unusual weather has had repercussions on all aspects of Oklahoma life including the birds. Ground nesting birds, ground foraging birds, birds who feed on flying insects, and many others likely experienced negative effects due to rain, flooding, and cool temperatures affecting their ability to feed and reproduce. It has also affected our own ability to get out and see the birds and observe for ourselves the effects of so much rain and flooding.

Weather can frequently be an issue for those of us who like to get out and observe nature. This semester I was delighted to be able to arrange my schedule so that I had one day free each week for going on field trips with students. I scheduled it on Tuesday, since that best suited my teaching schedule, and made myself available to all NSU students for fun-filled "Ornithological Odysseys". This activity was made possible by a grant from the Nuttall Ornithological Club, the oldest Ornithological society in North America. Oklahoma is a bit out of their normal geographical range, as they are primarily a New England group. But, they are staunch supporters of educators who emphasize field activities focusing on birds and so it happened.

In preparation for the semester long Tuesday bird holidays, I organized publicity, posters, and made an-

nouncements to everyone that I knew about the Ornithological Odysseys that were coming their way. Students were interested, and signed up for an email list I used to announce upcoming trips. However, the one thing that I did not plan for was the weather. Four of my fourteen potential Ornithological Odysseys (continued on Page 15)



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**OOS Fall Meeting**

**October 9-11, 2015**

**Southeastern Okla. State Univ.—Durant**

## O.O.S. Officers

The Oklahoma Ornithological Society was founded in 1950 and has more than 225 members. It is incorporated as a non-profit organization under the laws of the State of Oklahoma and the Internal Revenue Code. Membership is open to anyone interested in birds and their welfare.

The OKLAHOMA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY is dedicated to the observation, study, and conservation of birds in Oklahoma. The Society conducts meetings and field trips, publishes a quarterly newsletter and scientific bulletin, participates in nationally sponsored projects such as the Breeding Bird Survey and the Christmas Bird Count, encourages conservation, cooperates with the State Department of Wildlife and offers assistance to local groups organized for the study and enjoyment of nature

### OOS MEMBERSHIP DUES

OOS members receive the newsletter, *The Scissortail*, as well as *The Bulletin*, a professional ornithological publication.

Regular	\$25.00	Includes publication of the Society
Family	\$35.00	One set of publications per family.
Student	\$15.00	Same as regular membership allowing students to participate at reduced fee.
Sustaining	\$40.00 or more.	In addition to membership, gives extra support to the Society.
Life	\$500.00	In addition to membership, provides long range income for the Society through the Endowment Fund.

Libraries and other institutions may subscribe to the publications of the Society for a \$25.00/year fee.

Add \$1.00 to each category if paid after February 15 of the membership year.

Make all checks payable to: Oklahoma Ornithological Society or O.O.S. and mail to: OOS Membership Chair, P.O. Box 2931, Claremore, OK 74018

New members who have joined before December 1 join for that year and receive the preceding March, June, and September issues of publication. New members who join after December 1 become members for the upcoming year and will receive the first publication in March. Membership runs from January 1 to December 31.

Both renewing and new members should enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope to receive their membership card.

Please send notification of change of address to the Membership Chairman promptly as any returned mail from the Post Office is extra expense to the Society.

Notes for the OOS *Bulletin* are being sought. Articles should pertain to early sighting dates, late sighting dates, unusual behavior, unusual anatomical features, or summary papers of rare or accidental birds. Please send items for consideration to the editor of the *Bulletin* by email. Should you have questions regarding the process, please contact the *Bulletin* editor.



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Publications are issued in March, June, September, and December. Send articles and items that you wish to have included in *The Scissortail* newsletter to Suzy Harris by e-mail: mbhsuzy@cableone.net by **March 1st, June 1st, August 15th, and December 1st** for the following issue. Any readable format is acceptable.

## OOS SALES BY MAIL

- Oklahoma Bird Records Committee, Date Guide to the Occurrences of Birds in Oklahoma, 6th Edition. 2012. \$6.00 each in person; \$7 via mail or internet
- OOS Field Checklist. 2005. Tri-fold card. 1-5 cards, \$0.50 each. Packet of 10 checklists, \$3.00

For volume sales and information contact: Nadine Varner, (405) 370-5076; gallinuleofpurple@yahoo.com

For purchase, send order and check to: OOS Sales, 7845 NE 18th St., Oklahoma City, OK 73141 **Make check payable to "OOS."** You may now purchase these publications online at our website [www.okbirds.com](http://www.okbirds.com) Look for the publications link.

## President's Message (cont'd from Page 13)

were either iced, snowed, or rained out. Three of those were official university closings. That is close to 30 percent of field trip opportunities lost to weather. One thing that I learned from this effort is that it is best to get out whenever it is possible. It is nice to schedule time specifically for outings, and that makes it easier to ensure that it happens on a more regular basis, but it doesn't always work out the way that you planned. Weather happens.

The good news is that on the days when we did get out, students came! They did not get any course credit or bonus points, but they did get to learn about birds and other wildlife in a relaxed environment just for fun. And, I was there to help them learn about the things that we saw and heard. The weather was not always perfect, but a bad day outdoors with the birds is better than a good day indoors. It was a great semester.

Happy Birding!  
Mia Revels

### Treasurer's Report

By Nadine Varner

Our joint spring meeting with Arkansas was a success, with a net profit of approximately \$550. We currently have \$14,319 in the checking account. The special projects CD has \$10,230 and the endowment/bulletin fund CD has \$71,002.

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Marilyn Bradford—Shawnee, OK  
Rick Farrar—Franklin, AR  
Hope McGaha—McComb, OK  
Bruce Nixon—Tulsa, OK  
Donna Stone—Meeker, OK  
Linda West—Tulsa, OK

## DONATIONS

Dena Gaway  
Paul Ribitzki  
Joyce Varner

## Activities Committee Rebecca Renfro, Chair

The American Ornithological Union meeting is scheduled July 28 – August 1, 2015 at the University of Oklahoma. If you are interested in volunteering for part or all of the meeting please send Rebecca Renfro an email at [relore7@gmail.com](mailto:relore7@gmail.com). We should be hearing from the organizers soon on various volunteer needs. For more information about the meeting go to <http://americanornithology.org/content/aou-cos-2015-meeting>.

The 2015 Oklahoma BioBlitz is scheduled for October 2-3 at Osage Hills State Park. If you are interested in participating as part of OOS please contact Rebecca Renfro at [relore7@gmail.com](mailto:relore7@gmail.com).



# 100 Species in all Oklahoma Counties

By Lou and Mary Truex

The spring of 2011 was a low water event at Hackberry Flat. The area lakes were dropping, especially Tom Steed where Hackberry Flat draws its water allotment from. We were afraid our shorebird surveys were going to end for a while and wanted another project to tackle. Pete Jantzen had completed his 100 birds per county in Kansas some time earlier and we thought such a project could keep us out of trouble if we attempted it.

The task seemed daunting to say the least. I pulled our verified records for each county and began the process of organization. We were to start the adventure with six counties over 100, Comanche, Tillman, Stephens, Alfalfa, Cimarron and McCurtain. Those counties were easy to verify as we had Christmas counts from over the years to use as well as many of our state record birds were seen in those counties as well. We had seen many more birds in many more counties but only kept trip records that were discarded after any year birds were tallied....tallied but not according to county...LoL That left us with 29 zeros and another eight under 10 species. After getting organized (all those with OCD would be proud), we set up three means of record keeping. Birder's Diary on our computer, Ebird and written copies. We built a notebook with every sighting in each county on one side with needed birds from winter and summer on the other. We started with 2070 birds in the book and finished with 8858. Our mileage estimate is just over 90,000 miles which is the penalty for living in a corner of the state.

We then started the process of touring Oklahoma. It feels as if we've driven every county road in Oklahoma as we've had to change the fuel vent valve twice due to the buildup of dust. The best places to start in a county are where counties merge, especially at a lake. That is where eBird really helps. If you are careful enough in plotting your location, it puts you in the correct county. That certainly helps with record keeping. As for working county line roads, we kept separate counts on each side as well. The bird had to be in, or in the airspace of, the county to be counted.

Oklahoma is truly a state of habitat diversity. You have the high plains desert of the Mesa country, the semi-arid regions of western Oklahoma, the Cross Timbers regions and the amazing diversity of Eastern Oklahoma. Many counties only took two or three visits to complete because of their habitat diversity. In the counties that are less diverse or without a lake, as many as seven trips were required for us to complete the task. Our last two counties to complete were Latimer and then Texas, mostly due to location. We completed them in late April 2015 as the spring migrants began to show.

An interesting aspect of county birding is how a European Starling counts the same as a South Polar Skua. How long has it been since any of you drove around every little town and its elevator trying to find a Rock Pigeon or Eurasian Collared-Dove and then cheered when you saw one? Another quirky aspect of county birding is seeing a cool bird and then finding out you already have one for that county and do not have it anywhere else. The agony of defeat is brutal. One place we had not ever been was the Picher area in NE Oklahoma. The landscape is brutal as it is a Superfund area but it is so much fun to watch the blackbirds come in to roost. We had a few counts over 100,000 and it is just awesome to see that many of one species in a singular area.

We loved doing this project and will continue towards 150 in each county but I can promise with guys like Doug Wood, Jimmy Woodard, Larry Mayes and John Sterling doing this now, we won't be the first to reach that number. We have appreciated the help from everyone on the internet with a special thanks to Dr. Doug Wood and Jimmy Woodard. If we can be of help should you decide to undertake this task, feel free to contact us. If you are already involved and want a tour guide of SW Oklahoma, do the same and we'll gladly show you around our area of the state provided we are in state....

Goodest Birding,

Mary and Lou Truex  
ML2x@sbcglobal.net

**County Start and Finishing Totals**  
**100 Species in all Oklahoma Counties**

**Lou and Mary Truex**

9- 1- 2011 / 4-25-2015	20 / 114	Grady	0 / 102	Okmulgee
	21 / 102	Grant	46 / 104	Osage
	22 / 118	Greer	0 / 101	Ottawa
Start / Finish	34 / 112	Harmon	26 / 117	Pawnee
	23 / 101	Harper	0 / 104	Payne
0 / 102	0 / 104	Haskell	0 / 104	Pittsburg
110 / 124	0 / 103	Hughes	0 / 107	Pontotoc
16 / 107	98 / 120	Jackson	0 / 111	Pottawato-
17 / 104	66 / 137	Jefferson	mie	
10 / 112	17 / 123	Johnston	10 / 102	Pushmataha
54 / 110	6 / 102	Kay	37 / 112	Roger Mills
26 / 105	0 / 101	Kingfisher	0 / 101	Rogers
0 / 127	57 / 141	Kiowa	0 / 100	Seminole
55 / 125	0 / 102	Latimer	4 / 102	Sequoyah
21 / 103	30 / 103	Le Flore	110 / 164	Stephens
0 / 108	4 / 105	Lincoln	24 / 102	Texas
0 / 103	0 / 108	Logan	257 / 263	Tillman
120 / 163	0 / 104	Love	62 / 159	Tulsa
5 / 121	11 / 102	Major	0 / 101	Wagoner
0 / 101	4 / 102	Marshall	13 / 107	Washington
259 / 263	0 / 101	Mayes	23 / 109	Washita
52 / 119	4 / 103	McClain	0 / 102	Woods
0 / 104	121 / 177	McCurtain	0 / 110	Woodward
4 / 106	0 / 102	McIntosh		
34 / 102	10 / 107	Murray	2070 / 8858	
0 / 101	0 / 100	Muskogee		
3 / 105	41 / 113	Noble		
25 / 101	0 / 100	Nowata		
0 / 102	0 / 104	Okfuskee		
3 / 103	55 / 142	Oklahoma		

**OOS Spring Meeting**  
**Held Jointly with Arkansas Audubon Society**  
**By Jimmy Woodard, OOS President Elect**

128 participants from Oklahoma and Arkansas attended the joint spring meeting in Fort Smith, Arkansas, from May 1-3. The meeting began with 3 Friday field trips and a dinner and program that night. Dr Kim Smith and honors student Mitchell Pruitt, both from the University of Arkansas, gave an interesting history of Saw whet Owls in Arkansas and a report on their banding efforts of Saw-whets there this past fall.

Saturday, we split into seven field trips including visits to Sequoyah NWR, Tenkiller Lake and Devil's Den amongst the destinations. *A total of 166 species were found during the weekend of birding.* On Saturday afternoon, there were several student presentations and the OOS and AAS boards held separate business meetings. Our own Doug Wood gave a fascinating presentation on Saturday night on Conservation and Birding in Cambodia from his recent trip there in March. I think there are now several of us who have added Cambodia to our lists of places we want to visit. All in all, everyone agreed the joint meeting was a success and said they hoped we might do it again in the future. Some of you may remember our last joint meeting with AAS in Mena, AR back in 1991.

I hope that those who missed this meeting might consider joining us at a future OOS convention. Our next meeting will be in the fall. Doug Wood and Southeastern Oklahoma State University in Durant will be hosting us from October 9-11, 2015. Maybe we will see you there.

Canada Goose	White-winged Dove	Sedge Wren	Lark Sparrow
Wood Duck	Mourning Dove	Marsh Wren	Savannah Sparrow
Gadwall	Yellow-billed Cuckoo	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Le Conte's Sparrow
American Widgeon	Greater Roadrunner	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	Lincoln's Sparrow
Mallard	Barred Owl	Eastern Bluebird	Swamp Sparrow
Blue-winged Teal	Common Nighthawk	Gray-cheeked Thrush	White-throated Sparrow
Northern Shoveler	Chimney Swift	Swainson's Thrush	Harris's Sparrow
Green-winged Teal	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Wood Thrush	White-crowned Sparrow
Wild Turkey	Belted Kingfisher	American Robin	Summer Tanager
Northern Bobwhite	Red-headed Woodpecker	Gray Catbird	Scarlet Tanager
Pied-billed Grebe	Red-bellied Woodpecker	Northern Mockingbird	Northern Cardinal
American White Pelican	Downy Woodpecker	Brown Thrasher	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Double-crested Cormorant	Hairy Woodpecker	European Starling	Blue Grosbeak
American Bittern	Red-cockaded Woodpecker	Cedar Waxwing	Indigo Bunting
Great Blue Heron	Northern Flicker	Blue-winged Warbler	Painted Bunting
Great Egret	Pileated Woodpecker	Golden-winged Warbler	Dickcissel
Little Blue Heron	Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	Tennessee Warbler	Bobolink
Cattle Egret	Acadian Flycatcher	Orange-crowned Warbler	Red-winged Blackbird
Green Heron	Least Flycatcher	Nashville Warbler	Eastern Meadowlark
White-faced Ibis	Eastern Phoebe	Northern Parula	Common Grackle
Black Vulture	Great Crested Flycatcher	Yellow Warbler	Brown-headed Cowbird
Turkey Vulture	Western Kingbird	Chestnut-sided Warbler	Orchard Oriole
Bald Eagle	Eastern Kingbird	Yellow-rumped Warbler	Baltimore Oriole
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Scissor-tailed Flycatcher	Black-throated Green Warbler	House Finch
Red-shouldered Hawk	Loggerhead Shrike	Blackburnian Warbler	Pine Siskin
Broad-winged Hawk	White-eyed Vireo	Yellow-throated Warbler	American Goldfinch
Swainson's Hawk	Bell's Vireo	Pine Warbler	House Sparrow
Red-tailed Hawk	Yellow-throated Vireo	Prairie Warbler	
Sora (Sunday)	Blue-headed Vireo	Palm Warbler	
American Coot	Warbling Vireo	Blackpoll Warbler	
Black-bellied Plover	Philadelphia Vireo	Cerulean Warbler	
Killdeer	Red-eyed Vireo	Black-and-white Warbler	
American Avocet (Sunday)	Blue Jay	American Redstart	
Spotted Sandpiper	American Crow	Prothonotary Warbler	
Solitary Sandpiper	Fish Crow	Worm-eating Warbler	
Greater Yellowlegs	Purple Martin	Ovenbird	
Lesser Yellowlegs	Tree Swallow	Northern Waterthrush	
Least Sandpiper	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	Louisiana Waterthrush	
White-rumped Sandpiper	Cliff Swallow	Kentucky Warbler	
Pectoral Sandpiper	Barn Swallow	Common Yellowthroat	
Wilson's Phalarope	Carolina Chickadee	Hooded Warbler	
Franklin's Gull (Sunday)	Tufted Titmouse	Yellow-breasted Chat	
Caspian Tern	White-breasted Nuthatch	Eastern Towhee	
Forster's Tern	Brown-headed Nuthatch	Bachman's Sparrow	
Rock Pigeon	Carolina Wren	Chipping Sparrow	
Eurasian Collared-Dove	House Wren (Sunday)	Field Sparrow	

# *A Message from Martha: The Extinction of the Passenger Pigeon and its Relevance Today* (Book Review)

By Eugene A. Young

*A Message from Martha: The Extinction of the Passenger Pigeon and its Relevance Today* by Mark Avery (2014, 304 pages, \$22.00 hardcover, ISBN 9781472906250, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London).

This book is a sad reminder of one of the most tragic ecological disasters in our country's history, the extinction of perhaps, at one time, the most abundant species of bird in the WORLD, the Passenger Pigeon, or the "Blue Meteor." The author does a masterful job of providing a natural history lesson on this species, but also demonstrates the woven fabric of the ecology of the species with the early history of this country and how these complex interactions ultimately resulted in its unfortunate and needless demise.

The book is broken into traditional chapters (eight total) and each focuses on a particular aspect as to the "reasons" for the extinction. It ends with a "Further Reading" section, which is essentially a bibliography for each chapter, acknowledgments, and an index.

Chapter 1 (Introduction) is brief, but sets the reader up for Chapter 2 (The biology of an extinct bird), which everyone should find interesting. It's a lengthy chapter, and along with Chapter 3 (Lost abundance) provides a detailed synopsis of just about everything known about this once very majestic species. The author relies heavily on the works of others, but he also ties together some conventional thinking based on how we understand ecological principles today. A classic piece of work relied upon is *The Passenger Pigeon: its Natural History and Extinction* by Arlie William Schorger, published in 1955, for which he received the AOU's Brewster Medal in 1958 (p16). He depends on works and observations by many other notables as well: John Muir; Alexander Wilson; and John James Audubon are examples.

Biological aspects readers may find of interest include: the Passenger Pigeon was sexually dimorphic by plumage (males with more robust color) and size (males larger); despite its abundance, we really don't know how much it weighed, although it's estimated to have been around 350 g. To put this in perspective, I looked up some weights of similar common species and potential predators: the Mourning Dove weighs 86-170 g, Eurasian Collared-Dove is 140-180 g, and the Rock Pigeon is 265-380 g while the Merlin is 160-240 g and Peregrine Falcon comes in at 530-1600 g. Its scientific name *Ectopistes migratorium* means "wandering migrant"; its overall range was determined by the extent of American birch, red oak, white oak, and American chestnut, and breeding locations were determined by mast crops from these species. While it fed heavily on mast from the aforementioned trees, it also fed on wild rice, berries (including cranberries), insects, molluscs, and even worms. Occasionally, they were a pest of crops, usually by eating seeds that were just planted. Interestingly, this led to the development of the grain-drill, which was invented in Horicon, Wisconsin ("a stronghold for the Passenger Pi-

geon”), by Daniel Van Brunt to prevent surface-feeding birds from obtaining seeds (p20). Passenger Pigeons would visit salt springs and salt marshes; some suggest this would be a result of feeding on mast which is high in tannins and they would use the salt to neutralize tannins, similar to the reason that parrots visit clay licks in South America.

Perhaps the most interesting aspects related to natural history from these two chapters concern their incredible breeding biology. They were single brooded and laid only one egg (or did they lay two?); they initiate breeding early in spring, often getting caught in late spring snow storms. You may ask why one egg, why not two like Mourning Doves? Or what’s the rush to breed so early? The author has an excellent discussion of the one egg vs. two egg clutch debate (p39-47). Apparently, one egg is the requirement for a species where everything is sped up. Incubation was so synchronized that birds on nests were either all males, or all females; hatching for an entire colony was on day 13 and most birds hatched within just a day of each other; and after 14-days of caring for the young, the adults left the area, leaving the squabs to fend for themselves. Within 3-4 days young could fly and evade predators. Occasionally, breeding ranges would wonder. Oklahoma readers might be interested to know there were colonies in Oklahoma, with nesting commencing in mid-April (p42). The significance of these breeding habits is demonstrated in Chapter 3 (Lost abundance) when you find out how large breeding colonies were. Trees would have between 100 to 500 nests, and the birds apparently “coo” at night, often making it difficult to sleep if you were so fortunate to live, or camped near a colony. A colony in Wisconsin had two arms, one extending 50 miles with a width of 8 miles, the other extended 75 miles with a 6 mile width, a “mind staggering” 850 mi<sup>2</sup> of area. The author takes into account this total area, converts it to hectares (220,000), estimates 20 trees/ha, about 4.4 million total trees, a conservative 20 nest/tree, gives you 88 million nests or 176 million birds in just one colony (p60).

Throughout these chapters the author not only uses Schorger’s work, but also relies heavily on the accounts by Wilson, Audubon, and Muir to provide insightful descriptions of breeding colonies, wintering roosts, and migratory flocks (ex. p23-26, 63-67). Some of these accounts leave you speechless and are hard to fathom. Thus, the question the author raises, with such proclivity for success with “billions” of birds (5-10 billion was a real possibility), than, how could they be reduced to nothing? The author makes a strong argument since the bird was single brooded, only laid one egg, had such a short synchronized breeding season, all of these geared to a breeding season as quick as a drag race, that the loss of habitat and human perturbations ultimately are the cause of this ecological disaster.

In Chapter 4 (A road trip in search of an extinct species) the author switches gears and takes a more literary jaunt. And while it’s not about the biology of the Passenger Pigeon, its value is in the historic content. He visits the former home range of the Passenger Pigeon, including the home of Martha, the last of its kind. There is insight into the relationship between Wilson and Audubon that the average bird watcher might find interesting. However, the authors main purpose is to observe the existing habitat, and sadly, you come away with a feeling that the Passenger Pigeon wouldn’t fare well today either. Chapter 5 (No ordinary destruction) examines

the decline from the perspective of Jared Diamond's view of extinction, the "four ecological Horseman of the Apocalypse." The author uses Diamond's context of 1) introduced species, 2) chains of extinction, 3) over exploitation (p144-153), and 4) habitat loss (p153-159), with the latter two discussed as major contributors leading up to the extinction.

Chapter 6 (How the Wild was lost when the West was won) is an interesting chapter, with another literary style shift. Readers are given a history lesson on a lady named Martha Grier, the United States, and the perils the Passenger Pigeon was facing. Martha Grier just happened to pass on the same day that Martha did in Ohio, the only two Marthas to die in the state that day. The author in chronological sequence gives a history lesson over the 76 years of Grier's life; therefore, it include the historic events that the last Passenger Pigeons were facing, including Martha. This history includes the birth and deaths of famous people (Muir, President Harrison, Butch Cassidy, Aldo Leopold, Babe Ruth, Sitting Bull), statehoods (Oklahoma in 1904), the first postage stamp, laws (Homestead Act), extinctions (Great Auk, Labrador Duck), extirpations (Heath Hen), establishment of Yellowstone, and of course the history of the Grier family. This tied together with the last two chapters (7 and 8) provides a gloomy picture of how we humans have ultimate responsibility for this demise, and examines the current state we are in.

In Chapter 7 (The tolling bell?) there is an interesting section where the author presents a fictional President Obama speech (p237-242) and on page 238 he states, "The Passenger Pigeon was a thoroughly American species.... Martha and the other billions of Passenger Pigeons were victims of the way we occupied, settled, and developed our country." And as I read this, I hearken back to another quote on page 139 when the author is discussing Diamond's thoughts on extinction, and the author says as he's relating to the Passenger Pigeon, "...since we are dealing with the whole world population of a species, unlike when dealing with a local population, we can ignore the effect of immigration and emigration..." which is a sobering thought and makes me think about the current state of the Lesser Prairie-Chicken. Perhaps the Passenger Pigeon was an appendage of American species. The Lesser Prairie-Chicken being from the heartland of America may very well be its heartbeat and how we decide as a nation to conserve this species might tell us how well we learn from history.

This book is a great resource for those interested in conservation, ecology, and natural history. It's a book that every politician should read as it exemplifies the perils the Passenger Pigeon faced, and sadly, each species extant today faces as well. While the frequent lengthy quotes may distract some readers, I find the information far outweighs such distractions, and the breadth of knowledge obtained for anyone interested in birds should be immense and interesting. An inquisitive, eclectic read with a powerful message, the need of conservation.

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# *OOS Certificate of Merit Awards*

## *By Jim Deming, Chairman*

Last year three outstanding members were selected to receive Certificate of Merit Awards: Mark Howery, Claudia Glass and Don Glass. Mark's award was presented at the Fall meeting. Claudia and Don were unable to attend the Fall banquet, so their awards were presented at the Spring meeting

Mark Howery, Wildlife Diversity Biologist for the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, has long been interested in birds and completed graduate studies on shrikes. While bird conservation falls within the scope of his job, Mark devotes considerable personal time and energy to the OOS and bird conservation. He has been OOS Conservation Chairman since 1999, President of Cleveland County Audubon, compiler of the Christmas Bird Count, does Breeding Bird Surveys, and Wintering Bird Atlas Projects.

Claudia Glass, Assistant Professor, Department of Biology at Rogers State University, designed and developed the Ornithology Lecture and Lab, as well as teaching many other biology subjects. As an OOS member she has held the chairs of Conservation, Membership, Secretary, and most recently Archivist. Claudia has done research on tower kills, does bird banding, belongs to the board of Partners in Flight, Oklahoma Chapter, and does Herpetological demonstrations!

Don Glass, Assistant Professor, Department of Biology at Rogers State University, has served on many committees and received many awards in his 28 years at RSU. As an OOS member he has served as Archivist, and since 2001 as Membership Chairman. Don has done research on lighting and tower kills, does Breeding Bird Surveys, and has participated in Breeding Bird Atlas and Winter Bird Atlas Projects.

Nominations are now being accepted for this year's Certificate of Merit Awards. Here is a link which will take you to the nomination form on the OOS website: <http://www.okbirds.org/OOSCertofMerit.pdf>

Or you can use the form on the next page.



## ***Oklahoma Ornithological Society*** ***Certificate of Merit Nomination Form***

The Oklahoma Ornithological Society (OOS) is proud to recognize outstanding contributions in wildlife and habitat conservation, especially those with direct bearing on native birds in Oklahoma. The OOS considers outstanding achievements in the following areas as worthy of recognition:

- Acquisition, creation, protection, and/or management of habitats used by native Oklahoma birds.
- Survey, inventory, and/or monitoring efforts to improve information on the distribution and abundance of native Oklahoma birds.
- Forging partnerships among government agencies, businesses, and/or conservation organizations that benefit native Oklahoma birds.
- Leadership in teaching others about the conservation of native Oklahoma birds, including formal classroom activities and field trip leadership.
- Leadership in administration of organizations dedicated to the appreciation and conservation of native Oklahoma birds.

### **Nomination**

I nominate \_\_\_\_\_ for the Certificate of Merit in the following category  
(select one):

\_\_\_\_ Youth (18 and under)

\_\_\_\_ Adult

\_\_\_\_ Group (organizations, agencies, or businesses)

Please submit this form plus a one-page, typewritten letter detailing the nominee's contribution. Identify at least one item from the bulleted list above (or make the case for a unique contribution) that most closely matches the nominee's contribution. Please also indicate the length of time the nominee has been involved in the conservation effort.

Your nomination letter should provide complete contact information (name, mailing address, telephone number, and email address) for yourself and the nominee. To complete your nomination, please include two letters of support from other individuals knowledgeable of the nominee's contribution.

Nominations are accepted at any time, but to be considered for the annual fall meeting in any year, completed nominations must be received by August 1. Nominations should be sent to:

Jim Deming  
524 S. Tamarack Ave  
Broken Arrow, OK 74012  
[birdbrain.jim@gmail.com](mailto:birdbrain.jim@gmail.com)

## Brood Parasitism

by Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye.

Some species of birds thrive not by carefully rearing their own young, but by pawing that task off on adults of other species. The European Cuckoo, whose distinctive call is immortalized in the sound of the "cuckoo clock," is the bird in which this habit has been most thoroughly studied. Female European Cuckoos lay their eggs only in the nests of other species of birds. A cuckoo egg usually closely mimics the eggs of the host (one of whose eggs is often removed by the cuckoo). The host may recognize the intruding egg and abandon the nest, or it may incubate and hatch the cuckoo egg. Shortly after hatching, the young European Cuckoo, using a scoop-like depression on its back, instinctively shoves over the edge of the nest any solid object that it contacts. With the disappearance of their eggs and rightful young, the foster parents are free to devote all of their care to the young cuckoo. Frequently this is an awesome task, since the cuckoo chick often grows much larger than the host adults long before it can care for itself. One of the tragicomic scenes in nature is a pair of small foster parents working like Sisyphus to keep up with the voracious appetite of an outsized young cuckoo.

Interestingly, different females within a population of European Cuckoos often parasitize different host species. Some cuckoos may specialize in parasitizing the nests of Garden Warblers; others of the same population may lay in the nests of Reed Warblers, and yet others may lay in nests of White Wagtails. The eggs of each female very closely mimic those of the host selected (even though one host may have large, densely spotted eggs, and another may have smaller, unmarked pale blue eggs), and the mimetic patterns are genetically determined. The different genetic kinds of females (called "gentes") apparently mate at random with males. How these gentes are maintained within the cuckoo populations is not fully understood.

The North American Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoos only rarely lay their eggs in the nests of other species, but occasionally lay some of their eggs in the nests of other members of their species. Our cuckoos usually build nests of their own and rear their own young. Only about 40 percent of cuckoo species worldwide are brood parasites, the rest care for their own eggs and young.

Brood parasitism is much less common in other groups of birds. It is found in about 1 percent of bird species, including members of such diverse groups as ducks, weavers, and cowbirds. In North America the only obligate brood parasites (those which must parasitize and cannot build nests of their own) are the Bronzed and Brown-headed Cowbirds, which may be important enemies of other birds. The Brown-headed Cowbird has been recorded as a parasite of more than 200 other species. Cowbird eggs do not closely mimic host eggs, nor do the young oust host eggs and young from the nest. But cowbirds do tend to hatch earlier than their hosts, to grow faster, and to crowd out or at least to reduce the food intake of the host's young.

Cowbirds thus can place powerful selection pressure on a host bird species to learn to recognize and reject cowbird eggs. Behaviorist Stephen Rothstein of the University of California at Santa Barbara has shown experimentally that some North American species have, indeed, learned to do this. He placed artificial and real Brown-headed Cowbird eggs in the nests of 43 other species, and found that those species divided rather neatly into acceptor species and "rejector species." Acceptors include many warblers, vireos, phoebes, and Song Sparrows, while robins, catbirds, Blue jays, and Brown Thrashers are rejectors. The Song Sparrow just happens to have eggs very similar in size and spotting pattern to those of the cowbird, and almost invariably raises the cowbird young. In contrast, catbirds and robins, which lay unmarked blue eggs, almost invariably eject cowbird eggs from their nests. Phoebes, strangely, usually have unmarked eggs but are acceptors -- perhaps their habit of nesting in dark recesses has reduced their awareness of egg pattern.

Rothstein found very little sign of transitional species -- that is, ones with some individuals that accepted and others that rejected. The reason, he hypothesized, was that once the genetic ability to reject appeared in a species, it would spread very rapidly and very soon all individuals would be rejectors. That notion is certainly supported by rates of parasitism observed in acceptor species. In various studies, for example, 40 to 70 percent of the nests of Red-eyed Vireos were parasitized, about 20 percent of Eastern Phoebe nests were parasitized, and about 40 percent of Song Sparrow nests were parasitized. Reduction in the fledging rate of parasitized nests was well over 50 percent in the vireos and phoebes, and about 40 percent in the Song Sparrows.

A central mystery remains, however. Acceptors and rejectors do not represent different taxonomic groups, they do not have different lengths of association with cowbirds, most have eggs that can be easily distinguished from cowbird eggs, and they are capable of ejecting cowbird eggs from their nests. Why then have some species evolved the ability to reject, and others not. Rothstein suggests that nest concealment, large bill (to make ejection easier), and chance may play key roles. More careful observation and experiment will be needed before we will know if he is right.

Brood parasitism is not restricted to females of one species laying eggs in the nests of other species. In addition to some of our North American cuckoos, females of a wide variety of species sometimes lay eggs in the nests of other females of the same species. This behavior is examined in other essays.